THE IMPORTANCE OF ARTICULATION AND RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING (RPL) FOR SKILLS DEVELOPMENT: IMPLICATIONS FOR NSDS IV

J. Samuels
South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)

Abstract

This paper focuses on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), articulation in the education and training system, and skills development in South Africa. The body of the paper has three components. Firstly, it presents RPL achievements in the country in relation to the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) III, noting progress reported and recommendations made at the National Skills Conference 2011 as points of reference. It goes on to present important RPL developments since 2011, including plans for RPL policy implementation going forward. Key RPL-related developments include the establishment and work of a Ministerial Task Team for RPL, a national RPL Reference Group which assisted SAQA with the revision of national RPL policy, and considerable implementation of RPL policy with potential to reach over 200,000 candidates. Secondly, the paper outlines milestones in the movement of the country towards a fully integrated system for education and training. Two of the three National Qualifications Framework (NQF) sub-frameworks have been determined, the third is in the process of being finalised and there has been much joint work across all three sub-frameworks. Thirdly the paper sketches some useful dimensions for learning in workplaces. The article closes by pointing to the implications for NSDS IV, of these developments.

Introduction
Given the focus of the *National Skills Conference 2013* on progress in implementing the National Skills Development Strategy (NSDS) III, related sharing of best practice and identifying barriers, and generally reviewing NSDS III towards making improvements for NSDS IV, it is important to review gains made and lessons learned around Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), articulation in the system for education and training, and workplace learning.

The focus of this paper is three-fold. First, the paper focuses on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) policy developments and achievements to date in South Africa. Similar progress reported at the *National Skills Conference 2011* generated lively discussion and suggestions. Much progress has been made in the two years since: the initial *RPL policy* (SAQA 2002) and *Criteria and Guidelines for RPL* (SAQA 2003) have been revised to create the *National Policy for the Implementation of RPL* (SAQA 2013), and large-scale implementation of RPL policy is underway in areas where there is great need and where the stakeholders have come forward. This paper serves to update the audience on the latest developments. It sketches a map for further spreading the RPL policy implementation underway, and points to some implications for NSDS IV.

Second, the paper presents developments around articulation. Considerable progress has been made towards achieving common understanding of articulation across the three NQF sub-frameworks and the sectors these sub-frameworks represent. Important research under-pins this work, and is furthering articulation on the ground. Two of the three NQF sub-frameworks have been determined, the third is in the process of being finalised, and there has been much joint work between all three sub-frameworks.

The third of three areas addressed in this paper sketches briefly, some lessons from workplaces seeking to enable learning at work.

Section 1 outlines briefly, the role of RPL in NSDS III. Section 2 summarises progress reported and comments made at the *National Skills Conference 2011*, by way of clarifying the context for developments since that time. Section 3 presents the multi-faceted work done and gains made since 2011. Section 4 notes common
understanding built under the NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008, around articulation. It also describes achievements and work underway regarding determination of the three sub-frameworks and other articulation-related initiatives. Section 5 briefly sketches dimensions for workplaces seeking to enable learning and progression. Section 6, in closing, looks forward towards NSDS IV, the next round of RPL and articulation-related developments, and the roles and responsibilities of all stakeholders.

1. RPL and NSDS III

The NSDS III opens the way for RPL, although it does not name RPL as such or spell out any RPL-related rights and responsibilities. In its deep focus on increased access to training and skills development opportunities, and achieving the fundamental transformation of inequalities based on class, race, gender, age and disability, NSDS III creates potential for RPL. The goal of the NSDS III is an integrated education and training system – RPL is integral to this integration.

RPL can link skills development to career paths and career development. It has potential to facilitate alternative access to education and training, including to a whole range of skills development initiatives. It can enhance the integration of workplace training or experience and theoretical learning; and ease the transition from further education and training (FET) to higher education and training (HET), and from the workplace into institutions of learning. It can assist recognition towards obtaining work, in-work progression, and progression between jobs. It is a means to address inequalities based on class, race, gender, and age.

In order to realise this potential of RPL, RPL processes need to be accessible, affordable, feasible and credible. Legislation and policy need to require RPL, as well as enabling it and providing the necessary guidance and support for all practitioners and candidates. Providers need the necessary expertise. RPL candidates need to be prepared to go the extra mile to make recognition of their non-formal and informal experiential learning possible. Research (such as Ralphs 2011) has shown that learning in one context usually requires mediation for use in another context. This finding is true across a wide range of contexts.
At SAQA’s National RPL Conference: Building and expanding existing islands of excellent practice (2011), 52 abstracts show-cased work done between 1998 and 2010. Some 37% of these initiatives directly addressed RPL in the workplace; 33% covered RPL in Higher Education, and 4% RPL in the FET sector. A first scan of numbers of successful RPL candidates up to that time revealed 20,000 in Higher Education, 51,000 in the workplace, and RPL in eight of the then 12 scarce skills areas. While much had been learned about RPL in the first 15 years of South Africa’s democracy, and some had benefitted, the general view early in 2011 was that RPL had yet to deliver fully on what it promised.

An Organisation of Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) study of RPL across 15 countries (SAQA-OECD 2008), positioned South Africa in a cluster of five countries at “Stage 5 of 7” in terms of setting up a national RPL system (the study found four countries at “Stage 6 of 7” – and no countries anywhere, with fully fledged national RPL systems at “Stage 7”). South Africa was described in the study as having “a vision….many practices, access for people from many different backgrounds [and] sporadic funding”. The research report also said that “Not all levels or sectors are open”. At a SAQA-hosted National RPL Workshop in 2010 needs were identified in relation to (a) sharing effective delivery models for RPL, (b) enhancing the quality of RPL, (c) developing workable funding models for RPL, and (d) addressing legislative and other barriers to the expansion of RPL nationally. These needs were addressed at the National RPL Conference (2011), which led to the Resolution and Working Document on RPL (SAQA 2011) endorsed by the 350 participating delegates.

This Resolution and Working Document on RPL (SAQA 2011) has been used as a blueprint, and much has been accomplished since 2011. When SAQA recently tried to engage with an international RPL expert, the response was “But the world is looking to South Africa now – you are leading the way”.

2. RPL at the National Skills Conference 2011: a brief summary
At the *National Skills Conference* in 2011 there were 12 commissions; SAQA led the breakaway on RPL, presenting “*RPL as a key factor within a skills development context and post-school system*”. The presentation covered the following aspects:

- Broad approach to RPL in South Africa
- Where to get information and assistance for setting up and practicing RPL
- RPL: current state of play
- The February 2011 *Resolution and Working Document on RPL*
- What is needed to set up an RPL system

The *Resolution for the Recognition of Prior Learning* (SAQA 2011) affirmed the need for:

1. Establishing a well-resourced and integrated approach to RPL
2. Addressing the needs and priorities of the employed and the unemployed, regarding RPL
3. Building and connecting islands of good RPL practice
4. Enabling renewed partnerships between stakeholders, for RPL delivery
5. One biennial meeting for all RPL stakeholders
6. A Ministerial Task Team for RPL
7. A reference group to assist SAQA with RPL policy development

The *Working Document on RPL* (SAQA 2011) was a set of conference outcomes that allowed for further comment and engagement. Key points are summarized in Table 1 below. Work has since commenced or been fully addressed for all items in Table 1 followed by a tick (√); further elaboration follows in Section 3 below.

**Table 1: Key points from the *Working Document on RPL* (SAQA 2011)**

| The context, drivers, and understandings of RPL include: | • RPL remains a national priority √  
• SAQA must play a leadership role √  
• Recognition of a wide range of types of learning √  
• Trade union demands for RPL √  
• Need for DHET to provide clear guidelines regarding RPL targets for SETAs  
• Integration of RPL into education and training system √  
• RPL will not work in the absence of learning √  
• Urgent need for common understandings of RPL √ |
|---|---|
| The effective delivery of RPL requires: | • Sharing known models across sectors √  
• Addressing the need for RPL below NQF Level 1 and in the FET sector √  
• Special focus on return-to-learning/out-of-work youth √ |
| The quality assurance of RPL requires: | • All aspects of RPL must be against agreed standards ✓
• Standardisation only in similar instances of RPL ✓
• Concept of quality needs to be fit-for-purpose ✓
• Attempts to find equivalence need to continue ✓
• RPL details can only be shared under strict confidentiality to prevent discrimination ✓
• Building of an RPL database is critically important (NLRD) ✓
• Thorough training for RPL practitioners is a priority ✓ |
| --- | --- |
| The resourcing of RPL requires: | • State-led and state-guided initiatives, enabling funding of public and private provision
• State resourcing/ ring fencing/ funding formulae needed, that includes the unemployed
• Advisors are needed to assist with funding applications
• Harmonisation of fees ✓
• Sustainable, fair, accessible rack rates in private provision ✓
• Ability to pay needs to be taken into account ✓ |
| The setting up of an RPL system requires: | • A national RPL institute/ national coordination of RPL ✓
• Registered RPL centres
• An RPL clearinghouse and career development helpline
• Effective funding mechanisms
• Development of standard RPL templates and techniques for use within sectors ✓
• National benchmarks
• Systematic expansion of RPL networks ✓
• Systematic addressing of barriers ✓
• Professionalisation of RPL practitioners
• A biennial meeting ✓
• A Ministerial Task Team ✓
• An RPL Reference Group ✓ |

In terms of criticisms towards improvement, delegates in the RPL Commission *(National Skills Conference 2011)* noted that employers had not embraced RPL; there were language barriers in assessment methodologies; there had been lack of visible national leadership around RPL up to that time; progress was perceived to have been slow; RPL for workers had not been prioritized; and that there was a general lack of knowledge of RPL on the ground. In fact, while there were still real barriers, there had also been considerable progress and several developments, but the developments had not been visible across the board.

Delegates in the *National Skills Conference* RPL Commission also commended work done, and voiced support for the suggestions of a national Task Team, national
coordination of RPL, and involvement of professional bodies in national RPL policy. Further suggestions were made for:

- A national accord to hold partners accountable for RPL
- Using all available “centres on the ground” including local community centres, for RPL
- Further RPL pilots and wide sharing of findings
- Sector-wide finance and support for RPL
- Greater cascading of all RPL-related information at national, provincial, regional, district, local, and sectoral levels

Considerable steps have been taken to address most of these recommendations in the 24 months since this conference. Details are elaborated in the next section.

3. RPL policy and implementation of policy: developments after 2011

Several significant developments followed the National RPL Conference 2011, and the finalisation of the Working Document on RPL through democratic process. These developments are sketched here.

1. The Minister was advised by SAQA to appoint a National RPL Task Team and acted on this advice. The work of this Task Team is now complete. As part of its work, research was conducted into the status of RPL in SETAs; funding models for RPL; legislation affecting RPL; and a comparison of different international RPL coordinating mechanisms. A SAQA Bulletin (Volume 12[3]) contains some of this work, and the Ministerial Task Team has released its report.

2. SAQA appointed an RPL Reference Group through democratic process at and in the month following the National RPL Conference 2011, to assist with RPL policy revision. Some 79 nominations were received; 18 members were selected to represent all stakeholders (DHET, DBE, the Quality Councils, SETAs, public and private providers at all levels, employers, organised labour,
SAQA) on the basis of (a) expertise; (b) representation; (c) number of nominations; (d) spread of geographical areas. The revised RPL policy is grounded in extensive stakeholder consultation, research, and experience. It was developed in consultation with the Reference Group. A workshop was set up for broader consultation with organised labour. The draft policy was made available for a six week period for public comment, during which time extensive comments were received from stakeholders across the board, and integrated into the new document. After considering the advice of the Reference Group, and after consultation with the Quality Councils, the revised Policy for the Implementation of RPL was approved in March 2013. The document has been printed and circulated. It is a widely respected document, based on the learning of the first 15 years of RPL implementation and research, and resulting expertise. It seeks to provide consistent guidance for entities across the board, while at the same time accommodating differentiated approaches in the three NQF sub-frameworks. It also seeks to build common understanding and to be accessible to all. As part of its implementation plan the policy will continue to be widely distributed. In-depth work-shopping of the policy will take place in a whole-day workshop on the first day of the planned National RPL Conference 2014: Tried and Tested, Tools, Templates (Workshop date: 23rd February 2014).

3. **Extensive RPL coordination and development work** has taken place in the past two years, and continues at present.

One area of coordination involves RPL data. Since its inception, the NQF has made provision for the achievement of part and full qualifications via RPL, and for recording these achievements in the National Learners’ Records Database (NLRD). It has not been mandatory for providers to submit RPL data for uploading into the NLRD however, and to date only six SETAs and the Council on Higher Education (CHE) have supplied this kind of information. The NLRD contains records of achievement of 25,505 full/part qualifications by 23,669 people from this small group, submitted by 253 education and
training providers. Knowing of further RPL achievements affecting in the region of 200,000 people, SAQA’s Research Directorate commenced gathering details about and from RPL providers in the public and private arenas in 2010. Currently SAQA has more detailed RPL information on over 60 RPL providers spanning training centres and colleges, dedicated RPL centres, some professional bodies, some workplace training centres; and the 23 public Higher Education Institutions. Challenges include (1) keeping the databases up to date, and (2) for providers not supplying achievement data to the NLRD, the lag between available information and quality assurance that needs to take place before SAQA can promote the providers.

SAQA has also assisted with the implementation of RPL policy in a number of sectors. Over 20 organisational RPL cases have commenced with potential to reach over 200,000 individuals, many of whom seek RPL at or below NQF Level 4, although all NQF levels are involved in this work. So far, SAQA has assisted all organisations approaching it for assistance. SAQA is assisting the following entities at present, listed alphabetically:

- **Agricultural sector:** RPL for workers in the agricultural industry, especially seasonal workers (the most disenfranchised workers in the industry) – collaboration with DeLoitte and stakeholders across the agriculture industry (initial potential reach: 50,000 candidates)
- **Auto-motor artisans [Local Technical Entrepreneurs]:** Collaboration with TETA, NAMB, BMW, Mercedes, Honda, Toyota and Ford for RPL for mechanics (project still being developed)
- **Correctional Services:** RPL for offender artisans (initial potential reach: 40,000 candidates)
- **Department of Defence:** RPL for Military Veterans (potential reach: 20,000 candidates)

---

1. According to this data, RPL took place against 153 different qualifications, over a third of which are in the field of Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology at NQF Levels 1-4. Roughly a fifth of the qualifications are in the Physical Planning and Construction fields and a similar amount in Business, Commerce and Management studies. There were also qualifications in the fields of Services, Arts, and Communication. However, the majority of the 25,505 achievements were in the field of Services, mostly at NQF Levels 1 and 4, followed by Business, Commerce and Management Studies, mostly at NQF Level 2. The Services Level 1 qualifications were the National Certificate: Hygiene and Cleaning and the General Education and Training Certificate: Domestic Services, while the Level 4 qualifications were the Further Education and Training Certificate: Real Estate and the National Certificate: Ladies Hairdressing. The Level 2 qualifications in Business, Commerce and Management Studies were the National Certificate: Business Administration Services, the National Certificate: New Venture Creation (SMME) and the National Certificate: Contact Centre Support.
• Department of Public Service Administration (DPSA): Coordination of RPL in the public services sector (potentially 10,000 candidates)
• Department of Social Development (DSD): RPL for the professionalization of all Community Development Practitioners (potential reach of over 100,000 candidates)
• Department of Transport: RPL for staff in the Department of Transport (500 candidates)
• Education and Labour Relations Council (ELRC): RPL for educators teaching at different levels in the system (potential reach: 10,000 candidates)
• E-TV: RPL for E-TV staff members (potentially 500 candidates)
• Game Rangers: Collaboration with Rhodes University and South Africa Nature Parks (SANParks) to develop RPL model for game rangers (initial potential reach: 10,000 candidates)
• Hair care industry: RPL for the professionalization of practitioners at a number of levels (project under development; potential reach: 3000 candidates)
• Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA): RPL for psychologists (project under development, potential reach: 300 candidates)
• Marine Industry Association South Africa (MIASA): RPL for artisans in the marine industry (initial potential reach: 5000 candidates)
• Medical Laboratory Scientists: RPL policy and processes created at Higher Education Level (currently no candidates)
• National Artisan Moderating Body (NAMB): 30 RPL pilots for artisans (initial potential reach 10,000 candidates)
• Rand Water: RPL for 100 artisans and 20 management staff members at Rand Water (120 candidates)
• Road Traffic Management Corporation: RPL for Traffic Officers (1000 candidates)
• State Information Technology Agency (SITA): RPL for internal restructuring (potentially 300 candidates)
- **South African Police Services (SAPS):** RPL for musicians in the SAPS (400 candidates)
- **South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA):** commencing RPL for SAQA staff (project under development)
- **South African Sports Confederation (SASCOC):** RPL pilot towards setting coaching standards potentially with national and international impact (initial potential reach: 10,000 candidates)

A third area of coordination has involved collecting information on past, present, and proposed RPL initiatives and research across the board, for publication and dissemination. The following items have been developed:

- Proceedings of the Colloquium on RPL for upgrading and up-skilling teachers in South Africa (SAQA 2010)
- National RPL Conference: Bridging and expanding existing islands of excellent practice – Book of Abstracts and Summaries (SAQA 2011)
- National RPL Conference: Bridging and expanding existing islands of excellent practice – Book of Full Papers (currently in draft form)
- Resolution and Working Document on RPL (SAQA 2011)
- Successful RPL cases (currently in draft form)
- National RPL Conference: Tried and Tested Tools and Templates - Book of Abstracts and Summaries (to be printed in February 2014)

4. Planning for the **National RPL Conference: Tried and Tested, Tools, Templates (23-26 February 2014)** is at an advanced stage. The main purposes of this conference are:

- Further advancing sectoral, across-sector, and national coordination of RPL
- Work-shopping the revised national *Policy for implementation of RPL*
- Sharing best RPL practices, effective RPL process models, effective tools and templates, models for resourcing RPL and other cutting-edge findings relating to RPL
5. **CAT and Assessment policy development** is also at an advanced stage: the aim is to finalise them by March 2014. Both policies have been developed in consultation with the Quality Councils and Reference Groups, both involve wide stakeholder consultation, and both are linked to RPL policy in an attempt to increase synergy between the three areas. By working together the three policies (for RPL, CAT, and assessment) have more potential to increase systemic redress, access, success and progression.

SAQA has developed a strategy for implementing RPL policy which includes (1) advocacy around RPL policy and building common understanding around RPL, (2) sharing lessons learned around implementation of RPL policy and all related information within and across sectors, and (3) research that supports the development and implementation of RPL policy.

### 4. Building common understanding around and advancing, articulation

To move towards the bigger picture of which RPL is a part: if learners in South Africa are to be able to move into and progress within education/training, between institutions of learning, and between work and learning, a well-articulated education and training system is needed that is also well articulated with the world of work.

Currently articulation is inadequate. There is lack of trust and perceptions of lack of quality between different institutions and within institutions and subsystems. There are different and non-aligned quality assurance systems between the different sub-systems. In some instances teaching and learning is inadequate or outdated. There are not always clear pathways between sub-systems, and there is a lack of understanding regarding addressing these barriers.

But what is articulation? Articulation can be described as the movement of learners upwards, sideways, or upwards and sideways within workplaces or institutions of learning, between institutions, between workplaces, or between institutions and workplaces. The main purpose of articulation is to enable access, progression and mobility for learners.

Articulation within the NQF is about the links between the different parts of the
framework. It refers to the extent to which one qualification can give access or partial access to another qualification, and the extent to which learning achievements in one context (e.g. at an FET College) are recognised in a different context (e.g. by a Higher Education Institution or workplace).

Through extensive consultation across the full range of NQF organisations and a number of workshops, SAQA has followed a process of clarifying what articulation means in practice. Common understanding that is inclusive of the approaches in different sub-systems is important if articulation is to be implemented. There are clearly two types of articulation: articulation can be systemic and specific.

Systemic articulation is based on legislation, national policy and formal requirements within the education and training system.

Specific articulation (or “articulation in practice”) is based on formal and informal agreements within the educational and training system, mostly between two or more education and training sub-systems, between specific institutional types, and guided by guidelines, policies, and accreditation principles.

Both types of articulation are needed. In the absence of strong systemic articulation (legislation/policy), the system would depend too much on specific articulation agreements which may or may not be fair and transparent. It is worth noting that over-emphasis on systemic articulation could limit innovative opportunities for specific articulation initiatives. In South Africa at present, systemic articulation needs to be reinforced, and specific articulation agreements need to be enabled.

While there are a number of structural, institutional, knowledge-related, perception-relation and material barriers to articulation, the legislative and policy requirements which create the conditions for systemic articulation are largely in place. After considering advice from SAQA, the Minister of Higher Education and Training determined the NQF as a framework comprising three coordinated sub-frameworks of qualification types, in December 2012 (Government Gazette 36003); the NQF Level Descriptors (SAQA 2012) and new RPL policy (SAQA 2013) have been published and are in use; the policies for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)
and Assessment will be finalized early in 2014. The policies for minimum admission requirements for entry into Higher Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor Degree Studies – with the National Senior Certificate (NSC) and National Certificate: Vocational (NCV) at NQF Level 4 (Department of Education 2005 and Department of Higher Education and Training 2009 respectively), and the policy and criteria for recognising a professional body and registering a professional designation (SAQA 2012) and for registering qualifications and part qualifications on the NQF (SAQA 2012) form part of this suite of policies. The specific systems required by the NQF Act – which include the NQF Implementation Framework (SAQA 2011), the System of Collaboration (SAQA 2012), and the remit issued by the Minister – have also been in place for some time.

Following the determination of the NQF in December 2012, the three Quality Councils\(^2\) commenced development of the policies for their sub-frameworks. The policies for the sub-frameworks contain detailed descriptions of the essential character of each sub-framework, demarcation between the sub-frameworks; the qualification types in the sub-frameworks, and the basis on which the sub-frameworks articulate with each other. Two of these sub-frameworks – those for General and Further Education and Training (GFETSQF), and Higher Education and Training (HEQSF) respectively – have since been gazetted (Government Gazette 36721), and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) is in the process of being finalised.

In the same period and following a request by the Minister of Higher Education and Training SAQA developed Policy on the Principles to Direct Articulation and an Action Plan for Articulation (SAQA 2013) for consideration by the Minister. This Action Plan includes but is not limited to the following:

- Auditing articulation practices across the country
- Sharing of best practice regarding articulation
- An advocacy campaign to raise awareness of articulation-related requirements
- Strengthening communication in the system
- Enhancing the career development system in the country, including improving

\(^2\) The three Quality Councils of the South African NQF being Umalusi: Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO).
coordination, capacity development, and resourcing for career development

- Strengthening and aligning the different quality assurance systems within the NQF; strengthening qualifications where necessary, and developing processes of adjudication where recognition is problematic
- Finalising the national CAT and Assessment policies
- Agreeing on standard terminology for use across the system
- Encouraging partnerships between institutions to increase the number and types of specific articulation agreements
- Addressing issues relating to the determination of the NQF sub-frameworks

The Policy on Principles to Direct Articulation includes core, contextual and operational principles which align the policy with NQF principles and objectives, and take into account the approaches of the three differentiated NQF sub-frameworks.

Although much work remains to be done, work on aspects of the Action Plan for Articulation has commenced. Finalisation of the CAT and Assessment policies has already been noted. SAQA developed an NQF Glossary of Terms in consultation with the Quality Councils, where a wide range of NQF-related terms and concepts is defined, with specific clarification for each of the three NQF sub-framework contexts (SAQA 2013). Work on enhancing the career development system in the country, strengthening and aligning the different quality assurance systems within the NQF and addressing issues relating to the determination of the NQF sub-frameworks is underway.

After determination of the NQF sub-frameworks in December 2012, and as the Quality Councils were finalizing their policies, the Minister directed SAQA to provide advice in four areas namely the already noted principles to direct articulation, and the relationships of professional designations to the sub-frameworks, the feasibility of qualifications above NQF Level 6 on the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF), and potential gains of qualifications above NQF Level 5 in the General and Further Education and Training Sub-Framework (GFETSQF). After a comprehensive process which included thorough engagement with the stakeholders concerned, and research, SAQA provided advice in relation to which dialogue is still underway.
Regarding professional designations, it is now accepted that underlying qualifications determine the relationship between any particular professional designation, and the sub-framework concerned. Further, since professional designations may have more than one underlying qualification located in different NQF sub-frameworks, designations are registered on a separate register provided for in the Section 13(1)(l) of NQF Act 67 of 2008.

Although agreement is still in the process of being forged with respect to inclusion of qualifications at NQF Level 5 on the GFETSQF and the location of the N-qualifications, it is clear that considerable progress has been made towards systemic integration. There is ongoing dialogue between the key NQF organisations and the reach of this dialogue stretches across all education and training. The Quality Councils are to be commended for looking both inwards towards development of their sub-frameworks, and outwards towards links with the other two sub-frameworks in each case.

SAQA supports the encouragement of partnerships between institutions to increase the number and types of specific articulation agreements. The well supported 2\(^{nd}\) NQF Research Conference: Building articulation and integration (March 2013) is one example of a forum in which lessons and challenges around articulation were shared amongst the 250 delegates representing sub-sectors across the board. This conference showed that there are already a number of productive partnerships between different kinds of institutions – such work needs to be built upon and expanded.

Achieving systemic and specific articulation needs several instruments, of which the policies and developments discussed here are only part. While limited resources may restrict the possibilities for articulation at times, the NQF directly contributes to diversified and articulated education and training by providing a single integrated system for relating and registering articulated and quality-assured qualifications. Its components such as RPL provide tools to address poverty and inequality; registering qualifications on the basis of articulated criteria protects learners in the country from fraudulent practices. SAQA as the custodian of the NQF will increasingly place
emphasis on ensuring that articulation is not an afterthought but is integral to the design of qualifications from the start. Given that the extensive consultative phase of policy revision occasioned by the NQF Act 67 of 2008 is nearing completion, SAQA’s focus will now shift towards monitoring and evaluation to ensure that the new policies are fully implemented.

What then, about the role of workplaces?

5. **RPL, articulation, and skills development in workplaces**

While there is not space in the present paper to discuss details around the specifics needed for collaboration between workplaces and institutions of learning, key points are worth mentioning.

There are a number of actions that employers can take to enable learning, apart from mandatory aspects such as skills levies. Employers can provide structured learning opportunities for contracted employees, learners, interns or apprentices. Employers can also enable individuals in these and other categories to study by including formal learning in performance management contracts, allowing time for study at key points (such as exams), and providing the resources needed. Partnering with institutions of learning has potential for sharing of resources. A less-used but valuable route is to view all practices in the workplace, as sites of potential learning. Each time work is corrected or improved, there is potential for learning. Non-formal and informal learning can potentially be recognised via RPL. The progression of individuals within or between workplaces will ultimately benefit the country as a whole. SAQA encourages all of these actions. In closing then, some recommendations for NSDS IV follow.

6. **RPL, articulation, and NSDS IV: rights, roles, responsibilities**

Taking into account the revised Policy for Implementing RPL and RPL knowledge and experience to date; the NQF with its articulation initiatives, and the potential of workplaces to provide learning, the following implications are worth considering for inclusion in the NSDS IV:

- Requiring SETAs to develop RPL initiatives in their sectors
• Ring-fenced financing for RPL in SETA funding
• SETA stakeholders agreeing on the provision of quality RPL for employed workers and reporting on the results and impact of this RPL
• For employers, targeted funding from SETA levy grants
• Incentives for employers to encourage learning at work and RPL in the workplace, where all work is treated as learning, and this learning is recognised
• Incentives for alternative access to FET and Higher Education Institutions
• A fund to support cooperative, small enterprise, worker or researcher-initiated, NGO, community, and collaborative training initiatives of a wide variety of kinds for skills development below NQF Level 1, that is linked to job creation in areas where the jobs will be permanent (eg service delivery and infrastructure maintenance)
• Supporting RPL in Community Education and Training Centres
• The expansion and formalisation of worker education and training, simultaneously with recognition of non-formal and informal learning

It is only by working together that we will achieve a developmental state with developmental workplaces in which all stakeholders collaborate for a capable and committed workforce and citizenry for the greater good of all.

7. References


Republic of South Africa Department of Higher Education and Training. Minimum Admission Requirements for Entry into a Higher Certificate, Diploma or Bachelor Degree Studies with the National Certificate Vocation at Level 4 of the National Qualifications Framework, 2009.


