

**THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF)/
SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY (SAQA)
SUPPORT PROJECT – PHASE II**

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NQF SUPPORT LINK
Seminal text with factual core content

MODULE 4: THE NQF and ASSESSMENT

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1. Introduction to the module

The learning that is assumed to be in place are: *Implementing the NQF* (Module One, the foundation module) as well *The NQF and Learning Programmes* (Module Three).

The development goal of the NQF-SAQA Support Project identifies the leadership of the FET band as the initial target audience. The goal is specific in targeting the leadership of the FET college sector, but the goal includes “other targeted organisations”. For this reason, this module will address the governance and executive leadership of the FET colleges as well as the leadership in those organisations that also have FET-related responsibilities and with whom the colleges would need to work in implementing assessment aligned to the NQF. These other targeted organisations include the Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) as well as companies that provide workplace training, also known as constituent providers.

The structure of this module will be familiar to educators. It is presented in a sequence: from the known to the less well known, from the less complex to the more complex, and from general principles to specific policies.

There are four major sections:

Essential principles and practice of assessment promoted by the NQF covers the basic principles of all assessment, beginning with the more familiar and concluding with three recent developments in assessment. It elaborates the promotion of assessment by the NQF. This enables Further Education and Training (FET) institutional leadership to be updated on the latest thinking on assessment and equips those in leadership to monitor basic assessment practice in their institution. It stresses in particular the need for provider institutions to take greater responsibility for the learning of their learners and to use assessment to promote better learning.

Assessment for Outcomes-based education (OBE) relates the principles of all outcomes-based education to assessment in general. It attempts to clarify and de-mystify OBE. It equips FET leaders with the knowledge and insight to use and develop OBE in their institutions and to experience the benefits that it holds. It also attempts to give practical answers to common questions about OBE and assessment, and provides a working knowledge of the underlying assessment principles on which all registered qualifications and unit standards on the NQF are based.

The design of the NQF and assessment introduces issues that are specific to the NQF and to South Africa and explains how they influence FET providers. It provides FET leaders with the basic understanding necessary to be able to interpret and apply official and SAQA documentation on assessment issues.

Institutional assessment policies indicates the quality management policies and procedures that should be developed and implemented by FET providers. .

FET leaders are given an outline of what policies and mechanisms for monitoring and review they should actively develop for their own institutions.

2. The importance of the NQF and assessment to FET Providers

For FET providers and their staff, there are very welcome new challenges to work creatively and efficiently within the context of the NQF. Assessment has been a stagnant area for many years as things have changed little since the 1950s and 60s. Now there is the chance to re-examine old practices and to align them with current national and international ideas. Change does not necessarily come easily when there are well-established ways of doing things, especially when any change can be interpreted as “dropping standards”. But most of the changes are undoubtedly improvements and are smarter ways of doing what has been done before. They also promote equity, in that all providers will present programmes based on the same standards.

The NQF and Assessment

The NQF has brought about a completely new focus on assessment. The most obvious way in which this can be seen is that there are now direct links between what is learned and how it is assessed in all education and training qualifications. Assessment is the common feature, and link between, two of the macro-elements of the NQF, standards setting and quality assurance. Through the adoption of the system of outcomes-based education and training, the NQF has also provided that all assessment is based on the same principles and general procedures. This module attempts to touch on all the areas where the NQF has had an impact on assessment (though it is certainly not comprehensive). The following is a summary of some of the NQF’s main contributions in this area:

- **Integrated assessment:** Encourages a wide variety of assessment uses, methods and instruments to assess competence within unit standards on their own and in qualifications as a whole.
- **Recognition of achievements:** Assesses and credits what a learner knows and can do.
- **Access, progression, portability, and articulation:** Progression through the levels of the NQF is through credits that are awarded following the successful assessment of stipulated requirements.
- **Recognition of prior learning (RPL):** Assessment of RPL allows for accelerated access to further learning and gives give credit to evidence of learning that has already been acquired in different ways.
- **Legitimacy and credibility:** The NQF provides transparency in terms of the standard expected, i.e., what the learner is expected to achieve; what criteria will be used to assess achievement; what the learner will have to do to show achievement; how it will be assessed; the conditions under which or the situation in which the assessment will take place; the underpinning knowledge that will have a bearing; and the amount, complexity and type of evidence that will be required; how moderation will be done; when the assessment will take place.
- **Flexibility:** Uses a variety of assessment methods and instruments, ensuring, however, that the chosen method(s), instrument(s) are fair, reliable, valid, and practical.

- Guidance of learners: Promotes guidance to learners through the use of assessment, informing them of what they do know and can do; what they need to know and do; how they can achieve what they need to know and do; and when they are ready to be assessed for qualification purposes.
- Assessors: Changes their role from being 'gate-keepers', who use assessment to prevent learners from developing further, to supportive guides who have the success of the learner at heart – so that the learner can gain access to further learning.

The importance of assessment to the FET Provider

The FET provider faces many challenges. Improving and changing the assessment policies and procedures in an institution can assist it in a number of ways to meet some of these challenges.

1. The development of high quality education and training within a differentiated system to a diverse range of learners.
By using a common approach and common methods of assessment, quality is likely to improve and it will be much easier to cope with the many demands made by the diverse range of learners.
2. Widening access to and participation in education and training beyond General Education and Training (GET).
Using assessment diagnostically and formatively and applying the same principles to the assessment of RPL as in learning programmes will make access easier to manage.
3. Overly academic, theoretical and out of touch programmes.
New methods and instruments of assessment can help change this considerably.
4. High failure and repetition rates.
Training and professional development of educators in assessment together with the use of baseline and systemic assessment can contribute towards addressing the problem.
5. Need for quality benchmarks.
Assessment plays an important part in implementing a successful quality management system.
6. Broader social development of learners.
Assessing the critical outcomes of the NQF will help facilitate social development.
7. Development of critical thinking.
New and suitably varied assessment instruments can introduce critical thinking skills.
8. Lifelong learning.
Assessment in the NQF promotes this. As learners become accustomed to OBE, and to the way in which it operates, they will be encouraged to keep learning.

3. Expected outcomes of the module

FET leaders will be able to:

1. Explain the essential principles and practice of assessment that are promoted by the NQF.
2. Apply the basic principles of outcomes-based education to assessment within an FET institutional context.
3. Interpret the structures and practice of the NQF in relation to assessment in an FET institution.
4. Design outline policies and procedures for assessment in a FET institution within a quality management system.

4. Essential principles and practice of assessment promoted by the NQF

Why is assessment so important in the NQF? In both the way in which qualifications and unit standards are designed (referred to as Standards Setting), and the way in which a check is kept on the provision of learning (referred to as Quality Assurance) in the NQF, assessment has a key role. For this reason it is important for all FET leaders and educators to understand its basic principles.

Many of these principles are well established and will be recognised easily. The language and terms used to describe them, however, may be new. This section begins with what is likely to be more familiar. It concludes with three more recent developments in assessment that play a crucial part in the NQF. They are: *evidence for assessment*; *agreement trials*; and *formative assessment*.

Principles of good assessment

To assess means to measure something. Assessment has become a popular word because it describes a wide range of ways to measure the achievements of learners beyond the customary tasks, exercises, tests and examinations. It is currently an important area of research and innovation in education and training.

The perfect educational assessment probably does not exist, but it is feasible to *aim* to assess as well as possible. There are four principles of good assessment to aspire to: fairness, validity, reliability and practicability. Together they comprise *credible assessment*.

1. Fairness

Successful assessment depends on a learner having faith in an assessor and in the methods of assessment. A sense of 'fairness' is essential for this faith. Fairness involves treating all learners in the same way. It is not always possible to treat them equally but the conditions of assessment should be the same for all. The entire assessment process ought to be clear and transparent to every learner. Assessment is clearly unfair when it is biased against any learner on the grounds of ethnicity, gender, age, disability, social class or race and uses methods that do not take account of these factors.

2. Validity

Validity in assessment refers to the extent to which the assessment measures what it is supposed to measure; whether it is knowledge, understanding, subject content, skill, information, action or behaviour. It means that assessment activities have to match what is being assessed. To be valid, assessment should stay within the parameters of what is required – not less or more than what is stipulated. Appropriate methods must be used to conduct the assessment, learners must understand clearly what is required of them and they should be accustomed to method(s) of assessment.

3. Reliability

Reliability is closely linked to validity. It refers to the consistency of assessment and whether it will always give the same result or not. It can be defined as the extent to which the same assessment activity would give the same results if the same learners were to take it again under the same conditions. The following factors can influence the reliability of assessment:

- Assessors interpreting unit standards or qualifications inconsistently.
- Assessors applying different standards, e.g. inconsistency between two markers.
- Whether a learner's work is assessed at the beginning or the end; assessed quickly or slowly.
- The time and conditions under which the assessment takes place.
- The learner's state of mind or health.

Assessment cannot be completely valid and completely reliable. Some methods of assessment may have much validity but not as much reliability, and vice versa. Writing an essay is often regarded as a valid way of assessing certain knowledge and understanding, but marking essays is often not reliable at all. Multiple-choice tests are usually reliable, but they are often not very valid, as they remove the context of the learning and select a few examples only.

4. Practicability

Practicability involves putting assessment into practice successfully. It means ensuring that the methods of assessment chosen used take into account the available teaching and financial resources, facilities, equipment and time.

This principle influences validity and reliability. Choices sometimes need to be made between short and longer assessments, oral and written assessments, practical demonstrations and pen and paper test on the grounds of practicability alone, for example.

Good assessment practice

1. Authentic assessment

Authentic assessment is assessment that is *appropriate* to the purpose for which it is used and appropriate to the nature of what is being assessed. It includes more practical, realistic and challenging (creative and varied) approaches to assessment than traditional written methods. If, for example, a practical skill is being assessed, it should be assessed in a practical way. Likewise, if workplace knowledge is assessed, the context of the assessment should be the workplace.

2. Methods and instruments

In order to be fair to all learners and to be able to test all aspects of what is being learned in an authentic way, it is essential that a variety of methods of assessment be used. Someone who writes with difficulty may be disadvantaged in written assessment, but someone who finds practical work difficult might prefer written assessment, for instance.

Assessment methods, instruments and tools are described by different people in different ways. There are many descriptions of them. The assessment *methods* referred to here involve what an assessor does when he or she assesses a learner or a learner's work. They are:

- Observation – observing the learner while he/she is carrying out tasks, real or simulated.
- Evaluation of a product – evaluating something the learner has produced after the task has been completed.
- Questioning – asking questions orally or in writing which are answered orally or in writing. The questions could relate to the observation or to the product.

Assessment *instruments* here refer to the nature of the assessment tasks given to the learner to do.

The table below lists a number of possible assessment instruments and indicates what methods are used with them.

INSTRUMENTS:	METHODS:		
	Observation	Evaluation of a product	Questioning (written / oral)
Alternative response questions			✓
Assertion/reason questions			✓
Assignments		✓	✓
Aural/oral tests			✓
Case studies		✓	✓
Completion questions			✓
Examinations / tests		✓	✓
Extended response question			✓
Grid questions			✓
Log books		✓	✓
Matching questions			✓
Multiple response questions			✓
Oral questions			✓
Personal interviews			✓
Practical exercises / demonstrations	✓	✓	✓
Portfolios		✓	✓
Projects	✓	✓	✓
Questionnaires		✓	✓
Restricted response questions			✓
Role plays	✓		✓
Simulations	✓		✓
Short answer questions			✓
Structured questions			✓

Different kinds of questions:

- Alternative response questions: True/False; Yes/No questions
Possible uses: Recall of information; ability to discriminate.
- Assertion/reason questions: Consist of an assertion and supporting explanation. The learner has to decide whether the assertion and explanation are true, and if true, whether the explanation is a valid reason for the assertion. Sometimes the learner is asked to select his/her answer from a list of possibilities, e.g. True; True + Valid; True + Invalid.
Possible uses: Ability to weigh up options and to discriminate.
- Aural/oral tests: These are mainly used to generate evidence of learners' ability to listen, interpret, communicate ideas and sustain a conversation in the language of assessment.
Possible uses: Interpretation of ideas; expression of ideas.
- Completion questions/short answer questions: Learners are presented with a question with a pre-determined answer consisting of a few words, or may be given a statement where key words are omitted. They are then required to complete the statement by filling in the word(s). Such questions may also involve the use of numbers, diagrams and graphs.
Possible uses: Recall of factual information; test understanding and application of knowledge, e.g. in mathematical concepts.
- Examinations/tests: These usually consist of a range of questions. Learners are required to respond to questions usually within a specified time.
Possible uses: Recall of information; cognitive skills such as problem solving or analysis.
- Extended response questions: These are usually in a written form. There are few restrictions on the content and form of the response. Continuous prose is normally required, but there may be limits on the length and/or time allocated.
Possible uses: Open-ended debates or other responses; arguments; reports.
- Grid questions/matching questions: Grid questions and matching questions are variants of each other. The learner is presented with two lists – a set of statements and a set of responses. The learner is required to indicate which response from the second list corresponds or matches each statement in the first list. Grid questions are presented in grid format. They differ from the other selected-response assessment instruments in that each question may have more than one correct response and each response may be used more than once.
Possible uses: Recall of information; application of knowledge.
- Multiple-choice questions: Multiple choice questions consist of an incomplete statement or a question, followed by plausible alternative responses from which the learner has to select the correct one.
Possible uses: Recall of information; check understanding; analysis.
- Oral questions/restricted response questions: The form and content of the response is limited by the way in which the question is asked. These questions do not have pre-determined correct answers (as in short answer questions, etc.) and the assessor has to exercise his/her professional judgment when interpreting learner's responses.
Possible uses: Allows for self-expression when questions are oral; supports observation of tasks where underpinning knowledge and understanding are tested.

- **Personal interviews:** A personal interview is probably the oldest and best-known means of eliciting information directly from learners. It combines two assessment methods, namely observation and questioning. An interview is a dialogue between the assessor and the learner, creating opportunities for learner questions.
Possible uses: A range of applications using different forms of questions, particularly open-ended questions; guidance and support to the learner.
- **Questionnaires:** A questionnaire is a structured written interview consisting of a set of questions relating to particular areas of performance. Unlike a personal interview, it is administered and judged under standard conditions.
Possible uses: Assessment of outcomes particularly concerned with attitudes, feelings, interests and experiences.
- **Structured questions:** A structured question consists of a stem (which describes a situation), followed by a series of related questions. The stem can be text, a diagram, a picture, a video, etc.
Possible uses: Recall of information; application of knowledge and understanding; analysis; debate; arguments.

Other useful assessment instruments:

- **Assignments:** A problem-solving exercise with clear guidelines and a specified length. More structured and less open-ended than projects, but they do not necessarily involve strict adherence to a prescribed procedure and they are not concerned exclusively with manual skills.
Possible uses: Problem-solving around a particular topic.
- **Case studies:** A description of an event concerning a real-life or simulated situation, usually in the form of a paragraph or text, a video, a picture or a role-play exercise. This is followed by a series of instructions to elicit responses from learners. Individuals or small groups may undertake case studies.
Possible uses: Analyses of situations; drawing conclusions; reports on possible courses of action.
- **Logbooks:** A useful means of assessing learners' progress and achievements. It should have clear instructions for use and give guidance on how essential information is to be recorded.
Possible uses: In a workplace, to monitor and check activities; record processes; record of achievements.
- **Practical exercises/demonstrations:** An activity that allows learners to demonstrate manual and/or behavioural skills. The assessment may be based on the end-result of the activity (the product), or the carrying-out of the activity (the process), or a combination of both.
Possible uses: Demonstration of skill.
- **Portfolios:** A collection of different types of evidence relating to the work being assessed. It can include a variety of samples of work done. Portfolios are suitable for long-term activities. The learner and assessor usually plan the portfolio jointly as sources of evidence may vary. The learner is then responsible for the collection of evidence and the compilation of the portfolio.
Possible uses: Recognition of prior learning and experience; assessment of long-term activities related to each other; assessment where direct observation may be difficult.

- **Projects:** A project is any exercise or investigation in which the time constraints are more relaxed. The assessor directs the choice of the project, usually by providing the learner or group of learners with a topic or brief for the investigation.
Possible uses: Comprehensive range of skills can be assessed; integration of activities within and across unit standards or different parts of a qualification.
- **Role-play:** Learners are presented with a situation, often a problem or an incident, to which they have to respond by assuming a particular role. The enactment may be unrehearsed or the learner may be briefed in the particular role to be played. Such assessments are open-ended and are person centred.
Possible uses: Assessment of a wide range of behavioural and interpersonal skills.
- **Simulations:** Simulations mirror actual activities or conditions. They are suitable for assessments where demonstrations and observation will provide reliable and valid results, but where, for a number of reasons, it is difficult or not practicable to assess under actual conditions.
Possible uses: Assessments of actions under 'safe' conditions, e.g. operating machines which could be dangerous or where the breakdown of such a machine will cause a halt in production or endanger lives.
- **Reflective journal:** A reflective journal gives learners the opportunity to critically reflect on their own learning, to express their thoughts and experiences and to present this in an acceptable way.
Possible uses: It gives the assessor a unique opportunity to follow the thought-processes of a learner and to monitor the way a learner thinks and grows; critical evaluation of progress by the learner.

3. Moderation

At a very simple level, moderation involves checking the way that assessment has taken place to ensure that it is fair and accurate. In technical terms, it is the process that ensures that the assessment is valid and reliable. It should ensure that learners are assessed in a consistent way, using well-designed instruments. It should also make sure that all the assessors involved use similar methods and make similar and consistent judgements about learners' performance. It can also include processes to evaluate assessors, to improve or redesign assessment methods and instruments, and to handle appeals from dissatisfied learners.

Moderation of assessment must take place internally within a college or institution, but there is also often a subsequent external moderation, when an external moderator moderates the internal assessment.

Internal moderators should:

- Establish systems to standardise assessment, including the plans for internal moderation.
- Monitor consistency of assessment records.
- Check the design of assessment materials for appropriateness before they are used, monitor assessment processes, check candidates' evidence, and check the results and decisions of assessor for consistency by checking samples.
- Co-ordinate assessor meetings.
- Liaise with external moderators.

- Provide appropriate and necessary support, advice and guidance to assessors.

External moderators should:

- Check that the systems required to support the provision of learning programmes across the institution are appropriate and working effectively.
- Providing advice and guidance to the institution.
- Make an overview of how assessment is conducted across institutions.
- Checking that all the staff involved in assessment are appropriately qualified and experienced.
- Check the credibility (fairness, validity, reliability and practicability) of assessment methods and instruments.
- Check the internal moderation systems.
- Monitor and observe samples of assessment processes and learners' evidence to ensure consistency within and across institutions.
- Check assessors' decisions and judgments.

4. Record keeping

Good record keeping is essential in all assessment. Without it, there is no point in conducting assessment. There should always be records of the learners' names, the date of the assessment, a description of the assessment activity / instrument and the learners' results, together with comments about them. It is a useful practice to back-up the records kept by educators by insisting that learners have a systematic way of keeping their own records.

Records must be accessible to moderators, easy to interpret, securely kept, confidential and helpful in the teaching and reporting process. There should be a policy within each institution specifying how assessment records are kept.

5. Reporting

Two aspects of reporting are important: Whom the report is for and what is reported.

Reports of the results of assessment can be written for a learner, for parents, employers or bursars, for internal use within an institution, or for other institutions. The nature and amount of information in the report will vary accordingly.

A *record of achievement* will contain more than the usual report. It can include results, comments by educators and trainers, comments by the learner, examples of work done and records of the learner's other activities. Records of achievement are particularly useful for reviewing a learner's achievement, reflecting on it and planning for future work. A *profile* is a more systematic way of presenting the learner's achievements against the intentions of a learning programme. It may be regarded as a detailed combination of a testimonial and a record of achievement.

Evidence for assessment

A more recent term used in connection with assessment is *evidence*. What does it mean in this context? Evidence is the information that shows what a learner has learned or can do. Or, to express it in more formal words, evidence is the proof produced by a learner that shows that he or she complies with the requirements of the criteria against which he or she is being assessed. A traditional instrument of

assessment would be, for example, to test learners to find out what they know. The test, then, provides the evidence. But tests can provide evidence of one kind only. When one uses the word evidence, however, one is also referring to *a range of different ways* in which it is possible for learners to show what they have achieved.

The main tasks for assessors regarding evidence are:

- To specify how much evidence is required,
- To specify what kinds of evidence are needed,
- To check after assessment whether the required evidence is available, and
- To evaluate the quality of the evidence.

The sufficiency of evidence is a very important issue. At what time is the assessor satisfied that there is enough evidence of the right quality to satisfy the requirements of an assessment? This requires professional judgement and discussion with other assessors.

Evidence is obviously related to the four principles of good assessment, as the following questions show. What kinds of evidence is it *fair* to require of learners, and is it fair to require the same evidence of everyone? Is the evidence *valid*, in that it relates directly to what is being assessed? An associated question is whether the evidence is up to date, i.e. current. Is the evidence *reliable* and authentic: is it the learner's own work, and would the learner be able to produce it again if need be? What kinds of evidence are *practicable* in the context in which the assessment is being conducted?

It is possible to distinguish between three types of evidence. Direct evidence is the most valuable to the assessor. It is any evidence that is produced by the learner. Indirect evidence is evidence about the learner that comes from other sources, such as testimonials, records of work done and ratings. Historical evidence is evidence produced by the learner for other purposes in the past, including previous work and portfolios.

Agreement trials

Agreement trials are discussions among educators in order to reach agreement about what evidence is needed for a particular assessment and under what conditions it should take place. It is important for educators to have common, agreed, expectations of learners. An agreement trial could be:

- A number of short meetings attended by educators involved in the same kind or level of assessment, to enable them to come to a common view concerning their criteria and requirements for assessment. They might, for example, agree to try out a number of instruments for assessment and come back to discuss the results amongst each other.
- Discussions about evidence for assessment in order to make decisions. For example, discussing projects done by learners to find a common standard.
- Short meetings that are held whenever they are needed between educators in a single institution or a number of institutions in an area. The principle of an agreement trial is that it is arranged whenever there is a specific need and lasts only as long as it is necessary. The agreement that is reached remains in force until it is changed by another agreement trial.

Formative assessment

The usual use of assessment is to measure achievement in order to establish what progress has been made, to decide whether a learner can move on to a new stage of study or training or has qualified. This use of assessment is known as *summative* assessment. Formative assessment is less common but it has received considerable attention in recent years. It refers to the use of assessment to help learners with their learning and to assist them to make better progress. A useful definition is that it monitors and supports the process of learning and teaching, and is used to inform learners and educators about learners' progress so as to improve learning by means of constructive feedback that will enable learners to grow. Note that summative and formative assessment are *not* different kinds, methods or instruments of assessment, they are simply different *ways of using* assessment. The same assessment can be used for summative and formative purposes as long as learners receive feedback to help them make progress and educators adapt their programmes accordingly.

To summarise, formative assessment involves:

- The provision of effective feedback to learners,
- The active involvement of learners in their own learning,
- Adjusting teaching and instruction to take account of the results of assessment,
- A recognition of the profound influence that assessment has on the motivation and self-esteem of learners, and
- The need for learners to assess themselves and understand how to improve.

Specifically, educators will:

- Share learning goals with their learners,
- Involve their learners in self-assessment,
- Provide feedback which leads to learners recognising their next steps and how to take them,
- Underpin the confidence that every learner can succeed.

To promote the formative use of assessment, educators need to *prevent*:

- The tendency to assess the quantity of work rather than the quality of learning,
- Paying more attention to marking than giving advice for improvement,
- Comparing learners, which demoralises the less successful.

Methods of feedback include: appropriate questioning, focussing the teacher's oral and written comments specifically on the intended purpose of an assessment instrument, guiding learners to what the next step is for then to master (referred to as 'closing the gap' suggestions), and encouragement to a learner.

5. Assessment for Outcomes-based education

How does outcomes-based education encourage good assessment principles and practice? Outcomes-based education (OBE), on which the National Qualifications Framework is constructed, is an approach to teaching, training and learning which stresses the need to be clear about what learners are expected to achieve. The role

of assessment in OBE is specifically to establish whether and when this has happened. Registered qualifications and unit standards on the NQF are specially designed with this in mind.

Outcomes

In OBE the educator states beforehand what performance is expected of the learner. This statement is an outcome, a competence or end product. Outcomes can be described as the results expected at the end of a learning process. They refer to the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that learners should be able to demonstrate that they can understand or apply within particular contexts. The formal definition of outcomes is “the contextually demonstrated end-products of the learning process”.

When first introduced to outcomes the response of many educators is that outcomes seem to be merely a new word for objectives, or aims and goals. There are obvious similarities between the terms, but two important differences. 1) Outcomes describe what is to be *learned*, whereas objectives are often written for what is to be taught. 2) Outcomes are written to describe specifically what it is that learners will be able to do, in the format: *Learners will be able to...* (or similar wording). I.e. they describe a competence.

Demonstrating outcomes

Outcomes are intended to be demonstrated. In other words, learners must be able to do or show what an outcome requires and in this way satisfy the requirements of the outcome. The focus of assessment in OBE is specifically to do this. To help with the assessment outcomes are usually accompanied by *assessment criteria* that describe the standard at which learners must perform the requirements of the outcome.

Assessment criteria are statements to guide an assessor about whether the evidence provided by a learner is sufficient to demonstrate competent performance. They should specify:

- The knowledge, understanding, action(s), roles, skills, values and attitudes that a learner has to display in order to provide evidence that an outcome has been achieved,
- The level of complexity and quality required, and
- The conditions under which demonstration of these should occur.

It should be noted that outcomes are very seldom achieved fully. In most learning contexts learners *make progress towards an outcome* and satisfy the requirements laid down in the assessment criteria rather than ‘achieve’ the outcome.

Where outcomes are used

Confusion is often caused when speaking of outcomes as speakers seldom specify the context in which the outcomes they are referring to are used. Outcomes are written and may be assessed for different contexts, for example (in a descending order):

- All qualifications in the country. E.g. the NQF critical outcomes.

- A specific standard for a qualification or unit standard – written by its designers, usually a SGB.
- A national curriculum statement (NCS) – written by a curriculum committee. E.g. an FETC subject.
- A learning programme – written by those who teach it.
- A lesson or task - written by the educator.

The nature of assessment for OBE

The basic principles of assessment for OBE are that it is:

1. Transparent, and clearly focused;
2. Integrated with teaching and learning;
3. Based on pre-determined criteria or standards;
4. Varied in terms of methods, techniques, tools and contexts;
5. Valid, reliable, fair, learner-paced, and flexible enough to allow for expanded opportunities.

The steps involved in undertaking outcomes-based assessment can be summarised as follows:

1. Assess the prerequisite knowledge and skills of learners to make sure they have what is required to begin their new learning.
2. Prepare the learners in advance by explaining the outcomes that they are to achieve in the unit of learning. (Note that in some teaching approaches one might begin without revealing the outcomes immediately.)
3. Provide whatever form of whole-class instruction or individual/group work you consider will have the best chance of enabling all the students to achieve mastery of the unit, module, course or subject.
4. Organise guided practice for the learners so that they can be evaluated informally and provided with feedback to enhance their learning. Learners must show success in this guided practice.
5. When most learners seem to be ready to demonstrate mastery, assess their learning according to the assessment criteria that have been developed. (Alternatively, use self-assessment or peer assessment.) Learners who have achieved mastery then work on enrichment activities while those who have not achieved mastery receive additional instruction and practice.
6. All learners then take a summative test. (From Vickery 1988.)

Assessment for outcomes-based education obviously depends on the principles of assessment in section 4 above. The following aspects of these principles are emphasised in OBE, and in the NQF:

- Outcomes-based education is learner centred. Outcomes are not written for a class to attain but for individuals. Each learner is unique, has his or her own way of learning, own pace and needs to have good records of what has been achieved and what has still to be done. (Assessment is to help the learner, not to provide a set of grades for the educator.)
- Outcomes should improve planned progress through formative assessment that shows educators and learners what progress has been made and what still needs to be achieved, since learners are informed in advance of the outcome that they need to achieve. If, however, learners are merely told what outcomes they need to achieve, and not what the processes are by which they will be helped to

achieve the assessment criteria at the appropriate level, there will be no planned progress at all.

- Outcomes-based education requires more detailed records of progress than was previously the case because record keeping is an integral part of student learning. Additionally, if learners are also involved in keeping their own records they will be reminded continually of what they need to achieve.
- Outcomes emphasise what learners must be able to do. While content knowledge is important because without it there would be nothing to do or no context, the assessment of outcomes is concerned with whether the learner can demonstrate something or not. 'Facts' are not to be assessed on their own - assessment is about what one does with the information.
- Many different kinds of evidence that can be used in assessing an outcome. There is great flexibility in outcomes-based education for teachers to use whatever instruments they regard as appropriate to provide evidence for assessment criteria.

Criterion referencing

There are three points of reference in most assessment. They are: how a learner has performed in comparison with other learners in the same group (known as norm referencing); how a learner has performed in relation to his or her own previous performance (known as self- [or ipsative] referencing); and how the learner has performed in terms of set criteria (known as criterion referencing – criterion is the singular of criteria). It is important to be able to evaluate learners' progress against all three, but criterion referencing is crucial for outcomes-based education, while self-referencing is obviously also vital.

Assessment criteria are designed to help assessors to develop more detailed criteria of their own for assessing and grading work. Such criteria are sometimes referred to as a rubric. They are often written as a set of ascending or descending levels along the lines of the following example:

- 5 Shows original thought and insight; creative work or a very good synthesis of available information; detailed reasoning.
- 4 Shows own thinking, has considered the issues and chosen well, well explained.
- 3 Grasped the issues and has made good choices of what to do but cannot explain well why the choices have been made.
- 2 Has complied with the instructions, but shows little insight; has prepared enough but has mostly copied without trying to re-work personally.
- 1 Has not followed the instructions well; confused about the issues and does not seem to have prepared enough.

Learners are assessed against these criteria.

The use of criterion referencing does not mean that norm referencing is ever excluded. Norm referencing always has an important part to play in establishing fairness, validity and practicability and is useful for providing a comparison with other learners. For example, in order to develop criteria for mark one has to have an idea of what learners are broadly capable of performing.

Continuous assessment

Continuous assessment can be defined as the continuous updating of assessments of the performance of a learner, or, simply, learning with frequent pauses for assessment. Its opposite is terminal assessment, which is assessment that takes place only at the end of a unit of learning. Formative assessment obviously depends to a large extent on continuous assessment. Other features of continuous assessment particularly relevant to OBE are that it helps learners to become active participants in learning and assessment, to understand (through practice) the criteria that are used for assessment instruments, to set individual targets for themselves, and to reflect on their learning - thereby experiencing raised self-esteem. It allows educators to use strategies that allow for a variety of learner needs (language, physical, psychological emotional and cultural) and to be sensitive to learners with special education needs and barriers to learning through flexible and varied assessments.

Marking and grading

As with any educational assessment, assessment for outcomes-based education requires suitable ways for feeding back the results of the assessment and for recording them effectively. Traditionally marks, percentages and grades have performed both functions. In addition, because marks can be arithmetically manipulated (added together, aggregated, and averaged) they have often served the additional purpose of providing an integrated overall statement of results for a period of learning or a qualification as a whole. This kind of manipulation, however, usually removes all transparency and additionally hides the reasons for the assessment of the performance from the learner, preventing a focus on learning something from the assessment.

Outcomes-based education requires assessment against the specified outcomes and their associated assessment criteria, so it has no need of mechanisms to aggregate results. Results should indicate whether a learner has satisfied the requirements of an outcome. It is also often very useful to the learner and, for instance, to employers to have an indication of how well these requirements have been satisfied. For the purposes of formative assessment, the quality of the feedback is the key: the more useful the feedback given, the better the learning. In a summative assessment there is less need for feedback, though the learner needs to have enough information to be able to confirm that the assessment was credible.

In the place of marks and percentages in OBE assessment, a wide variety of codes can be developed, such as those introduced for the GETC in schools,

- 4 Learner's performance *has exceeded* the requirements of the Learning Outcome for the grade.
- 3 Learner's performance *has satisfied* the requirements of the Learning Outcome for the grade.
- 2 Learner's performance *has partially satisfied* the requirements of the Learning Outcome for the grade.
- 1 Learner's performance *has not satisfied* the requirements of the Learning

Outcome for the grade.

Alternatively a range of verbal codes (such as 'very high, high, sound, limited and very limited competence) can be used.

Research has established, however, that learners benefit the most from feedback when it is given in the form of comments and annotations, without either marks or codes.

The following table gives an indication of the occasions when marks and percentages, codes and comments / notes are useful in assessment. Note that all can be used in conjunction with criterion referencing.

<i>Marks and percentages</i>	<i>Codes</i>	<i>Comments</i>
<u>Useful for:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Speed and simplicity• Adding together, averaging, aggregating BUT also easily manipulated• Comparing performance with others and the learner's own previous work• Comparing learners for employment• Easy recording• Motivating learners through competition	<u>Useful for:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Much quicker to write than comments• Comparing performance with the learner's own previous work• Cannot be manipulated• Comparing performance against Assessment Standards	<u>Useful for:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Detailed, individual feedback• Suggestions for improvement• Indicating individual progress• Cannot be manipulated• Comparing performance against Assessment Standards
<u>NOT useful for:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comparing performance against Assessment Standards• Feeding back information when added together or averaged• Making visible the reasons for the assessment of performance (or the lack of) to learners	<u>NOT useful for:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Comparisons with others• Feeding back information	<u>Not useful for:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saving time – take much longer• Comparisons with others.• Quantifying reports• Systemic and baseline assessment

Circumstances play a large part in influencing the choice of feedback and recording of information, as seen in the factors listed below:

- The number of learners and the amount of time available to the assessor.
- The complexity and the length of the assessment activity.

- The learning content or skills being assessed (e.g. mathematics vs. writing).
- How quickly feedback is given.
- How individualised the feedback is.
- The nature of the criteria / rubrics used to describe learners' performance.

6. The design of the NQF and assessment

What aspects of the design of the NQF influence assessment? The NQF has been designed to promote good principles and practice of assessment. It does so in a variety of different ways, some simple and some complex. The NQF is dynamic and many of these aspects are still developing, as more and more learners and providers of education and training become familiar with it and apply its provisions. As OBE becomes well established in the country there will be a growing consensus about the best ways in which to use it. The following are some of the micro-elements of the NQF that it is necessary to be familiar with in order to conduct assessment successfully – and to play a positive role in building the NQF in the future.

Critical and specific outcomes

A simple distinction between the critical (also referred to as cross-field) outcomes and specific outcomes is that the critical outcomes are intended for all qualifications in the country, while specific outcomes are those designed specifically for a particular unit standard or qualification. The first seven critical outcomes can easily be assessed and the other five are developmental outcomes. In many unit standards and qualifications aspects of the critical outcomes are 'built-in' and are expressed in the specific outcomes have been written for them. Where this has not been done, educators must be aware of their responsibility to use the critical outcomes in their programmes and to make sure that they assess against them in their assessment instruments.

Levels on the NQF

The NQF operates in terms of levels that classify qualifications with comparable entry and exit requirements. All unit standards and qualifications must specify the NQF level at which they have been registered and will be awarded. Each level shows increasing complexity in learning. The Further Education and Training band comprises levels 2, 3 and 4.

There are level descriptors for each level. They are statements that indicate in broad terms what is unique to each level and how it compares with other levels. When specific outcomes are written or assessment criteria developed it is crucial that they reflect what is contained in the level descriptor for the relevant level. Assessors in FET should have a practical working knowledge of the nature of the three FET levels in order to be able to assess appropriately. Such knowledge will only come through experience and agreement trialling.

Unit Standard and Exit-level outcomes-based qualifications

In both types of NQF qualifications, those based on unit standards and those based on exit-level outcomes, summative assessment determines the final award of the qualification. But the two types differ from each other in a number of other ways that influence assessment practice, as indicated in this table.

<i>Unit Standard Qualifications</i>	<i>Exit-level Outcome Qualifications</i>
Credits awarded on satisfying the requirements of each unit standard individually. Credits recorded by NLRD.	Credits only awarded at the exit level, on satisfying the requirements for each Learning Area. The total number of credits for a Learning Area awarded at one time (or none awarded if requirements not satisfied).
Flexibility for learners in choosing and compiling the unit standards that will be combined to form the qualification.	Flexibility for educators and learners in integrating specific outcomes across learning areas, subjects and tasks.
No built-in progression in performance between unit standards.	Progression within the specific outcomes term-by-term, contributing to the learner's ability to satisfy the exit-level outcomes.
No requirement to keep the records of learner achievement once a unit standard has been completed.	Requires an effective method of recording the results of assessment and learner achievement throughout the qualification and a consistent system of describing them.

The most important aspects of these are the *formative use of assessment* and *progression*. In exit-level outcome qualifications it is essential to pay particular attention to using assessment formatively, based on continuous assessment. This is more difficult to do in unit standards, particularly if they are small, but it is nonetheless imperative to foster better learning. Progression has two sides to it: learner progression, which involves the need to keep a track of each learner's progress, and *conceptual and skill progression*, where outcomes and the assessment criteria particularly must show how it is expected that learners will progress and deepen their learning and experience over time. This, too, is obviously a key issue where exit-level outcomes are concerned, but it ought not to be neglected in unit standards, particularly when there is more than one unit standard in a subject or area.

NQF credits

Qualifications are made up of credits that are defined as the value assigned to ten notional hours of learning. While credits indicate the length or 'size' of a unit standard or qualification in terms of time, they also indicate the perceived amount, importance and the level of difficulty of the particular learning relative to a qualification as a whole. A large credit allocation, for instance, denotes that the particular unit standard, module, course or subject is crucial to the purpose of the qualification, while a small allocation suggests that it is a minor component of the qualification.

Each of the three levels in FET is 120 NQF credits – the equivalent of a year of fulltime study. The FETC can also be designed using exit-level outcomes in which case it is awarded at level 4.

Learners accumulate credits towards the award of the FET on completion of each unit standard in a unit standards-based qualification. In an exit-level outcome qualification the credits are only allocated at the end, when the learner satisfies the requirements of each subject or course. These credits will be allocated to the courses or subjects *as a whole*. There is no part allocation. For example, if the subject English communication has an allocation of 20 credits, the full number of credits will be awarded when the requirements for the subject are satisfied. A learner who completes oral communication but not written communication will not be awarded any credits until all the requirements are satisfied.

Qualifications are designed in terms of a *minimum* number of credits. This provides great flexibility to add extra learning to the qualification, without having to register for a further qualification. It means that learners can add an extra course(s) or unit standard(s) to enhance the value of their FETC or certificate at NQF level 2 or 3, in which case the number of credits they will have accumulated will exceed the minimum for the qualification.

It is important *not to confuse credits with marks*. Credits are not awarded for differential performance. To illustrate: a learner who exceeds the requirements for satisfying the outcomes of a unit standard or subject is *not* awarded extra credits. (If that were to happen it would be the equivalent, for instance, of a higher education student doing well in Psychology 1 and being awarded Psychology 2 as a result.)

Internalisation of standards

The term “standards” is used in education and training in a number of different ways, as the following examples show:

1. ‘There are good standards at that college’ – meaning perhaps that assessment at the college is thorough and credible; marks are not manipulated; it is strict about passing and failing; much is expected of learners.
2. ‘Standards have dropped at that college’ – meaning perhaps it is now easier to pass or receive good results; assessment is less strict than before; there is poor moderation.
3. ‘Standards of education are dropping in the country’ - meaning perhaps that there is a perception that things are not the same as they were; content knowledge and skills have changed.
4. ‘You need to set standards’ – meaning perhaps that there must be a way of judging or measuring; learners need to be given something to aim at.

The NQF uses the term *standards* in a different (but related) way. Standards are “specific descriptions of learning achievements agreed on by all major stakeholders in the particular area of learning”. The standards are contained in the specific outcomes, assessment criteria, and purpose of the qualification or unit standard, its embedded knowledge, range statements and the accreditation process. Without credible assessment however these standards remain standards on paper only. This underlines the importance that the NQF attaches to good assessment, and the manner in which it is built in.

In order for standards to be implemented in a uniform way, they need to be internalised. Learners and assessors can only use the standards to guide them if they are familiar with them. This comes from developing an experience of appropriate assessment instruments and examples of assessed work (or specially prepared exemplars). Assessment trials provide this kind of experience for assessors. Another proposal is to develop a bank of assessment instruments that is accessible to all colleges, to help educators to internalise the standards and give them confidence to develop their own instruments.

Applied competence

The NQF defines the competence which learners are expected to demonstrate in its standards as *applied competence*. It is the ability to put into practice in a relevant context the learning outcomes acquired in obtaining a qualification. Applied competence is shown in the union of practical competence, foundational competence and reflexive competence:

<i>Practical competence</i>	<i>Foundational competence</i>	<i>Reflexive competence</i>
<p>The demonstrated ability <u>to perform a set of tasks in an authentic context</u>. A range of actions or possibilities is considered, and decisions are made about which actions to follow.</p>	<p>The demonstrated <u>understanding of what the learner is doing and why</u>. This underpins the practical competence and therefore the actions taken.</p>	<p>The demonstrated ability to integrate performance with understanding, so as to show that the learner is able to <u>adapt to changed circumstances appropriately and responsibly</u>, and to explain the reason behind and action.</p>

Assessment criteria and the instruments used to assess them should take *all three* competences into consideration.

Applied competence implies that a learner has the theoretical knowledge that enables an understanding of what is being done and why it is done, together with the skills to perform a particular task or to think in a certain way. Furthermore the learner can integrate performance with understanding, thus learning from actions and adapting to changes. This requires a variety of assessment instruments.

Integrated assessment

The requirements for the registration of qualifications on the NQF include, amongst other criteria, that a qualification must

- represent a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose or purposes, and which is intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning;
- incorporate integrated assessment appropriately to ensure that the purpose of the qualification is achieved, and such assessment shall use a range of formative and summative assessment methods such as portfolios, simulations, work-place assessments, written and oral examinations.

Integrated assessment is a process of assessment that enables learners to demonstrate specific outcomes in relevant contexts and which uses assessment both formatively and summatively. Integrated assessment also implies that the methods of assessment used should ensure that the purpose of the qualification is met across the range of standards in it.

It encourages the following:

1. Defining clearly the outcomes that are being assessed.
2. Assessing a number of related outcomes within one assessment activity / instrument.
Knowledge and skills are not discrete and assessment practices should reinforce the integrated nature of knowledge within and across unit standards, modules, courses, subjects and learning areas. An integrated approach provides opportunities for innovative teaching and learning. When outcomes are assessed across unit standards, for example, the assessment criteria can be combined to ensure that the skills, knowledge, values and attitudes of each unit standard are included in the assessment.
3. Combining a number of different assessment methods and instruments to assess an outcome/s.
Competence in a particular outcome can be demonstrated in a number of ways and hence a variety of assessment instruments and opportunities must be provided for a learner to demonstrate his / her ability.
4. Assessing for applied competence.
5. Relating assessment to the purpose of the qualification *as a whole*, and not just the intentions of the particular unit standards, modules, courses, subjects or learning areas.
Assessment within a unit standard, module, course, subject or learning area cannot be separated from the overall intention of the qualification. A mathematics module, for example, must relate to the overall purpose of the qualification of which it forms a part.
6. Relating assessment to the critical outcomes.
The critical outcomes infuse all learning and promote integrated assessment.

Recognition of Prior Learning

RPL requires assessment in order to give credit to learning that has been acquired in different ways before. The principles and practice of assessment for RPL are no different from other assessment. In other words, awarding credits to prior learning should be on the basis of the same assessment as for other learners. RPL however poses particular challenges of its own. It requires a holistic approach, that incorporates the principles of good assessment but it also reflects the need to look for the intrinsic, (and not the extrinsic) value of someone's learning within a particular context, and the ways in which some forms of knowledge are privileged. Assessment for RPL purposes needs to consider which knowledges are valued, in order to ensure that both old and new forms of discrimination are avoided and to mediate knowledge transfer across contexts.

A holistic approach to RPL should prevent assessment from becoming purely technical, dislocated from individual learner and broader context. It may be summarised briefly as follows:

- It subscribes to the principles and values of human development and lifelong learning. As such it consciously supports the social purposes of RPL in relation to access, equity and redress. Assessments are conducted in a manner that promotes dignity, confidence and educational opportunities.
- It is learner-centred and developmental in that assessments are not used to penalize candidates for what they do not know, but rather to shape and form decisions around educational planning and career-pathing.
- It gives a high priority to learner-centred support systems to assist in preparation for assessment.
- It attempts to remove any emotional, educational and cultural factors that may constitute barriers to effective learning and assessment practice.
- It recognizes the rich diversity of knowledge and learning styles that candidates bring into an assessment situation.
- It recognises that RPL should ideally be the first step into a learning programme that will build on the skills and knowledge already recognised and credited.

Moderation procedures

The NQF requires that a moderation system be put in place. In FET Colleges the GENFETQA (General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance body) has the responsibility to develop and implement the moderation system for the FETC. Other relevant ETQAs are responsible for other qualifications and unit standards.

7. Institutional assessment policies

What are the aspects of credible assessment, outcomes-based education and the NQF that need to be included in the policies of individual institutions that offer FET learning programmes? Each institution needs to develop its own policies for quality management and for assessment.

Quality management

NQF regulations require that all providers of education and training have a quality management system that includes but is not limited to:

- i. quality management policies which define that which the provider wishes to achieve;
- ii. quality management procedures which enable the provider to practise its defined quality management policies; or
- iii. review mechanisms which ensure that the quality management policies and procedures defined are applied and remain effective.

An institution is responsible for ensuring the quality of the learning experience of its learners according to the requirements of the qualifications it offers, and for keeping records and reporting the results of the assessment of its learning programmes. This should form an important part of its overall quality management policy.

In order to be accredited as a provider of education an institution has to satisfy eight quality management criteria, including one for assessment. The requirement is to “Outline policies and procedures for forms of assessments that are used and how they are managed.”

It is suggested that providers do the following:

The *assessment policies* describe the approaches that are used in its assessment practices. For example, are assessment approaches mainly examination-based? Do assessment policies recognise principles of lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning and integration of theory and practice? Are assessment policies informed by understandings of notions of failure and deficits or do they work in developmental, supportive and continuous ways? Assessment policies also outline how the processes of assessment will be managed: – by whom, how and how often. They include internal assessment, external assessment, moderation, provision of feedback to learners and maintaining records of assessment. They also include ways in which support that learners may require are identified and ways in which support is provided.

The *assessment practices* of a programme must be applied and integrated. Therefore:

- A programme should assess whether learners are able to integrate (horizontally) the knowledge and skills delivered through the different courses or modules, which make up the programme.
- A programme should also assess whether learners are able to integrate (vertically) the dimensions of applied competence: practical competence, foundational competence, and reflexive competence.
- The assessment strategy should assess the extent to which learners have the ability to apply what they have learned in authentic and changing South African contexts.
- Assessment should be ongoing and developmental.

Assessment policy and procedures

As part of the quality management system outlined above each provider institution should formulate its own assessment policy based on these guidelines, guidelines provided by Departments of Education and Labour, the Umalusi or the relevant economic sector ETQA to whom the provider it is responsible. Each institution needs to have an assessment team to facilitate the implementation of this policy. The team should have representatives from each qualification or learning programme area. To ensure a professional approach to assessment, the assessment policy should outline clearly, for example:

1. What is the institution’s approach to assessment?
2. Is the institution’s approach consistent with NQF principles?
3. How does the institution’s assessment policy incorporate principles of lifelong learning, recognition of prior learning and integration of theory and practice?
4. How are assessments conducted, by whom and how often? (See the assessment process below.)

5. What assessment codes and grades are agreed upon for use in the college?
6. The necessity for conducting agreement trials amongst educators and assessors.
7. What are the mechanisms for moderation?
8. How are records kept, accessed and secured?
9. Are policies and procedures for possible appeals in place?
10. How are learners given feedback on the ways in which they have been assessed? How does this occur? Who does it, and how often?
11. How does the institution ensure that assessments are used to identify and provide for the support and guidance learners need?
12. How are assessment results fed back into programme development?
13. How are staff trained: initially as assessors, and in continuous professional development?

Areas where in-house training needs to take place include:

- How to develop and use criteria / rubrics to assess.
- How to do agreement trials.
- How to write comments for assessment activities and reports;
- Using assessment banks.
- Achieving a common understanding of the institution's assessment policy.

The assessment process that forms part of the assessment policy is divided into the preparatory phase, the assessment and re-assessment and appeals.

1. Preparatory phase

- The assessor becomes familiar with the unit standard and/or qualification that he/she is going to assess
- The assessor plans the assessment, making decisions about the assessment methods, assessment instruments, activities, type and amount of evidence required. This is the stage at which agreement trials are very useful. Apart from the obvious advantages of sharing the planning for the assessment, these meetings will also serve as moderation meetings where assessors review each other's plans and materials and discuss issues such as assessment strategies, evaluation of past assessment materials, new approaches and strategies and the possibilities for the use of more than one assessor.
- Where the assessor is not the learning facilitator, the assessor needs to gather information about the learning programme and the readiness of learners for the assessment.
- Decide on the timing of assessment. Assessment is conducted when learners will reasonably be ready to be assessed.
- The assessor designs the assessment by selecting the appropriate methods and instruments and designing the appropriate materials on the basis of the assessor's knowledge and understanding of the unit standards/qualification, applied competence and integrated assessment.

2. The assessment

- The assessor informs the learner about the requirements for the assessment.
- The assessor reaches an agreement with the learner on how the evidence is to be collected and presented.

- The assessor explains the roles and responsibilities of the learner with regard to his/her assessment. It is important that learners understand from the outset what their roles and responsibilities are in terms of their assessments. Also, learners must understand the process of assessment and why it is done in a particular way. They will also need to know what they can expect from the assessor and what the assessor expects from them. Learners should know:
 - the kinds of assessment activities that they would be asked to perform,
 - the standard and level of performance expected,
 - the type and amount of evidence to be collected,
 - their responsibility regarding the collection of evidence.

In addition, the learner and assessor should both be satisfied that the timing of the assessment is suitable, that the opportunities identified are suitable, and the venue of the assessment is fit for purpose.

- The assessor conducts the assessment and collects the evidence. The assessor should ensure that the assessment is conducted in an appropriate and non-threatening environment.
- The assessor makes a judgement about the evidence against the criteria of the unit standard
- The assessor provides feedback to the learner with regard to the assessment decision
- The judgement of the evidence can only take place against the pre-determined assessment criteria. The assessor must guard against including superfluous information or evidence in the assessment and against ignoring the criteria due to pre-conceived ideas about the learner. It is here where the skill of the assessor will be tested. In summative assessments, learners should be clear about whether they is competent or not, and if not, should be given guidance on how to proceed further.
- The assessor completes the administration according to the quality assurance requirements.
- The assessor has to record the results of the assessment in compliance with the requirements of the provider institution, the ETQA and SAQA. The records, the assessment instruments and materials have to be stored safely in case of appeals and for moderation.
- The assessor evaluates the process. The evaluation of the process could involve: consulting learners for feedback about the assessment; reviewing the entire process with other assessors in an agreement trial; making appropriate changes which could include recommendations regarding changes to the unit standard or the qualification; using the assessment results to evaluate the learning programme and strategies used.

The following is an example of a self-audit checking tool that has been developed for use in RPL, but can be used for any assessment process. (Key: Y – Yes; N – No; U – Underdeveloped)

METHODS AND PROCESSES OF ASSESSMENT			
	Y	N	U
The purpose of the assessment and the expectations of the candidate are clarified			
Assessment plans take into account the form, quality and sources of evidence required (for example performance evidence, knowledge evidence, witness testimony, etc.)			

The form and quality of support to be provided to the candidate in preparing for the assessment are established			
The candidate is actively involved in all aspects of the assessment process to ensure that the assessment is fair and transparent. Possible barriers to fair assessments are identified and addressed.			
Assessment plans indicate a variety of appropriate assessment methods and instruments to validate diverse types of learning			
The choice of assessment methods is fit for purpose and ensures reliable and valid assessment outcomes			
An appeals process is in place and made known to the candidate			
Assessment instruments and exemplars are developed and moderated in compliance with the ETQA requirements			
Assessment reports indicate the assessment plan, the evidence presented, the assessment outcome and recommendations for further action, including additional training and/or re-assessment			
Moderation and review mechanisms are in place, including policies for verification, evaluation and quality assurance of assessments and assessment systems			

3. Re-assessment and appeals

Ideally, continuous formative assessments should minimize the need for reassessment as the assessor and the learner agree on a summative assessment only when they both feel that the learner is ready for it. Re-assessment should comply with the following conditions:

- Re-assessment should take place in the same situation or context and under the same conditions
- The same method and assessment instrument may be used, but the task and materials should be changed. However, they should be of the same complexity and level.

Monitoring and review mechanisms

Assessment has an important part to play in monitoring and reviewing the quality of institutions. This is informally so, as everyone is familiar with the idea that a provider is a “good provider” because it gets “good” results. Here assessment is used to make a judgement about the quality of the institution. But there are also formal ways in which learner assessment contributes to monitoring the health of the teaching and learning environment in FET institutions, such as the following:

- **Baseline assessment**
Baseline assessment involves establishing what the base knowledge and experience is in a group of learners at the beginning of a programme of learning. Its purpose is to find the ‘value added’ by the learning programme, through contrasting the baseline information with the summative assessment. Thus one gains a measure of the effectiveness of the learning programme. It is also useful to compare baseline tests over time, as they should show that learners are being increasingly well prepared for subsequent modules, unit standards and courses. It complements the information gathered from student course evaluations.

- **Systemic assessment**
There is an international trend towards using systemic tests to give an indication of how various sectors of education and training are performing. Tests based on international norms can, for example, be conducted at South African colleges to show both how their learners' performance compares with that in other parts of the world, and how, at the same time, it contrasts with the performance of learners at other local colleges. This provides very useful information to analyse the success of the FET college sector as a whole and to diagnose cases where institutions are under-performing relative to other FET institutions. It complements the work done by external moderators and the raw data available from throughput rates.

Registered assessors

SAQA policy is that all educators responsible for the assessment of learning outcomes leading to qualifications and standards registered on the NQF should be certificated assessors and registered constituent assessors for the specified qualifications and/or standards. Teachers, lecturers and trainers who traditionally administer assessment in addition to facilitating learning should become registered constituent assessors for specified standards and qualifications once they have met all the necessary criteria. The registration of assessors is intended to ensure that all NQF registered standards and qualifications are assessed consistently, even though the context of assessment will vary greatly according to the level and field of the qualification. A register of assessors is also a means of ensuring that there is a pool of assessors with the appropriate experience and expertise to assess according to the requirements of the standards registered on the NQF.

All registered assessors must meet the requirements of the generic assessor standard, and should be certificated by the ETDP SETA or by the relevant ETQA in agreement with the ETDP SETA in this regard. The generic assessor unit standard is Plan and Conduct Assessment of Learning ASSMT 01 (SAQA 2000d). Its specific outcomes are:

1. Plan and prepare for assessment
2. Prepare candidates for assessment
3. Conduct assessment
4. Evaluate and record evidence and make assessment judgements
5. Provide feedback to relevant parties
6. Review assessment

Assessors must have proficiency in the subject matter of the discipline or learning area in which the standards and qualifications they are responsible for falls. The assessor should have either the same qualification as the one that is being assessed, or a qualification in the same 'family' as the one being assessed. In some cases however, assessors must have the actual qualification they are assessing – this is especially true for occupations in which lives are at risk. In some cases, too, ETQAs may insist on a qualification at least one level above the one they are assessing. This is usually the practice in formal academic qualifications up to level 7. Assessors should also demonstrate both occupational and contextual expertise in their field of assessment (SAQA 2001b).

8. Key words

- Agreement trial - discussions between educators in order to reach agreement about what evidence is needed for a particular assessment and under what conditions it should take place.
- Applied competence - the ability to put into practice in the relevant context the learning outcomes acquired in obtaining a qualification.
- Assessment – a continuous planned process of gathering information on learner performance, measured against the Assessment Standards.
- Assessment criterion - a statement derived from a specific outcome which describes in broad terms what a learner is expected to achieve for assessment purposes.
- Assessor - the person who is registered by the relevant Education and Training Quality Assurance body in accordance with criteria established for this purpose by a Standards Generating Body, to measure the achievement of specified National Qualifications Framework standards and qualifications; and constituent assessor has a corresponding meaning.
- Authentic assessment - assessment that is appropriate to the purpose for which it is used and appropriate to the nature of what is being assessed. It includes more practical, realistic and challenging approaches to assessment than traditional written methods.
- Baseline assessment – initial assessment used to find out what learners already know.
- Continuous assessment – an assessment model that encourages the integration of assessment into teaching and the development of learners through ongoing feedback. It involves the continuous updating of assessments of the performance of a learner; learning with frequent pauses for assessment.
- Credible assessment – assessment with high levels of fairness, validity and reliability that is practicable.
- Credit - that value assigned by the Authority to ten (10) notional hours of learning.
- Criterion referencing - Assessment in which a learner's attainment is measured in terms of specified levels of performance, or mastery.
- Critical outcomes - those generic outcomes which inform all teaching and learning, and critical cross-field education and training outcomes has a corresponding meaning.
- Evidence - information that shows or establishes what a learner has achieved.
- Exit level outcomes - the outcomes to be achieved by a qualifying learner at the point at which he or she leaves the programme leading to a qualification.
- Fairness - treating all learners in the same way. It does not necessarily mean that all are treated equally, but that the conditions of assessment are the same for all.
- Formative assessment - assessment that is used to inform educators and learners about a learner's progress in order to improve learning by feedback. The information should be of kind and at a time that will enable the learner to grow.
- Integrated assessment - that form of assessment which permits the learner to demonstrate applied competence and which uses a range of formative and summative assessment methods.
- Learner - an individual who is participating in a learning programme with the purpose of achieving credits for standards and or qualifications.

Level descriptor - that statement describing a particular level of the levels of the National Qualifications Framework.

Moderation - the process which ensures that assessment of the outcomes described in National Qualifications Framework standards or qualifications, is fair, valid and reliable.

Norm referencing - Assessment in which the performance of a learner is compared with the performance of a group of similar learners.

Outcomes - the contextually demonstrated end-products of the learning process.

Outcomes-based Education (OBE) - A learner-centred, result-oriented approach based on the belief that all learners can learn and succeed.

Portfolio – individual file or folder of each learner’s work.

Profile - A systematic, comprehensive description and assessment of a learner’s academic and non-academic achievements, attributes and interests.

Qualification - the formal recognition of the achievement of the required number and range of credits and such other requirements at specific levels of the National Qualifications Framework as may be determined by the relevant bodies registered for such purpose by the South African Qualifications Authority.

Quality assurance - the process of ensuring that the degree of excellence specified is achieved;

Quality management system - the combination of processes used to ensure that the degree of excellence specified is achieved.

Practicability - Ensuring that assessments take into account the available financial resources, facilities, equipment and time.

Registration - the process which ensures that the person who assesses learner competence has the requisite criteria recommended by Standard Generating Bodies (SGBs) for specified NQF registered standards and/or qualifications.

Registered constituent assessor - an assessor who has met the requirements for registration as an assessor of specified NQF qualifications and/or standards and has been registered by the ETQA under whose primary focus the standards and qualifications fall.

RPL – Recognition of prior learning. Recognition of prior learning means the comparison of the previous learning and experience of a learner howsoever obtained against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for purposes of qualification of that which meets the requirements.

Range statement - a statement which specifies the scope and depth of the content required, as well as the processes with which a learner should be involved and the context in which they should occur.

Record of achievement - a record of all a learner’s achievements, qualifications and informal experience. It makes possible a cycle of review, reflection and future planning by the learner.

Reliability - The extent to which the assessment is consistent. Consistency refers to the same judgements being made in the same, or similar contexts each time a particular assessment for specified stated intentions is administered.

Self-referencing (also known as ipsative assessment) - Assessment of learners measured against their previous achievements.

Standard - registered statements of desired education and training outcomes and their associated assessment criteria.

Standards - specific descriptions of learning achievements agreed on by all major stakeholders in the particular area of learning.

Standards Generating Body - a body registered in terms of section 5(1)(a)(ii) of the Act, responsible for establishing education and training standards or qualifications, and to which specific functions relating to the establishing of national standards or qualifications have been assigned in terms of section 5(1)(b)(i) of the Act.

Sufficiency - the problem faced by educators in assessment in having to decide when there is enough evidence to show that a learner has achieved what is required (in a specific outcome or Assessment criterion, for instance).

Summative assessment - assessment for making a judgement about achievement that is used to report to others.

Terminal assessment - a measurement of attainment made at the end of a course or unit of study.

Unit standard - registered statements of desired education and training outcomes and their associated assessment criteria together with administrative and other information as specified in these regulations.

Validity - Whether an assessment measures what it is meant to measure.

Validation - the overall process by which it is determined by an ETQA whether or not an assessment is valid (has succeeded in assessing what it claims to have assessed); and leading to the acceptance or rejection of assessment results – it can include a range of validation options, for example, verification, statistical analysis, examination of the assessment instrument, sampling of evidence of applied competence, observation of processes, site visits or interviews.

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