



BEYOND THE NQF

Training providers are understandably confused by the accreditation process, writes ANDREA VINASSA. But there are some companies taking a strategic approach. **MARK ORPEN**, CEO of The Institute of People Development (IPD) is one of them

Unit standards and qualifications themselves do not dictate what can or cannot be learned & therefore National Qualification Frameworks (NQFs) around the world primarily concern themselves with learners becoming qualified against registered qualifications. Despite this logic, most learning actually has little or nothing to do with the registered qualifications themselves.

South Africa's NQF is a structured national framework of registered unit standards and qualifications against which education & training providers should pursue accreditation with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

It is true that award-bearing programs do provide a structure and an impetus to learning; often encouraging learners to excel beyond the assessment criteria requirements in a particular program context. However, workplaces undergoing retrenchments, restructuring or rapid business growth and very often in uncertain environments, do have particular industry specific competence development and learning needs, often not found in formal award-bearing programs.

The European Union, USA and the United Kingdom are currently pouring millions of Euros, Dollars and Pound-Sterling into improving education and training in South Africa aimed at meeting industry specific development needs. Such funding is fast increasing the percentage of actual education & training spend in the country, and shows clear signs of further increase.

Mark Orpen, CEO of the Institute of People Development (IPD) summarizes: "Funding procedures across most of the post-compulsory education sector gives priority to learning that is linked to registered unit standards or qualifications. The emerging implication across most industry sectors is that whether training runs or not is becoming dependant on whether it is funded or not. The need for funded awards to be approved by Sector Education & Training Authorities (SETAs) and other regulatory authorities therefore means the NQF is increasingly dictating what funded training provision is available to workplaces, outside of formal higher education and customized industry-specific learning."

US-based Heinz-Wattie Frozen Foods Plant in New Zealand recently analyzed the demands for multi-skilling

and cross-skilling that were putting pressure on the traditional systems for acquiring and recognizing skills. The organizational changes created various new demands. These included skilling for the devolution of authority and for the redesign of organizational and socio-technical systems. Such learning was not articulated in the available registered qualifications.

A similar case study conducted at Canadian-based: CLEAR Communications Ltd highlighted a set of crucial limitations in the debate around the appropriate skills for environments of rapid change, uncertainty and complexity. One such debate is that organizational learning embraces formal education, pre-employment activities, induction, on-the-job and off-the-job learning, equity and personal development, career options and other activities. The study concluded that organizational learning extended far beyond the traditional qualifications-based awards.

Mark Orpen claims: "sustainable accredited training provision in South Africa will, amongst other things need to quality assure the integration of workplace competence requirements and registered qualifications outcomes. It's about training providers adjusting their business processes first to meet changing market demands – and then program alignment to achieve the desired integrated learning outcomes. Accredited training providers should be setting the pace by creating case studies through testing how to build a better relationship between ETD provision and workplace-specific learning at their client organizations using learner-directed learning techniques."

To ensure workplace-learning processes are balanced against qualifications results, workplaces will need to set up their own assessment managements systems, design appropriate assessment instruments and guides, decide on how to moderate the assessments and then develop internal assessors to make it all happen.

In addressing the question on whether the NQF can support learner-managed learning, a likely answer may emerge when accredited provision adequately responds to rapidly changing and complex working environments with their new demands. Accredited Providers will increasingly need to ensure that their qualification offerings and learner-managed learning processes coalesce to deliver high quality learning and often times, through funded projects.