

National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Bodies in a Period of Climate, Policy and Technological Tsunamis: Opportunities and Challenges?

The world has entered a period of unprecedented technological change. Education and training institutions globally are grappling with what this will mean for them. Huge educational policy changes by multi-lateral organisations are changing the landscape with many of the new policy positions requiring substantial changes at the country level to remain relevant. These changes are at play while the planet faces a massive climate crisis. The NQF Bodies at home and abroad are asking themselves how they can respond to these changes. How they can remain relevant? What are the opportunities and challenges?

The Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR) raises fundamental questions for society. Massive job losses are predicted. Educational stakeholders are asking how they can and should respond. Experts present two scenarios for the future of NQFs; Scenario One predicts that technology will overtake and replace NQFs, while another scenario predicts that NQF bodies could integrate the new technology into their processes. The second scenario, however, requires fast movement or face the possibility of imminent distinction.

4IR can either be used to further embed inequality, unemployment, racism and sexism or could be employed to address capacity constraints in resource deficient environments. The tools of the 4IR can be used to create jobs, empower workers, training and change power relationships. Institutions can teach learners to be critical thinkers in the era of the 4IR, and NQF Bodies can use these tools to speed up registration and accreditation implementation processes and turnaround times.

Regional and continental policies have huge implications for the educational institutions in South Africa. The establishment of a Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF) and the development of the proposed African Continental Qualifications Framework (ACQF) are examples. Both frameworks are seen as tools for recognition of qualifications and mobility of learners, workers and youth, and professionals across the continent. South Africa and the Seychelles aligned their National Qualifications Frameworks with the SADCQF. Quality Councils and educational institutions must now show this alignment on their transcripts and certificates to make learner mobility possible. The ACQF is part of a broader initiative called the “African Continental Free Trade Area” (AfCFTA) and is designed to address youth unemployment

The activation of the Addis Convention on 15 December 2019 puts in place a set of principles to facilitate the recognition of higher education qualifications across the continent. Given the ratification by South Africa’s parliament in March 2019 it is now legally binding on all institutions.

The Addis Convention underpins the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education which were adopted by 193 Member States on 25 November 2019. Both policy documents include concepts like recognition of qualifications, certified recognition of prior learning (RPL), partial studies, quality assurance, learning outcomes, eradication of fraud, and credible information systems.

Institutions have been very slow to adopt and implement some progressive policy changes. The higher education sector took 10 years to move from the 8 level to a 10 level framework. RPL is implemented in a non-consistent and partial way. NQF bodies have been reluctant to adopt the recognition of partial studies.

The structural and policy changes cannot be compared to the climate crisis facing humans. NQF bodies and institutions have a massive responsibility to engage with the climate crisis and cannot do “business” as usual.

Alignment to the new policies provide opportunities for educational institutions and NQF bodies to play more active roles globally. It allows learners, young people and professionals opportunities to move across boundaries and build a future across national boundaries.

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