# The South African National Qualifications Framework: its evolution, impact and future direction

Going Global, Miami, 29 April to 1 May 2014

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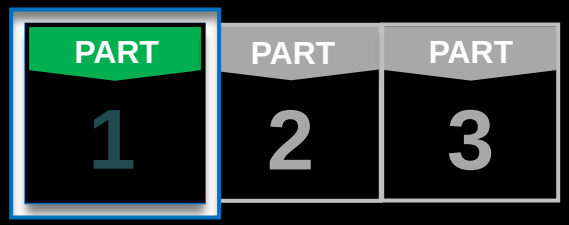
# *Flying blind: policy rationales for national qualifications frameworks and how they tend to evolve*

**This presentation draws on the paper by Mike Coles, James Keevy, Andrea Bateman and Jack Keating (posthumously), forthcoming 2014**

# EVOLUTION




Evolution

Impact

Future direction

15%

# Realities in South Africa

- 20 years into democracy (population 52.6 m)
- Middle-income country (USD 3,600 per capita income)
- Large proportion of young people (51% below 25 and largely black)
- Life expectancy is 52.6 years
- 45% live below national poverty line (ZAR 33.5 USD per month)
- Unemployment rate between 25% and 40%
- Over 13.5m enrolment in the education and training system (87%, 7-18 years)

85%

Original slide background by Brian O'Connell, 2014

# Evolution of the NQF

IN SOUTH AFRICA:

- Established in 1995 shortly after the end of apartheid
- Strong transformational agenda to promote lifelong learning
- Influenced by developments in Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom

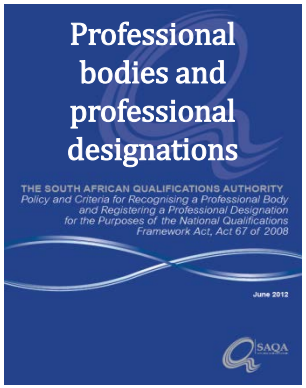
BUT ALSO GLOBALLY:

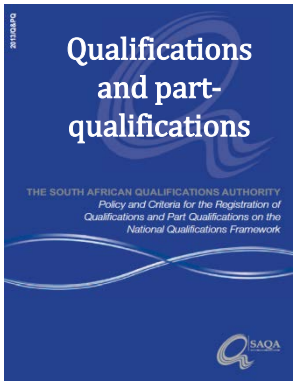
- Evolution to more reforming NQFs
- More modest ambitions
- Recognises differences between types of learning
- Distinct but articulated sub-frameworks

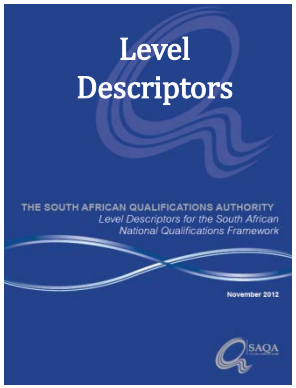
| | National Qualifications Framework | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Level | Sub-framework and qualification types | |
| Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework | 10 | Doctoral Degree<br>Doctoral Degree (Professional) | * |
| | 9 | Master's Degree<br>Master's Degree (Professional) | * |
| | 8 | Bachelor Honours Degree<br>Postgraduate Diploma<br>Bachelor's Degree | Occupational Certificate (Level 8) |
| | 7 | Bachelor's Degree<br>Advanced Diploma | Occupational Certificate (Level 7) |
| | 6 | Diploma<br>Advanced Certificate | Occupational Certificate (Level 6) |
| | 5 | Higher Certificate | Occupational Certificate (Level 5) |
| General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework | 4 | National Certificate | Occupational Certificate (Level 4) |
| | 3 | Intermediate Certificate | Occupational Certificate (Level 3) |
| | 2 | Elementary Certificate | Occupational Certificate (Level 2) |
| | 1 | General Certificate | Occupational Certificate (Level 1) |

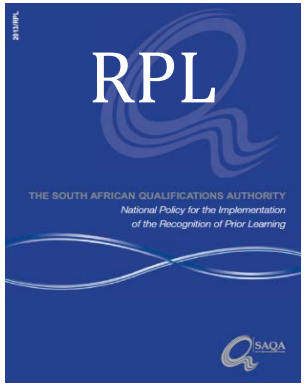
Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework

# A new phase




CAT

Assessment

System of collaboration

NQF Implementation Framework

# IMPACT

Evolution | Impact | Future direction

# Impact of the South African NQF

- NQF understood as a relational device
- Unrealistic expectations; “trail blazer”
- Transformational model was necessary in the early years to break with the apartheid legacy
- Reforming agenda has come to the fore, but it is politically less palatable
- Trend for NQFs to become less “hard nosed”
- NQFs are not quick fixes, yet they appear so straightforward to implement

SIGNIFICANT

- Differences in the epistemology of knowledge, skills and qualifications, and the ownership of and value carried by qualifications

BUT

- NQFs by-and-large have not created the seamless whole for the education and training systems that many expected
- Qualifications systems remain confusing even though the introduction of qualifications *types* has made systems more transparent.

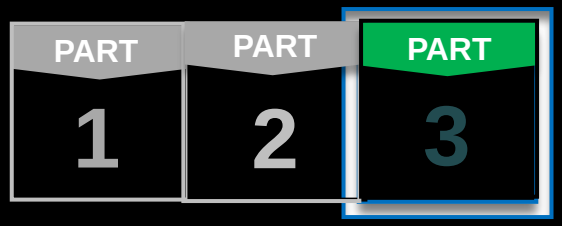
ON THE POSITIVE SIDE

- NQFs have been most helpful with international mobility and articulation
- NQFs have all been successful as way of engaging stakeholders, particularly the business community

**The scale of the reforms and the levels of the investments that were required to achieve access and redress were beyond the immediate means of the new government. Education and training systems are deeply historical constructs and the formal system could not immediately be transformed to one that provided widespread access and redress the denial of opportunity in the past. So a complementary strategy to reforms of the existing infrastructure was needed.**

**Coles *et al*, 2014**

# FUTURE DIRECTION



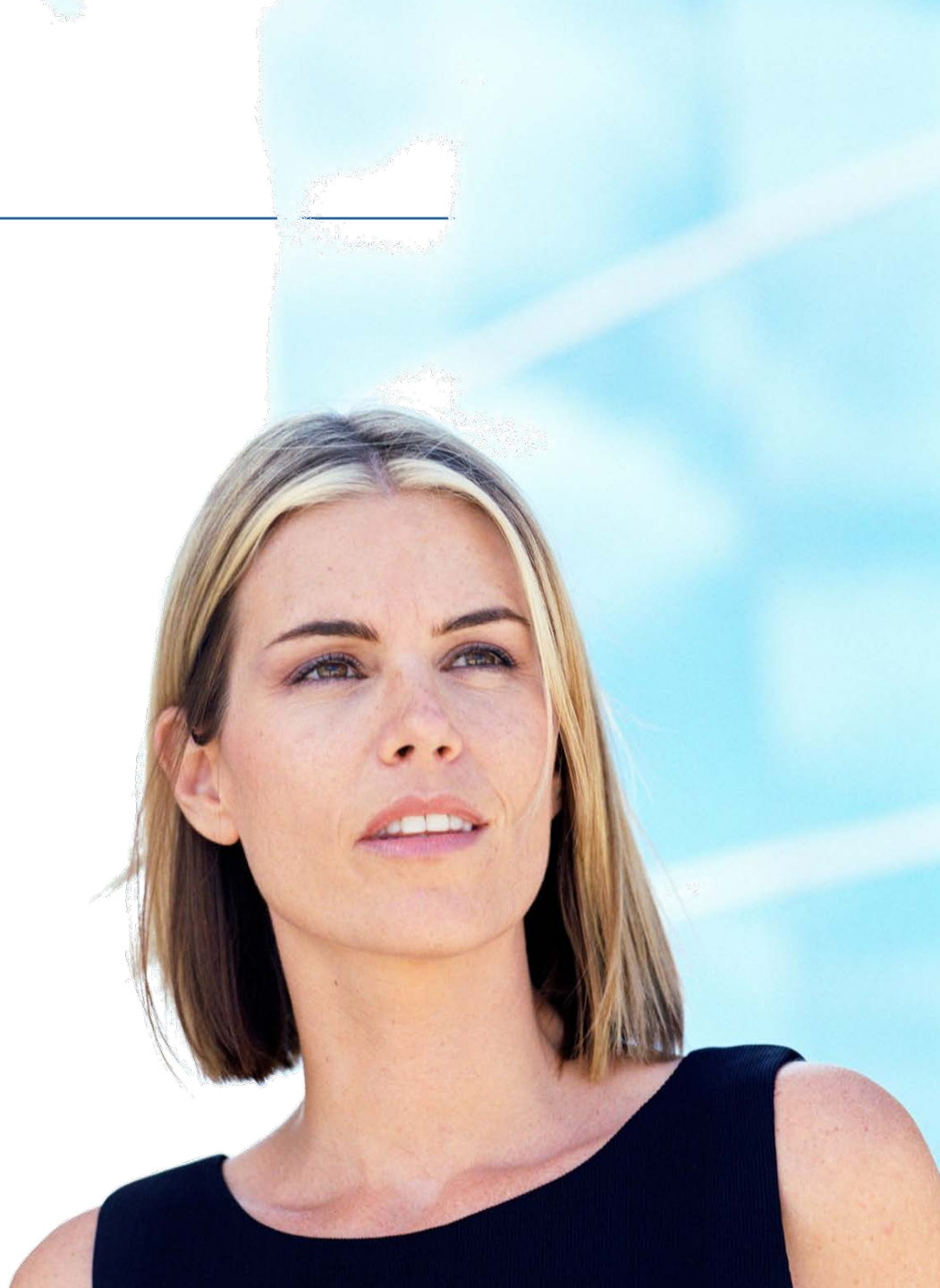

Evolution

Impact

Future direction

# Future direction

- Three sub-frameworks, each with its own quality assurance regime
- Focus on trades and occupations
- Inclusion of professions in the NQF
- NQF as part of a coherent national strategy



**…the NQF itself is a national institution, the work of thousands, led by SAQA. In all likelihood the NQF will be a fixture on the South African scene for a good fifteen years more, despites its travails, controversies and uncertainties. It has framed so many of South Africa's debates on education and training, contributed so much of the vocabulary and syntax of the South African discourse, influenced so much practice, that it is impossible to imagine what South African education and training would have been like without it.**

**Tevor Coombe, 2012**

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