

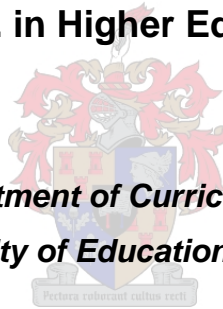
**The Impact of the National Qualifications Framework on
Higher Education with specific reference to Access,
Teaching and Learning: A Case study**

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Declaration of Originality

I, Tshepiso Matentjie, hereby declare that this dissertation is my own work, and has not been submitted for any degree at any University.

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the NQF on higher education institutions focussing specifically on access, teaching and learning. The study aimed to answer the following research questions: What was the impact of the NQF on increasing access to higher education? In particular how did the RPL process facilitate access into the University of Pretoria? Secondly, how did the NQF influence the processes of teaching and learning at this particular institution? And finally, why did the NQF have differential impacts on different faculties within the same higher education institution? To gain the end-users' perspective, a case study of the University of Pretoria was conducted. Data was gathered using interviews with ten senior members of staff at the university working in nine different departments, and student records indicating admissions through RPL into the University of Pretoria as well as relevant institutional documents.

The findings suggest that the impact of the NQF on access, teaching and learning differed across departments, resulting in a partial implementation of the policy. This was facilitated by factors inherent in the policy itself and factors inherent to the institution. The influence of external factors such as professional bodies on teaching and learning practices of end-users at the University of Pretoria posed a major challenge against NQF implementation. The motivations leading to NQF implementation are not directly linked to the NQF policy per se, although they resulted in portraying the extent of change to access, teaching and learning along a continuum that distinguished between departments that 'blindly complied', that selectively adapted and those that strategically avoided implementation of the policy.

Indications for further research are that a wider look at the impact of the NQF on access, teaching and learning in higher education is less revealing than a more focussed investigation. Future research should zoom-in on individual departments within higher education institutions to reveal the deeper and more nuanced impact of the NQF.

OPSOMMING

Die doel van hierdie studie is om die impak van die NKR (NQF) op veral toegang, onderrig en leer in hoër onderwysinstellings te ondersoek. Die studie poog om die volgende navorsingsvrae te beantwoord: Watter impak het die NKR op toenemende toegang tot hoër onderwys? Hoe fasiliteer die EVL-proses ("RPL process") toegang tot die Universiteit van Pretoria? Hoe beïnvloed die NKR die onderrig- en leerproses aan hierdie spesifieke instelling? Ten slotte, waarom het die NKR 'n differensiële invloed op verskillende fakulteite binne dieselfde hoër onderwysinstelling? Ten einde die uiteindelijke gebruiker se perspektief te bepaal, is 'n gevallestudie aan die Universiteit van Pretoria uitgevoer. Data is ingesamel uit onderhoude met tien senior personeellede wat in nege verskillende departemente werk, studenterekords aangaande toelating tot die Universiteit van Pretoria deur EVL, en ook relevante institutêre dokumente.

Die bevindinge impliseer dat die impak van die NKR op toegang, onderrig en leer van departement tot departement verskil en dat dit lei tot 'n gedeeltelike implementering van die beleid. Dié verskil is aangehelp deur faktore wat inherent is aan die beleid, maar ook faktore inherent aan die instelling. Die invloed wat eksterne faktore soos professionele liggame op die onderrig- en leerpraktyke van finale gebruikers aan die Universiteit van Pretoria het, is 'n groot struikelblok vir die implementering van die NKR. Motiverings wat lei tot die implementering van die NKR is nie noodwendig aan die NKR-beleid gekoppel nie, alhoewel dit daartoe gelei het dat die mate van verandering in toegang, onderrig en leer op 'n kontinuum aangedui is. Hierdie kontinuum onderskei tussen departemente wat die beleid "blindelings navolg", ander wat dit selektief aanpas en nog ander wat die implementering van die beleid strategies vermy.

Aanduidings vir verdere navorsing is dat 'n breë ondersoek van die NKR se impak op toegang, onderrig en leer in hoër onderwys minder beduidend is as 'n meer spesifieke ondersoek. Toekomstige navorsing behoort te fokus op individuele departemente binne hoër onderwysinstellings ten einde 'n indringender en meer genuanseerde impak van die NKR te bepaal.

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LIST OF KEY TERMS

OBE	Outcomes Based Education cf. p. 1
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning cf. p. 1
SAQA	South African Qualifications Framework cf. p. 1
NQF	National Qualifications Framework cf. p. 1
ANC	African National Congress cf. p. 4
SCQF	Scottish Qualifications Framework cf. p. 12
SCOTVEC	Scottish Vocation Education Certification cf. p. 13
SCOTCAT	Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer cf. p. 13
NZNQF	New Zealand National Qualifications Framework cf. p. 14
NZQA	New Zealand Qualifications Authority cf. p.15
VET	Vocational Education and Training cf. p. 17
C2005	Curriculum 2005 cf.p.18
SANQF	South African National Qualifications Framework cf. p. 19
APEL	Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning cf. p. 20
NPDE	National Professional Diploma in Education cf. p. 22
REQV	Relative Education Qualifications Value cf. p 23
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education cf. p. 30
CDM	Career Decision-Making cf. p. 44
SGB	Standards Generating Body cf. p. 45
CHE	Council on Higher Education cf. p. 51

CHAPTER 1

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE NQF IMPACT STUDY

1.1 Introduction

The broad purpose of this study was to research the impact of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) on the higher education system, with specific reference to access, teaching and learning. My study aimed to answer the following specific research questions: What was the impact of the NQF on increasing access to higher education? In particular how did the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process facilitate access into the University of Pretoria? Secondly, how did the NQF influence the processes of teaching and learning at this particular institution? And finally, explain the possible differential impacts that the NQF had on different faculties within the same higher education institution?

According to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act No 58 of 1995, the objectives of the National Qualifications Framework are to create an integrated national framework for learning achievements; to facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career path; enhance the quality of education and training; accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large (SAQA 1995:1). The NQF as well as the newly proposed draft Higher Education Qualifications Framework which is derived from the NQF policy and contextualised to the higher education sector aims to facilitate the integration of all higher education qualifications into the NQF and its structures for standards generation and quality assurance (DoE 2004:6). These policies are intended to improve the coherence of the higher education system and facilitate the articulation of qualifications, thereby enhancing the flexibility of the system and enabling students to move more efficiently over time from one programme to another as they pursue their academic and professional career (DoE 2004:6).

The adoption of the NQF and Outcomes Based Education (OBE) in South Africa was designed to bring the South African education system in line with the rest of the world (Kraak, 1998: 22 and Pape, 1998:2). This implies that an even more diverse profile of learners enter higher education in terms of language, culture, type and quality of prior learning and learning needs. While these policy reforms support this form of diversification in response to

globalisation forces, most of the hard work is left to the educator within the classroom to see how best they can make these students' learning experiences a success.

The policy of the NQF and other documents informing curriculum reform in higher education emphasise the development of critical cross-field outcomes¹ within qualifications (SAQA 2000: 18). Quite often academics have been resistant to develop these skills within mainstream courses, especially for learners found lacking in this regard. Frequently learners are referred to generic academic development programmes for development of these skills. Emphasis is placed on remediation and support rather than on development. As a result learners have difficulty applying the newly acquired skills within the subject context. The responsibility is placed on the students to catch-up and on the academic development practitioners to 'fix them up'.

The NQF provides avenues for identifying and developing the critical cross-field outcomes within the qualification. This implies that its implementation enables educators to now share the responsibility for academic development as well. When academic development and support is integrated and offered within mainstream subjects, transference of skills is facilitated (Van Rensburg 2000:158). Its implementation makes it possible then to move beyond simply indicating what critical cross-field outcomes the curriculum aims to develop. The curriculum should indicate what assessment methods will be employed to evaluate the development of critical cross-field outcomes as well as the assessment criteria. It is possible to indicate as well how they will be developed through practical sessions, experiential learning or workplace experience. For those learners who may fulfil the requirement for the critical cross-field outcomes (or some of the other learning outcomes), how these will be evaluated and accredited. For those learners who may be at different levels of readiness due to their educational and workplace experience, how they will be identified and what academic development programmes will be made available to them if found lacking in these skills.

1.2 Rationale

These issues are of priority to me because in my seven years of experience as an academic development practitioner at one of South Africa's higher education institutions, I learnt that a paradigm shift is required for academics to conceptualise even half of the issues raised above. In cases where the shift has occurred, problems with limited resources and time take

¹ Critical cross-field outcomes include generic skills such as numeracy, critical thinking, academic writing, problem solving and computer literacy; they are considered to be inseparable from the learning context within which they are developed (Lave & Wenger 1991 in Kraak 1998:36; Nuttall & Goldstein in SAQA 2000a:20)

priority and stall the process of change. This research would enable me to determine the extent to which the NQF has facilitated this paradigm shift, if at all, beyond the paper exercise as it was initially presented. It would also help generate ideas that could be used as leverage to remove the inertia that has characterised the field of academic development.

The NQF provides a case in time on which the dynamics of implementing policy reforms can be observed. As a scholar I hope the process of inquiry and the findings of this study will challenge practitioners and policy makers alike to start thinking differently about educational change, and for the government to recognise administrative and bureaucratic practices that feed the inertia that stall change.

The significance of this study is that it gives end-user perspectives in implementing the NQF policy. Given the draft Higher Education Qualification Framework that would also require implementation in future, this study aims to add empirical data to our understanding of translating policy into practice and develops a conceptual framework to explain the gap between policy and practice. Such an understanding could help facilitate the process of developing the Higher Education Qualification Framework into a policy that avoids the pitfalls of the NQF and take into cognisance the experiences of end-users to optimise the positive impact of the Higher Education Qualification Framework.

1.3 The literary context for the study

According to Young (2003), the idea of defining qualification in terms of outcomes derives from occupational psychology in the United States. These earlier attempts were focused on measuring teacher competence. Recent developments that lead to the idea of national qualifications frameworks were inspired by work done in Scotland in 1984 on the 16+ Action Plan and the rest of the United Kingdom in 1986. These developments focused on vocational qualifications and shared a common definition of qualifications in terms of outcomes (2003:1). In his analysis of the South African National Qualifications Framework, Michael Young (2003) argues that the initial goals of the NQF distinguishes it as strong when compared to national qualification frameworks from other countries (see section 2.4).

SAQA, in its attempt to review its progress regarding the implementation of the NQF, conducted numerous studies (DoE, 2002:3). These studies focused on addressing and questioning structural and organisational issues in the NQF and SAQA; Secondly, they did not constitute an empirical study evaluating the implementation of the NQF focusing

specifically on access, teaching and learning. Finally, even though part of the brief for these studies was to “address the concerns of key social partners and stakeholders ...” (DoE 2002:3) the findings and recommendations were silent on this issue. This suggested that one of the major stakeholders, in particular higher education institutions, their experiences including those of ordinary academics charged with the responsibility of implementing the NQF, was not fully explored and documented.

Another study by Ogude (2001) described how higher education institutions responded to the SAQA regulations in terms of restructuring their curriculum. The study focused on four areas; institutional policies and frameworks; progress on interim registration; processes within faculties of Science and Humanities and the approach adopted by technikons. The author distinguishes between initiatives that were institutionally driven, spearheaded from above by management, and those that were faculty driven. The findings in this area indicated that the institutional responses in implementing the policy requirements differed according to their position in curriculum development when the policy reviews were first introduced. Some embarked on institution-wide initiatives, which had begun before the NQF policy requirements were imposed, while some were reacting to the policy requirements. While the findings of this study highlight the experiences of the institutions in their process of implementing policy, the study did not however test the extent to which what institutions said in the interviews was reflected in practice. The study also fell short of providing a theoretical analysis that would explain the discrepancy between what policy had intended to happen, and what end-users experienced in the process of implementing the policy. Michael Young (2000) attempts to provide an explanation about this discrepancy. In his analysis of the South African National Qualifications Framework, he argued that the NQF as part of the education policy of the newly elected African National Congress (ANC) -led government represented mainly utopian ideals that were completely removed from the needs and context of South Africa. The NQF did not translate the policy ideals into practical strategies of implementation. It had failed in delivery and achieving meaningful change amongst the disenfranchised members of our society (ibid). The literature suggests that there is a gap between policy and practice, more specifically that what the National Qualifications Framework initially set out to do differs in comparison to what end-users did in practice, and this forms the basis on which the research problem to this study was formulated.

1.4 Research Problem

An initial survey of the NQF literature suggested that the governmental review spent much time on the organization and structures of the South African Qualifications Authority and the NQF with relatively little empirical evidence on the impact of these reforms in the day-to-day lives of higher education institutions. This study was designed to do exactly that i.e., to gain the perspective of the end-user by focusing on the experiences of a higher education institution in implementing the NQF. Conducting the study adds empirical data to our understanding of translating policies into practice. The study also serves to develop a conceptual framework to highlight and provide an understanding about the complexities that challenge, promote and hinder successful policy implementation in education. The analytical framework of policy positioning and theory of action and theory in use is put forward as a way to explain the discrepancy between what the NQF initially intended to do in policy terms and what higher education institutions, in particular the University of Pretoria did in practice.

1.5 Conceptual Framework

In this study I used two conceptual frameworks as a basis for my analysis of the data. The first I call *policy positioning* and draws on the work of Michael Young (2000) in which he explains the failure of South African educational policy reform in general, and the NQF in particular. Policy positioning formulates a macro understanding of what motivates policy makers to adopt a particular stance when formulating policies. It highlights the hidden political agenda that sometimes, within the educational context, goes contrary to what is best for educational practice. Macro in this aspect reflects what occurs at legislative and government level when policies are developed, the political agenda being pushed by the government of the day, and how they interpret change and progress. However the discrepancy between policy and practice does not exist at a macro level only, it also occurs between policy developers and end-users as policy implementers.

The second part of my conceptual framework draws on the work of Argyris and Schön (1974) looking at *theories of action* and *theories in use*. Their work seeks to explain the discrepancy between what policy in theoretical terms aims to do and the assumptions underpinning its formulation about what will require its successful implementation as compared to what happens in practice as a policy is actually implemented, and what implementers perceive to be feasible within their contexts.

As mentioned already these two theories serve to explain the discrepancy between what the NQF initially intended to do in policy terms and what higher education institutions, in particular the University of Pretoria did in practice.

1.6 Methodology

In order to achieve this a case study of the University of Pretoria was conducted to obtain the end-users' perspective on their experiences of implementing the NQF and how it impacted on how they taught, how they assessed learning, and how learners learnt. I also consulted statistical data indicating how RPL was used as an access mechanism into the University of Pretoria as well as interviewed academics teaching RPL students to determine the type of learning support these learners required. In short my main data sources were policy documents and interviews.

The type of study undertaken here can be described as interpretivist research. The individual respondents' experiences and the meanings they assigned to their experience with implementing the NQF form the unit of analysis. Thus the aim of this study was to understand the subjective world of the end-users. Interpretivist research is concerned with how individuals interpret the world around them. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated interpretivist research focuses on getting "inside" the person, to understand from within.

Analysis of policy documents about the NQF served as baseline data to determine the initial policy goals of the NQF. Through the use of semi-structured interviews with key informants, descriptions of the experiences as well as explanations behind the experiences of the end-users were captured. According to Cohen Manion and Morrison (2000:146) interviews allow the gathering of facts, accessing beliefs about facts, identifying feelings and motives, commenting on the standards of actions [i.e. what could be done about situations], present or previous behaviour and eliciting reasons and explanations from the respondents. The key participants included senior managers at the University of Pretoria who were involved at an institutional level for driving the initial implementation of the NQF within the institution. They provided an indication of how the university interpreted the policy goals of the NQF, and would indicate any discrepancies between what the policy intended, and what the institution understood.

To assess institutional practice in terms of how end-users implemented the policy goals of the NQF, academics who were involved in the actual teaching and assessment of learners were interviewed, these included those with RPL learners in their classes and those without. This would help determine the differential impact of the NQF on the various faculties at the University of Pretoria, showing whether it facilitated any real change in teaching, learning and access.

1.7 Data Analysis

Data gathered through interviews were transcribed using a data transcriber. Both quantitative and qualitative data were analysed. The qualitative data analysis was done on three levels. The first identified the emerging themes from the literature on the NQF. This was used to develop the first level of codes, which were used to conduct the first level of analysis. Where additional themes were identified, these were included in the first level. The second level of analysis involved combining themes that are related to form what Cohen et al. (2000:148) call a domain analysis. The third level involved making linkages between the domains and establishing relationships between them. Speculative inferences were also made to determine the relationships between the domains. Summaries of each domain were made, then clustered according to those that collaborated with each other and those that indicated discrepancies. This process involved testing the conceptual analysis on policy positioning, and theories of action and theories in use (see 1.5). The other component involved generating alternative explanations to the patterns of the themes.

Data on student admissions were compiled to describe institutional patterns on RPL admissions across different years, as well as to provide a basis for comparisons amongst faculties.

1.8 Validity

The use of institutional documents drawn from student records and reports of meetings capturing the institution's handling of the implementation of the NQF combined with interview data from respondents facilitated triangulation as it enabled the use of multiple sources of data in the study. This ensured that what was tabled in meetings as institutional strategies to respond to the NQF goals could be cross-checked against what ordinary academics were doing on the ground thus enhancing the validity of the findings. Additional validation

strategies were done through auditing* and peer-debriefing processes. Through these processes a trail of evidence collected through the research process as well as copies of interview transcripts were reviewed and discussed with senior researchers for further validation purposes.

1.9 Limitations of the research

In the methodology I had intended to track how the RPL learners were progressing within the different faculties by looking at their throughput and retention rates. This would have provided verification of how the university and staff were responding to meeting the needs of RPL learners. Lack of data in this regard made such verification not possible implying that the theories in use of academics in this area could not be tested in practice.

I had not included staff from the lower rankings of the university structure, further research could include a more diverse profile of respondents to ensure the authenticity of the data to such that it represents all the viewpoints among members of the research setting.

1.10 Thesis Structure

This chapter provides a background to the study as well as a theoretical argument and rationale for the study.

Chapter 2 reviews literature on the NQF in different contexts, drawing particularly from Germany, Scotland, New Zealand, England, ending with the South African case. The chapter mainly highlights what the NQF claimed to do in policy terms. It also documents what is known about its effects within education in these countries. The chapter also elaborates on the conceptual argument introduced in chapter 1. It provides the analytical framework of policy positioning and theory of action and theory in use as a way to explain the discrepancy between what the NQF initially intended to do in policy terms and what higher education institutions did in practice.

Chapter 3 provides a more detailed account of the methodology and methods used in the study; my original plans and how they were changed in the field.

* where a trail of evidence collected through the research process is kept

Chapter 4 presents an analysis and discussion of the data culled from documents and data resident in the segments of the transcripts. The analysis is given in terms of what the impact on access, teaching and learning has been. Also included are my reflections as a student and staff member in the Faculty of Education at the University of Pretoria.

Chapter 5 links the theoretical framework with the findings from the data. It aims to show how policy positioning explains how the policy goals of the NQF were formulated. It also explains how the University of Pretoria interpreted and internalised this position in the strategy that they chose to follow in the implementation of the NQF within their institution. The theory of action/theory in use is used to explain the gap between policy and practice at two levels. Firstly the gap between what policy developers intended and what University of Pretoria management understood in their institutional response. Secondly the discrepancy between what the UP management understood and what UP academic staff on the ground did in practice. The chapter also provides conclusions and implications for further research as well as limitations of the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The *broad purpose* of this Chapter is to present the intellectual origins and contestations that surround national qualifications frameworks as a distinctive form of policy intervention, and to then describe a two-pronged theoretical framework for making sense of the discrepancy or distance between policy ideals and practical outcomes in the context of such frameworks. The *specific objectives* pursued within this context are the following:

1. To outline the various expressions of national qualifications frameworks in various national education and training systems;
2. To identify the principal claims and assumptions governing each of these frameworks in the different contexts;
3. To assess the weaknesses and limitations of each of these frameworks in relation to the key issues in this study i.e., access; teaching, learning and assessment;
4. To justify this particular research as a response to the limitations of the existing literature with respect to the policy (i.e. what the NQF as policy expects) and practice (i.e. what practitioners in institutional contexts actually do);
5. To describe the one major obstacle to policy implementation i.e., how education institutions traditionally do their academic work in South African contexts and what this means for the NQF; and
6. To offer a broad explanatory framework that accounts for the distance between policy and practice.

According to Young (2003:1), the intrinsic logic of National Qualifications Frameworks are based on a need to improve flexibility of education and training systems; to widen participation and enhance the mobility of learners and potential learners within the education system (Young 2003:11). Countries that have implemented NQF's all share in this logic, and they are based on the following assumptions; they describe all qualifications in terms of a single set of criteria. The different levels of school, further education and higher education use the criteria to accredit learning irrespective of

whether it is formal, informal or non-formal; they rank all qualifications along a single hierarchy with level descriptors that apply to all types of accredited learning and qualifications; they describe and assess all qualifications in terms of learning outcomes that are independent of the site of learning or form of instruction; they divide qualifications into unit standards which can be located on levels using the same level descriptors and having defined notional learning hours to determine the credit rating; they aim to provide bench-marks to assess and accredit all forms of learning; and finally they are based on meritocracy where it is believed only the learner's own performance could inhibit his/her from progressing (Young 2003:5,6).

Michael Young (2003:7,8) distinguishes between strong and weak NQF's referring to the different degrees of prescription and adherence to the six assumptions discussed above. In this regard, the New Zealand and South African NQF's are considered strong, while the frameworks found in Scotland, Ireland and Australia are considered weak. He also distinguishes between comprehensive and partial NQF's referring to their scope. Comprehensive frameworks cover all qualifications – as in the case of South Africa and New Zealand, while partial frameworks apply to only some types of qualification like vocational qualifications as in Germany and Scotland.

2.2 How National Qualifications Frameworks are expressed in various contexts

2.2.1 The case of the German NQF

The literature on NQF's has largely focused on the origins and pitfalls of the implementation processes in the various countries. In the case of Germany, Hubert Ertl (2002) discusses the concept of modularization in vocational education and training as well as the debates around it in Germany. Modularisation was regarded as one of the most promising approaches to achieve the goals of reforming the German vocational education and training system. The goals for reform were for the system to be more flexible in responding to the changing work environment and to offer more individualized training pathways in response to varying personal potentials of trainees (Ertl 2002:54). It is the conception of modularisation and the debates around it that have ultimately led to advocacy for the adoption of a National Qualifications Framework along similar lines to other European countries such as Scotland and the UK.

Although Ertl's paper is two years old suggesting that it might not reflect the current state of affairs in German vocational education and training, its inclusion in this review is essential for a number of reasons. Firstly it highlights the influence of globalisation on education reform as mentioned earlier in the discussion by Michael Young (2003). Secondly it highlights the general thinking informing education reform in Germany, and the issues that make adoption of the NQF framework to vocational education and training appealing in that country and in others with similar circumstances like South Africa. Thirdly it highlights that even in its conception, the issue of practical implementation of the NQF does not form part of the discourse when educational policy reform issues are discussed. Ertl does not draw on empirical evidence that this strategy is necessarily suitable or the best for Germany. He does not include in the discussion Asian countries, which serve as exemplars for alternative models, and could weaken the desirability of the European models of the NQF. He neglects to explore fully factors within the existing German vocational and training system that could render the adoption of the NQF unsuccessful. His recommendations fail to explore the possible impact of adopting this framework in Germany. Instead he emphasizes the need for sameness with other progressive European countries. It neglects to indicate how the recommended NQF will build on the existing strengths of the current German vocational education and training system. This issue has already been mentioned by Michael Young (see 2.1), however Ertl's paper highlights this even further.

2.2.2 The case of the Scottish Qualifications Framework

The Scottish NQF (SCQF) is built on principles similar to those of the South African NQF. It aims to increase access into education and training, ensure lifelong learning and serve to improve skills of the Scottish workforce. The SCQF has restructured all qualifications in Scotland implying that the volume of learning for all qualifications can be measured, assigned to one of the 12 levels of the Framework, and assessment for the qualification can be quality assured (Raffe 2003:4). Unlike the South African NQF, the SCQF does not involve the large-scale development of new qualifications, or the related standards-setting processing activities. Instead the SCQF builds on the existing qualification frameworks, and only seeks to adapt them (Raffe 2003:6).

Raffe (2003) records that the development of the SCQF has taken over twenty years to develop. This process began with the 16-plus Action Plan in 1984 which reformed the

curriculum in Further Education colleges and multi-purpose institutions which were providing general and vocational programmes. The framework replaced non-advanced vocational education with an outcomes based national education system. Qualifications were restructured into portable modules of notionally 40 hours length, with internal criterion-referenced assessment leading to certificates awarded by the Scottish Vocational Education Council or SCOTVEC (Raffe 2003:7). The main criticism against the SCQF was that it provided a fragmented and incoherent curriculum, making it difficult to allow for progression between modules in further education and qualifications in higher education. This was mainly due to the differences in pedagogy and assessment. Raffe notes that these problems were addressed in 1999, when the modules were incorporated as National Units into the National Qualifications introduced by Higher Still (ibid).

The reform of education in Scotland included the adoption of Scottish Vocational Qualifications in 1990. These were found to be problematic in that they exacerbated the separation of work-based and institution-based learning. In 1989 the Higher National Certificates and Higher National Diplomas were reformed to create a single, unit based national framework. These constituted the main higher education qualifications below degree level delivered by the Further Education sector. This process of unification allowed better articulation between higher national awards and university degree programmes, and thus facilitated progression into higher education (ibid). In 1991 the Scottish Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SCOTCAT) Scheme was formally established as the national credit framework for higher education. It was based on credits and levels, and was recognized by all Scottish higher education institutions by 1992.

The more recent developments in educational reform in Scotland are with regard to Higher Still (Raffe 2003: 8). It unified the system by incorporating school and college-based provision, higher education and SCOTVEC modules and both academic and vocational subjects below higher education level. It is regarded as more prescriptive as it offers a common architecture of units for all programmes. It also includes common criteria for curriculum and assessment. With the national qualifications structured along seven levels, they provide a unified framework that allows access and flexible opportunities for progression within the mainstream education system. Raffe notes that the main source of tension with Higher Still has been with its prescriptive design regarding assessment. Its implementation has also been slower in the Further Education sector whose concerns

include the constraints on flexible delivery and the acceptability of the new provision to employers (Raffe 2003:8).

The Scottish Qualification Framework started in the mid 1990's and provides a wider framework incorporating work already done through Higher Still and the SCOTCAT scheme. Spearheaded by the higher education sector, the SCQF integrates general and vocational curricula; it reduces the differences between educational tracks and provides seamless opportunities for access and progression in lifelong learning (Raffe 2003:17). Through recognition of prior learning, it provides access and opportunity to receive credits for learning already achieved.

Raffe (2003) highlights three dangers with regards to the framework. Firstly, that the framework could encourage certification instead of promoting learning. Implying that learning such as community-based learning that does not lead to qualifications might be devalued. Secondly the framework could encourage progression into higher education and devalue learning opportunities that do not lead to higher education qualification. Thirdly the SCQF could end up being appropriated for purposes for which it was not designed such as using it as an instrument of regulation, funding and control.

2.2.3 The Case of the New Zealand NQF

The New Zealand NQF (NZNQF) aimed to embrace academic and vocational qualifications similarly to South Africa through unit standards. The reforms began in the late 1980's and the reasons driving educational reform and the consequent adoption of NQF in New Zealand were the need to raise the level of skills of current and future employees and to develop new industries to support economic growth. The focus was also on making providers of tertiary education more accountable. It was aimed at increasing the participation and achievement of Maori and Pacific Island students in higher education. There was also different bodies and inconsistent procedures that were responsible for controlling the diverse range of qualifications that were offered. Thus the goal was also to streamline educational offerings and have a unitary framework for vocational, secondary school and degree level qualifications.

The initial conception of the NZNQF was to develop a national register of qualifications with specified criteria, as well as a classification system indicating levels of qualifications

that increased with complexity of skill and knowledge from certificates, diplomas, degrees to post-graduate degrees. The register would also have credits specified for particular components of qualifications, the standards for learning outcomes as well as a list of credits to be maintained for lifelong learners. The NQF was also meant to provide a mechanism for registration and accreditation of providers. This framework was aimed to embrace all national qualifications within a single, comprehensive unitary framework based on unit standards.

Lessons learnt from the New Zealand experience serve to highlight assumptions made regarding the NQF, which led to problems regarding its successful implementation. Firstly its implementation disregarded issues around power and autonomy. The NQF made it possible for other types of service providers to offer degrees – which is largely the core business of higher education institutions (Phillips 2003:11). Therefore the first mistake was to undermine the territory and power of higher education institutions and the threat posed by the NQF to the autonomy and core business of higher education institutions in this regard.

Secondly, the NQF gave the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) powers to quality assure programmes offered by universities, a role previously undertaken by the universities themselves. The NZQA was established to facilitate the implementation of the NQF, but also to facilitate course approval and accreditation. As a body created by government decree this meant that it would be vulnerable to political changes (Phillips 2003:6). In this sense then it meant that government would have a role in quality assuring programmes offered by universities and this role could be (ab)used to further political goals – thus rendering universities open to government and political pressure leading to possible censorship.

Thirdly its inception was based on the assumption that the incentives for universities to be put on the NQF register would be regarded as lucrative above others. It disregarded the fact that higher education institutions already had professional and international bodies already driving their own curriculum reform and were already quality assuring and accrediting their programmes. Accreditation and recognition by these professional bodies carried more weight than a locally based national qualifications framework. Fourthly, as in South Africa, the unit standard as a measure of learning achieved and evidence of skills

acquired was also questioned. This criticism focused on the validity of using unit standards as a measure of learning achieved for some forms of learning. Finally the formulation of the NQF policy did not take into consideration the amount of resources that would be required to achieve its successful implementation. Phillips notes that there was criticism regarding the costs it demanded for implementation.

2.2.4 The Case of the Australian NQF

Australian education and training is characterised by fragmentation and autonomy that is a result of the federal system of government in that country. Its colonial history has enabled the establishment of universities within the six states and the federal system has facilitated independence and autonomy between these universities. According to Keating (2003), the history of these universities and the independence enjoyed by each university within its independent state has meant that very little collaboration in terms of curriculum development and quality assurance has occurred across institutions over time, thus making a unitary national qualifications framework difficult to establish.

The other force that has made the implementation of the NQF problematic is the secondary schooling system in that country. Schools in Australia have a powerful influence on who goes through into higher education. This is as a result of elite non-governmental schools determining access into secondary education on the basis of students' ability to pay fees, which are not affordable to the majority of people in Australia, as well as student's academic performance. In turn, scaled scores derived from upper secondary certificate subject grades determine access into university. The result is that students attending elite academic schools push the performance margin for entry into university higher. The elite schools retain competitive advantage as feeder schools for students entering university. This makes entry into university for the majority of learners who cannot perform or afford fees at the same level in secondary school difficult.

Funding to secondary schools and universities in Australia from the federal government is limited to government schools, they receive 90% of its funding. The remaining secondary schools are private, and receive only 30% of funding from the federal government, with universities receiving only 1% (Keating 2003:5). Invariably this means that the Federal Government, which is responsible for instituting the NQF, has limited influence on what occurs in the majority of schools and the universities in Australia, and financially these

institutions are not dependent and therefore not accountable to it. This had led to them resisting changes instituted by the Federal Government such as the NQF, and in turn the Federal Government having little power to enforce the NQF policy on the education system.

The other factor that has made it difficult for the Australian NQF to have a framework that is common for education and training has to do with the history of vocational education and training as a separate sector from the rest of the education sector. Keating (2003:4) highlights that the incorporation of the technical colleges into Technical and Further Education was instituted through intervention by the Federal Government in the late 1980s. This component receives 60% of funding from the federal government (Keating 2003:4). At present the development of training packages offered through the sector, the procedures for registration, auditing of training providers as well as the issuing of Vocational Education and Training (VET) awards is facilitated by the Australian National Training Authority. The result is that this sector is separated from the other sectors due to its competency-based construct, its constituency base which is industry led and federalism. Its constituency have had little interest in linking VET and its awards with the other education sector and their awards. The result is that the implementation of the NQF and its attempt to unify the teaching and education sector is further hampered by this separation.

2.3 The case of the South African NQF

South Africa is distinguished as having a strong framework in that it is prescriptive and closely adheres to all the six assumptions outlined earlier in discussion by Michael Young (2003). It is also comprehensive since all the qualifications are structured according to the framework (see 2.1).

Young and Kraak (2000:1) state that educational policy reform in South Africa is characterised by government emphasis on the economic role of education and its role in human resource development, and counter-arguments aimed at balancing the economic and human capital approach to education with alternative approaches; increased pressure for improved performance; movement towards greater accountability in higher education; the search for measurable educational outcomes; and critique on educational

policy options. All these factors are observed in other countries throughout the world to varying degrees in both developing and developed countries.

According to Young and Kraak (2000: 2) the South African situation is unique in two ways, firstly, in the sense that post-1994, the newly elected democratic government was under intense pressure to facilitate access to education to the majority of people who were predominantly educated up to elementary education, and secondly, the link between those involved in policy research and theory and policy makers, practitioners and others involved in implementation is closer than what is found in most developed countries

The 1994-1999 period was characterized by numerous policies for a new system of education and training, examples include the formulation of the NQF, outcomes based education and Curriculum 2005 (C2005) policies. According to Chisholm (2003:3) this process of policy reformulation from an apartheid to a democratic emphasis was driven by the social alliance between business and labour and excluded role players in the education sector. She highlights the following as the major critique against the implementation of the NQF, OBE and C2005:

- A skewed curriculum structure and design;
- Lack of alignment between curriculum and assessment policy;
- Inadequate orientation, training and development of teachers;
- Learning support materials that are variable in quality, often unavailable and not sufficiently used in classrooms;
- Policy overload and limited transfer of learning into classrooms;
- Shortages of personnel and resources to implement and support C2005;
- Inadequate recognition of curriculum as the core business of education departments (Chisholm 2003: 3-4).

In short, these policies were considered utopian and provided little direction as to their implementation (Young and Kraak 2000: 3-4). They were also considered ambitious in that they did not seem to be feasible. They dealt with very complex and radical changes to an education system characterized by unequal distribution of resources and low levels of skills and capacity. The policies completely disregarded the social reality related to

implementing them in practice; in particular the required resources, capacity and expertise to implement them were absent (Young and Kraak 2000: 4).

As a result the post-1999 period was characterized by a lot of debate and criticism about the feasibility of the policy goals and there was growing pressure to review them. The culmination of the debates was the Round-table discussions sponsored by the Human Science Research Council that were initiated in September 2000. These discussions led to the revision of the C2005, the restructuring of higher education and the SAQA and NQF and it included stakeholders from the education sector (Young and Kraak 2000: 3).

Cosser (2000) reviews the progress achieved by SAQA in overseeing the implementation of the NQF. It provides a critique of the NQF implementation to date, he also proposes certain NQF implementation adjustments for the future.

The SAQA evaluation reviewing the implementation period from November 1997 to April 2001 focused on three deliverables; standards setting, quality assurance and information management (Cosser 2000:154 see also DoE 2002 and DoE 2003). The evaluation focused mainly on structural progress made in the implementation of the NQF in that period. Cosser (2000:156) argues that this evaluation places emphasis on inclusivity and structural issues at the expense of striving for quality. He argues for instance that the registration of 41 new qualifications and 679 new unit standards does not imply that all those unit standards and qualifications are of high quality. He argues that the success of the NQF should be measured by the extent of the quality of education and training provision, and by how information on the provision of learning is fed back into the redesign of standards and the rearticulation of programmes leading to those standards (Cosser 2000:154).

Cosser's (ibid.) paper does not explore the impact of the NQF on individual higher education institutions and it highlights the gap in research which my study aims to address. My research will focus particularly on whether and how NQF implementation has improved the quality of programmes through the rearticulation process. My study also aims to determine if the NQF has in fact succeeded in improving the quality and delivery of education and training. Studies investigating the impact of the South African National Qualifications Framework (SANQF) on end-users have focussed largely on researching

Recognition of Prior Learning as practiced in higher education institutions. The next section reviews these studies in order to show the differences in how end users interpreted the policy of the NQF through their implementation of RPL, as well as the type of challenges that have led to these differences in interpretation and how they have served to further widen the gap between policy and practice.

2.3.1 Focusing on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

According to SAQA regulations, RPL is supposed to be a tool that enables the learners to achieve a qualification in whole or in part based on their prior learning, all be it formal, non-formal or informal (SAQA 1997:16). Breier (2001) observed that most higher education institutions have attempted to implement RPL by having RPL policies and procedures in place. According to Breier, the implementation of RPL has largely focused on using it as an access mechanism only (2001). She argues that this has been done in two ways; firstly, where there are clear outcomes that a learner must meet, in this case RPL is used as a challenge test implying that a pass on the test leads to exemption from particular components of a course. The second is where a portfolio is used for the learner to reflect on their experience and how it relates to formal curricula, prior to admission. In this case the portfolios are used to determine whether the learner's prior experience is similar to that associated with the formal learning outcomes including generic outcomes; or through the development of a portfolio the learners is granted general credit because they have demonstrated that they have the kind of potential necessary to succeed in higher education study (Breier 2001).

Breier's (ibid.) analysis of RPL is also reflected in Trowler's (1996) distinction between the credit exchange and developmental model to Assessment of Prior Experiential Learning (APEL). Borrowing from Butterworth (1992 in Trowler 1996), he highlights that the credit exchange model regards the student as already possessing knowledge and skills, and the goal of APEL is to accredit these in order to give it value through assessment. The competencies or outcomes of a qualification are put along a continuum and used as a basis against which the learners skills and knowledge is judged.

Trowler (1996:3) posits that this method is possible where the skills and knowledge are quantifiable and can be easily demonstratable, as is the case with the unit standards advocated by the South African NQF. In which case a challenge test can be given to the

learners for them to demonstrate their competence, or through a portfolio of evidence the learner can demonstrate the acquisition of those skills. In this case the learner's personal competencies are exchanged for academic credits, which in turn can allow the learner admission into a programme, exempting them from doing a part of a qualification.

Trowler (1996) argues that this model is derived from the behaviourist approach to knowledge and skills acquisition. It is based on the assumption that knowledge and skills are objectively measurable, aggregative, context-independent and imperishable. This means that knowledge and skills exist within the learner and can be quantified irrespective of when they were acquired or the context in which they were acquired, and that knowledge and skills are transferable. He also argues that this model is market-oriented because it emphasizes accrediting learning that is useful to the economy and hence to the marketability of the owner.

While this is so, Breier (2001) holds that higher education institutions have done very little to use RPL to enable learners to achieve credits or advanced standing in order for them to earn a whole or part of a qualification. They have neglected to pay real attention to whether there is post-entry recognition of prior learning, i.e. accommodating the informal experience into the methods of teaching, assessment and curriculum design and build upon it in the process of instruction.

Trowler (1996) compares the developmental model to APEL, highlighting that it is deemed as higher or more advanced than the credit exchange model. Here once the learner has documented their prior experience, they are required to reflect upon it, make generalisations about it and then determine new ways in which the experience can be applied to similar future situations. The goal is for the learner to think critically about his or her own experience and how it has contributed to their personal development, and how it can lead to enhancement of their professional expertise. The reflective component is what distinguishes this model from the credit exchange model. The developmental model views knowledge as constructed by the individual. Once the learner has begun thinking about experience in this way, this form of learning is regarded as similar to any form of learning in higher education. Trowler (1996) insists that these two models constitute opposite ends of a continuum, and both are important to accreditation of prior experiential learning in the higher education sector. He also argues that each model can

be most applicable to particular types of programmes where experience can be easily demonstrated against required skills e.g. a field such as statistics has clearly identifiable technical skills than pedagogics in education .

Both the Trowler (1996) and Breier (2001) studies highlight the fact that very little research in higher education has focused on using RPL for purposes other than the provision of access into higher education. Moreover, the process of orientating and exposing RPL learners to other forms of formal discourse are not adequately researched. Their prior experience and limited schooling pose a challenge and a potential barrier for them to accommodate new forms of learning. They also have limited understanding of when their prior experience is applicable in formal learning and the strategies necessary to determine how to use their prior experience in particular orientations and in general orientations. Breier (2001) argues that for adult learners, this requires a shift from a collective to an individual identity and an ability to critically reflect on their own experience. It also demands that they access the required language and literacy skills specific to that particular discipline. For lecturers, this requires recognizing segments of horizontal discourses to be able to access and engage learners within their frame of reference and facilitate their understanding of the formal discourse using generalizing and application strategies. Breier (2001) mentions that for this to be possible, it requires a unique ability in lecturers to combine generalist and specialist skills. Her argument is that if these aspects of RPL are not considered then learners are put at a disadvantage and will not experience “access for success”.

Breier's (ibid.) study provides motivation to look at the implementation of the NQF beyond provision of access through RPL. By highlighting some of the challenges that her colleagues and their learners experienced after admission through RPL, her study emphasizes the need to look beyond access into how RPL has impacted on curriculum development, provision of learning support, and how this has changed how academics teach and how learners learn. It also provides a case on which to investigate how various institutions have implemented RPL – issues that this study hopes to address.

Moll and Welch (2004) explore the problem of implementing RPL within the context of teacher education. The paper is part of on-going work looking at the emerging practices of RPL in the National Professional Diploma in Education (NPDE). RPL is used in this

programme to allow alternative access to teachers who hold qualifications classified as Relative Education Qualification Value (REQV) 12 or lower for advanced training in teacher education. This qualification is pitched at NQF level 5 and is a 240 credit qualification. Through RPL it is possible for a learner to be credited a maximum of 120 credits either through exemption or assessment. Through the project, they determined the RPL assessment methods to include classroom observation schedules, portfolios and challenge tests.

Although the paper by Moll and Welch (2004) does not really explain the discrepancies between policy and practice in terms of theories of action and theories in use, their discussions of the literature on RPL implementation and the findings from the study indicate what policy intended, what happened in practice and what caused the discrepancy. They even go further to discuss the implications about discrepancy between policy and practice in the implementation of the NQF. In general their findings suggest that the official policy positions emerging from the government and the practical realities of implementation are pulling in contradictory directions (Moll and Welch 2004:179). More specifically, their findings can be described in the following table

Table 2.1 Discrepancies between RPL policy and practice

What the policy intended – theory of action	What actually happened in practice – theory in use
Using RPL to give individuals a chance to get credit on the basis of what they already know and can do. This means that access is given on a case-by-case basis (2004:178)	RPL was instead used as a mass access mechanism that did not take into consideration the individual learning of each student.
Help learners select the new learning that they need from the programme	Without discrimination all learners were put through the NPDE programme even though their prior learning differed, some of the learners had REQV 12 while others had REQV 11
Where learners need additional training to supplement their learning – this should be indicated through the RPL process and recommendations for learning support should be made	The financial constrains made this impossible and thus even learners who needed additional support, time and instruction were forced into the same programme

Moll and Welch (2004:163) also indicate that one of the intended outcomes of RPL is to redress historical injustices and deprivations caused by the apartheid education system. The practice of forcing under-prepared learners into advanced programmes as a result of limited funding goes against this principle. It perpetuates the 'revolving door syndrome' where under-prepared learners are granted access, but afterwards fail and/or drop out. RPL also promises to provide cost-effective mechanisms for speeding up the acquisition of skills and knowledge. This is also seen as a mechanism for accelerating economic growth in the country (Moll and Welch 2004:163). In practice it is obvious that the RPL process is very expensive and limited funding forced institutions to short-circuit the RPL process. In summary their research suggests that the implementation of RPL in South Africa is marred by intellectual and logistical challenges (ibid).

From the literature reviewed above it is evident that despite the utopian goals of the NQF's in the various countries, its implementation shows a gap between what the policy aims to do and what actually happens in practice. The review has highlighted numerous factors that have led to this gap. The first has to do with institutional inertia. This manifests in institutions' resistance to change as the NQF is aimed at reforming traditional roles established over a long history and structural demarcations between the various sectors that make it difficult to achieve seamless articulation between secondary and tertiary education as well as education and training.

The second factor is with regard to institutional autonomy. Education institutions have enjoyed over time the freedom to determine who to teach through their admission requirements; what to teach by deciding on the curriculum and the structure of programmes as well as their duration; and how to teach in terms of what will count as evidence of learning achieved. The NQF is a form of intervention that makes governments have a say on all these three areas which are sacred to educational institutions. Processes like Recognition of Prior Learning challenge the admissions requirements of education institutions and forces them to consider students who traditionally have been excluded from participating in education. Through Outcomes Based Education the NQF challenges how institutions teach and what type of learning is regarded as being of value.

The literature makes the claim that implementation of the NQF is not realistic, firstly in terms of its applicability in taking the geographical and historical contexts of countries and institutions into consideration regarding the differential depth of change that would be required for each country and institution. The amount of time it will take for each to achieve the desired changes, the type of initial development required to level the plane across institutions such that change is enabled and the resources that will be required to initiate and sustain change. Secondly it has been unrealistic in terms of instituting incremental change, it assumed a blanketed approach to change where one size is intended to fit all at the same time without clear milestones that allow migration over time to a unitary qualifications framework.

Finally, the literature suggests that the incentives for adopting National Qualifications Frameworks were undermined by incentives gained from professional bodies and international authorities external to education institutions. These bodies have more direct influence on how institutional qualifications are structured, registered and quality assured, how professionals are trained and how they are assessed.

The discussion has thus far dealt with the policy of National Qualifications Frameworks and how it drove curriculum reform in various countries across the world including South Africa. It has not critically asked questions regarding whether it is a legitimate education policy that serves to advance sound educational practices. In other words, the policy itself is not brought under scrutiny. Some of the issues raised above in the review of the literature suggests that the NQF has challenged the traditional roles of education and training institutions be it schools as was the case in Australia, tertiary institutions as is the case in South Africa and most of the other countries adopting NQF's or in industry as illustrated again by Australia. Largely, universities have been the most vocal in resisting changes suggested through the NQF. My contention is that to understand the gap between policy and practice, investigation should explore the extent to which the NQF is perceived to be enabling end-users, particularly universities to improve their teaching, learning, assessment, research and community development practices and their contribution to knowledge production in society. Therefore it is pertinent to try to understand why the NQF could be met with resistance by this particular group of end users. For a possible explanation I use the next section to explore the history of

universities and the conception of their role in higher education and training in general and more particularly in South Africa.

2.4 The Relevance and Efficacy of the NQF as Education Policy

It appears that since the 1500's when universities were first established, it was generally accepted that they have a special status that needs to be protected by all means, then why all this sudden aggravation? For so many years universities have not been in the practice of questioning (or being questioned about) their own relevance and value, why now? The National Qualifications Framework has brought along a mechanism that seems intent on facilitating change. Is it really educationally sound to achieve this change in the first place, and secondly does it need to be in this way? In what way is it relevant as an education policy for universities?

Using Newman's (2000) notion of the soul of higher education as a basis, this discussion explores the nature of the role that higher education played in the past, in the present and for the future, and how the NQF has facilitated the change in the role played by higher education institutions. I want to argue that the soundness of National Qualifications Framework as an educational policy should be determined by its contribution to strengthening the role played by universities in facilitating development through education. Drawing from international and national authors on the subject, I explore the conception of the special status of higher education argued by Newman (2000:17) as being to socialise students so that they are ready to undertake their responsibilities in society as contributing citizens; to provide all citizens with social mobility through access to higher education and to uphold the university as a home of disinterested scholarship and for open and unfettered discussion of critical issues. Later on in the discussion I problematise the points raised by Newman, however I begin with an exploration of his argument and how it links with what the NQF is aiming to achieve in policy terms. The section concludes with reflections drawn from literature on a possible way forward to be explored for the possible future role of higher education institutions and how the NQF could facilitate or hinder that role in the future.

2.4.1 What is the role of higher education?

Newman argues that the socialisation of students takes place in three ways; socialisation into the community, to the life of the mind and to the profession (Newman 2000:18).

Socialising students to the life of the mind means introducing them to sophisticated intellectual concepts and giving students the lifelong ability to think critically (Newman 2000:19). Socialisation to the life of a profession means exposing students to the traditions, the values, the responsibilities and ways of working within the profession according to the ethics governing that profession. Socialisation to the community means preparing students for life in society, to actively participate as a citizen in a democracy (Newman 2000:18). Through various academic and extracurricular experiences, students are given many opportunities to gain the skills and attitudes necessary for this role. These also include developing global awareness, the capacity to appreciate gender, racial and ethnic diversity and the ability to work in teams (Newman 2000:18). In policy terms, the NQF aims to facilitate this type of socialisation of students. In this sense then there is overlap in the educational goals of the NQF to those of higher education. As the literature below indicates, consensus on the educational goals advocated by the NQF has been recognised and acknowledged in the education sector.

Feldman and Paulsen (1994) analysed the evolution of college teaching and learning in America. Feldman and Paulsen identified the general educational goals, values and practices over the different time periods from the colonial ages, the nineteenth century, the twentieth century through to the future (1994:8). They argue that the goals, values and practices are implicit descriptions of the different milestones in the development of higher education in America (Feldman and Paulsen 1994:8). These writers' analysis of the traditional role of higher education concurs with Barr and Tagg's analysis of the teaching and learning paradigms characteristic of the different eras marking the evolution of higher education. Barr and Tagg (1995) articulated this by analysing the dichotomy between the instructional and learning paradigms. They argue that the early conception of higher learning defined the traditional role of higher education institutions as providing instruction rather than producing learning (Barr and Tagg 1995:13). They suggested a shift from an emphasis on teaching to an emphasis on learning, because as noted by Boggs, the old paradigm no longer fits as we approach the new century (Boggs 1995:25). The National Qualifications Framework is an attempt to facilitate the shift to the learning paradigm, it forces academics to focus on the products of learning as demonstrated through learning outcomes instead of the products of teaching as demonstrated by the amount of contact and theory given through instruction.

Gibbons (1998) analysed mode 1 and 2 of producing knowledge. His main argument is that in as far as universities are concerned, in mode 1, knowledge production and dissemination i.e. research and teaching were self-contained activities carried out in relative institutional isolation (Gibbons 1998:1). He argues that in mode 2, which characterises the changes that higher education institutions would have to embrace, knowledge production involves multiple partners and stakeholders and also involves the use of the potentialities of the new information and communication technologies (Gibbons 1998:1).

To Newman, mode 1 knowledge production is what constitutes the soul of higher education, and he argues that some of the changes brought about by the mode 2 knowledge production, in particular changes brought about by policies such as the NQF, are threatening the special status of traditional higher education institutions (2000:17). The writers reviewed above seem to concur with Newman's conception of a traditional role of higher education. There also seems to be a general consensus amongst these writers that this role is being challenged and that the role of higher education has to be reformulated. Their point of departure from that of Newman is whether there is a need to save the special status of higher education and whether it is threatened in the first place.

In South Africa it is only recently that technikons were reconceptualised as higher education institutions with the same status and role as universities, the National Qualifications Framework has driven this reconceptualisation by formulating a single unitary national framework for qualifications (Chetty 2003: 12). In his analysis of the evolution of higher education in South Africa, Kraak (2001; 12) indicates that during 1974 the government of the day adopted a trinary system of higher education and training, which comprised of universities, technikons and colleges. According to Kraak (2001:12), this system was largely informed by the recommendations from the Van Wyk De Vries Commission of inquiry into universities, and it reported largely that:

- Universities should concentrate on the teaching and research of the basic fundamental principles of science, with a view to the provision of higher level person power;

- Technikons should concentrate on the application of scientific principles to practical problems and on technology, the preparation of persons for the practice, promotion and transfer of technology within a particular occupation or industry;
- Colleges should provide vocational training, specifically building upon the craft tradition of the apprentice model beyond N3 level, with N4 to N6 qualifications considered to be at the tertiary level (Department of National Education 1995:10 in Kraak 2001:12).

Kraak (2001) goes on to map out the evolution of the South African higher education system up to the conception of a single nationally co-ordinated system of higher education and training under which we are currently operating. From Kraak's analysis as well as from other South African scholars who have written on this subject, (see Vilakazi 1999 and Van der Westhuizen 1999), we can deduce that Newman's conception of the soul of higher education, reflects the role of higher education within our country. However from Vilakazi's (1999) analysis we learn that there are other significant points of departure regarding the role of higher education within our country and Africa in general. For now I focus on the significance of the stratification of our system and the contribution that technikons made with regards to Newman's third point about upholding disinterested scholarship and providing a home for open and unfettered discussion of critical issues.

Research has been used by universities as the main tool to uphold this type of scholarship and it formed the base on which unfettered discussion of critical issues could be made. Although it needs to be mentioned that the subject and findings of research by themselves limit the type of discussions that can be made. Moreover that issues that are not the subject of research could also form the basis for debates in academia or they could be sidelined completely. Like Chetty argues, the late entry of technikons into the higher education sector means that their contribution in this regard is very little and still in its infancy (Chetty 2003). Therefore this type of scholarship is one sided with universities largely taking the lead over technikons in research and publications. However, not all universities have contributed equally. The legacy of apartheid and unequal distribution of resources amongst higher education institutions by the apartheid government has ensured that mainly historically white higher education institutions have made a more significant impact in this regard than the historically black institutions (Chetty 2003).

Thus it appears that what the NQF has managed to achieve is to combine the universities, technikons and colleges into one sector of higher education. It has not however led to the development of colleges and technikons to the same level of academic excellence and research output as universities. The question remains whether the NQF has gone beyond window-dressing by reformulating the roles of technikons and colleges to ensuring deep change within technikons and colleges as part of the higher education sector such that they can begin to contribute to knowledge production and academic discourse in the same vein as universities. The conception that higher education has a soul that needs to be protected raises questions about the 'actual value' of this soul and why it needs to be protected. It also brings to mind the possibility that the existence of this soul is only in the minds of those who claim it exists. If it is the very essence that defines the special status of universities and higher education, then why is it being threatened in the first place, and whose interests is served by protecting this soul or challenging it? These questions lead us to the next section on the type of challenges and expectations raised by educational policies on higher education.

2.4.2. What is the essence of the changes required by national education policy with respect to higher education institutions?

The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) has articulated the new role of higher education and what is expected of higher education institutions in South Africa through the national educational imperatives. At its core these imperatives emphasise that higher education must drive the socio-economic development of the country by increasing the critical mass of highly skilled intellectuals. This is as a result of an increasing demand for tertiary institutions to develop mature, critical thinking graduates who are holistically developed, who can contribute meaningfully to their country's democracy and socio-economic growth (Department of Education 2001; Van der Westhuizen 1999). The NQF provides the tool through which the government aims to ensure that higher education institutions can deliver on these terms.

Society, the government and other stakeholders expect higher education institutions to remain socially accountable (Gibbons, 1998). A report by Sharda Naidoo of Business Day (29 September 2003) indicates that although there has been a 41% increase in graduate outputs since 2000, alarm bells about the efficiency of the higher education system in filling labour shortages are still being sounded. The report indicates that about 25% of

companies employing engineering technicians are experiencing a shortage of these skills. Other career fields affected include information technologists, health professionals, managers, accountants and auditors (Business Day 29 September 2003). The report argues that in terms of the skills shortage as a whole, technicians are leading the race to fill them ahead of universities. However as a sector we are still running short to meet the required labour demands (Business Day 29 September 2003). As a result the NPHE states very clearly that higher education institutions are to increase the participation rate in higher education from 15% to 20% in the long term with particular emphasis on giving access to women, black and disabled students. This must be achieved by increasing their representation in business, commerce, science, engineering and technology programmes, as well as in post-graduate programmes in general (Department of Education 2001).

Higher education is expected to contribute to the creation of a learning society that draws from people of all ages and from all walks of life and gives them the opportunity to advance and develop themselves, both intellectually and materially (Department of Education 2001). The ability of higher education institutions to attract alumni and adult learners back into the sector will diversify its market profile and facilitate lifelong learning. This is in line with what Newman identified as one of the roles of higher education in terms of the socialisation of students, except that he argues that too much emphasis is being placed on preparing students for the workforce (Newman 2000:18). He argues that this type of preparation is less of a priority and is more short-term because it is based on the immediate needs of industry. He argues that the goal should be to keep long-term gains and values of higher education's contribution to serve societal long-term educational and developmental needs (Newman 2000:23).

The NPHE links an increase in throughput to improvement in efficiency. In turn, improvements in efficiency are linked to improvements in quality (Department of Education 2001:18). The NPHE already mentions that future funding for higher education institutions will be determined by performance and delivery in terms of how tertiary institutions respond to the higher education imperatives (Department of Education 2001). In essence this implies that higher education institutions are expected to be more effective and efficient, i.e. do more with less (Boggs 1995:26). Therefore, unless higher

education institutions streamline themselves to meet these imperatives, then their continued existence is threatened.

This focus on higher education and its contribution to societal development is part of developments in our country to reconstruct education and training. Makoni argues that the pressures to reconstruct education and society are an attempt to address the legacies of destabilisation and under-development caused by colonial government, racial segregation, apartheid and so forth (2000:1). Makoni argues that with the consolidation of democracy, economic and political changes are taking place at the same time as the radical rethinking of the educational philosophies underlying higher education (2000:1). Literature on the changing role of higher education indicates that this phenomenon is not isolated to South Africa only, it has been observed throughout the world (Gibbons 1998). Newman argues that while the university has a responsibility to develop critical thinking individuals who will contribute meaningful to their country's democracy, it also has a responsibility to challenge accepted dogma. Through research it can illuminate societal problems by bringing in fresh evidence, and it can serve as a source of knowledge and a place for free and open debate on critical issues (Newman 2000:22). Newman argues that the involvement by external parties into the affairs of higher education poses a threat because it could compromise the academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions, leading to self-censorship (2000:22).

Gibbons' (1998) analysis of mode 1 and 2 of producing knowledge alluded to earlier in the discussion, regards mode 2 of knowledge production as the future of higher education. The change towards Mode 2 is regarded by Newman as another threat to the soul of higher education. As mentioned earlier Gibbons' main argument is that higher education institutions are no longer the sole proprietor of teaching, learning and research (Gibbons 1998). There are different sites of learning other than higher education institutions and there are different forms of learning other than the type of formal learning that takes place in universities (Gibbons 1998). Under mode 2 of knowledge production all these deserve recognition because they make higher learning accessible to a greater number of people and increases the centres of excellence in knowledge production and dissemination to include industry and other types of organisations thus facilitating knowledge transfer across disciplines. This knowledge transfer is made possible through the NQF. As mentioned earlier (see 2.1), the NQF makes it possible for a machine operator trained

within an industry setting that offers informal education, to gain recognition for their prior learning by a higher education institution and gain access for further learning in a formal learning institution to obtain a professional qualification as an engineer.

In a move to widen access to higher education, this has inadvertently led to a rise in private, distance learning and virtual higher education institutions which, according to Newman (2000: 18) do not share the same values with traditional higher education institutions and are competing with them for students. Newman is concerned that these other types of institutions do not concern themselves with any of the traditional roles of higher education. Thus they trivialise the significance of traditional values and instead give priority to being competitive and market-driven, and chasing profits (Newman 2000: 18).

2.4.3 Analysis of the traditional role of higher education

Thus far this discussion has largely explored Newman's conception of the soul of higher education. We have also attempted to relate it to the South African context. We have not yet challenged Newman's argument, henceforth we problematize the idea of the soul of higher education. We discuss some of the pitfalls in the traditional role that higher education institutions played and how it has given rise to the current conception of higher education.

The National Plan for Higher Education as well as views from scholars mentioned earlier in the discussion articulated very clearly the roles that graduates are supposed to undertake upon completion of their higher learning economically, socially and politically. In relating Newman's articulation of the soul of higher education to the South African context, there are a few points of contention that need to be pointed out. Referring back to Naidoo's (29 September 2003) article, it suggests that firstly, at least in the South African context, higher education is not (and given our history has not been) producing enough graduates to be able to undertake a meaningful role with visible impact on society. Secondly, the level and quality of training that graduates are supposed to have is questionable. Naidoo's (ibid.) article suggests that in fact higher education is not responding satisfactorily to meet societal needs, which inadvertently implies that graduates, due to the poor quality of their training, are ill-prepared to undertake their roles of responsibility in society. Thirdly, Naidoo's (ibid.) article suggests that despite the fact

that the unemployment rate is high in South Africa, higher education is exacerbating the problem by producing unemployable graduates.

To put this more precisely and extending it to the entire continent, it means that the ability of higher education to provide social mobility and to promote the development, modernisation and democratisation of their own countries as Newman suggests has been very limited in the African context (Vilakazi 1999:206). On the one hand this function has been compromised and overshadowed by elements such as wars, colonialism, racial segregation, poverty, corruption, limited access to resources and lack of adequate funding in most African countries. On the other hand this has been diluted by an attempt by African universities to mimic western universities without developing distinctly different identities that would contribute to developing an African civilisation and producing an African intelligentsia (Vilakazi 1999: 207). African universities have failed to cultivate a sense of respect and pride in indigenous knowledge systems. Vilakazi (1999) argues that African universities have failed in guiding and driving development in African countries. They have also failed in recognising, promoting and developing African modalities of knowledge production and dissemination based on African areas of priority such as developing visionary leadership, finding solutions to poverty, war and improving its own economies based on agricultural rather than industrial development. Therefore they have failed to fulfil their role as the guiding light of the African continent and of the societies within which they are located (Vilakazi 1999:207).

The idea that higher education should be a home of unfettered debate on societal problems and a source of new knowledge is another point of contention. While this might be the case in some areas affecting society, such as in conducting research to find the cure for HIV/AIDS and informing social policy in this regard. This critical inquiry has been directed outwardly and not inward. It is interesting that over the centuries universities across the world have not used their own platform to challenge some of its own values and original conceptions. For instance it has not used scholarship to be self-critical or as a self-reflective tool to judge its own progress, and success or failure in its pursuit of knowledge. Instead it has challenged some of the critical issues in society as if it were perfect and not perpetuating some of the problems prevalent in society faced by common folk.

From the literature, authors such as Barr and Tagg (1995), Furmann and Grasha (1994) and Boggs (1995) suggest that the limitations of the traditional role of higher education are that:

- It encouraged competition amongst learners – grading top and bottom performers and separating them into different classes thus perpetuating differences and discouraging cooperation and interdependence amongst learners. It is traditionally elitist implying that higher education was only accessible to those who could afford it – thus perpetuating various forms of segregation. This is in contrast to Newman's argument that higher education developed students' capacity to appreciate diversity and their ability to work in teams (Newman 2000:18);
- It discouraged a cooperative relationship between teacher and learner. As Furhmann and Grasha (1994: 7) argue, the classroom became the battle ground between student and tutor where each tried to outwit the other. The instructor was viewed as an expert who prescribed in detail the course content, assignments and methods of evaluation with no consultation with the learners (Feldman and Paulsen 1994:8);
- The teaching and learning methods used encouraged surface learning where only the lowest order of cognitive skills such as memorisation and reproduction was developed (Furhmann and Grasha 1994: 7). Therefore the claim that it developed critical thinking skills in its graduates is not reflected or supported by the teaching and learning methods that were used. According to Boggs (1995) traditional universities did not question the effectiveness of these teaching methods;
- It emphasised instruction over learning, and passive instead of active learning.

These limitations are compounded by the fact that the profile of learners entering higher education now is very different to the type of learners who entered higher learning in the past. Issues around quality promotion as well as increased pressure to provide greater access to education, advances in technology and globalisation of markets and institutions have all led to redefining the traditional idea of higher education (Newman 2000:17). In the next section we focus on what this entails, the rewards and limitations of the emerging view of higher education, as well as its implications for the South African context and the future.

2.4.4 What are current and dominant conceptions of higher education?

According to Newman the current idea of higher education is characterised by advances in technology and increased use of technology in teaching and learning; increasing competition; pressure to be business and profit oriented and the role and goals of higher education are increasingly being defined by external forces such as governments and industry (Newman 2000:17).

The points referred to by Newman are more negative and show the limitations of the current conception of higher education in being relevant, quality promotion oriented and accountable to society, thus his argument that these factors are destroying the soul of higher education. Limiting the elements that characterise higher education in this century to the points mentioned thus far would be like articulating a one-sided point of view. There are positive aspects that characterise higher education in this day and age, and which in the opinion of writers such as Gibbons (1998) will further strengthen the role of higher education in terms of its relevance and quality improvement for its current and future role. Barr and Tagg (1995) and Boggs (1995) articulate these in more detail, however in essence the positive aspects are that in embracing and responding to the current and future changes, higher education institutions are now beginning to:

- Reformulate the terms of reference that define success in higher education into measurable outcomes that focus on teaching, learning, research, community work and anything else that promotes learning;
- Redefine the conceptualisation of quality not on business terms but in terms that represent the business of teaching and learning such as the quality of learning attained by all learners irrespective of their educational background;
- Show a commitment towards restoring the prestige of teaching as a profession;
- Recognise various forms of learning and the variety of learning sites, the value of trans-disciplinary and inter-institutional collaborations and the increasing impact these would have on meeting short and long-term societal needs;
- Engage in more self-critical and self-reflective practices as a way to continuously improve the business of teaching and learning;
- Increase their commitment to providing the less advantaged with an opportunity for education through the creation of multiple access routes into higher education and massification.

Therefore the focus becomes on taking charge of changes occurring with the higher education sector and then driving the process of change henceforth to pursue the emergent goals in order to cement the strategic role of higher education institutions in the future.

2.4.5 What is the way forward for higher education?

It is necessary to reflect on Newman's (2000:23) recommendations as a way forward. He articulates the emergence goals that should shape the future of higher education institutions as follows. Their goals should be to create policies that help modify pure market forces in ways that enhance positive socialisation, social mobility and the university's role in the unfettered creation and debate of knowledge. They should use the new technologies to enhance rather than diminish higher education's critical roles. They should harness the opportunities and advantages of having a wider range of variations and mixtures of programme offerings and higher learning opportunities. They should keep the long-term gains and values of higher education's contribution to serve societal long-term educational and developmental needs. This will ensure that higher education institutions remain relevant and responsive in the immediate and future scenarios.

In the interim, and a way forward Boggs (1995:27) suggests revision of college mission statements to clearly define that student learning is the college's purpose. Support for this should be indicated by institutionalising focus on retraining staff to re-orient them towards the learning paradigm and recruit staff in line with this line of thought. Commitment by higher education institutions to producing learning with every student by whatever means work best (Barr and Tagg 1995:13). This implies that higher education institutions should not be restricted to using particular forms of teaching strategies even if they do not promote learning, or to reserving admission into higher education only to top performers or a particular profile of learners simply because they are more likely to pass while excluding at risk students. Financing of higher education to be based upon attainment of student learning outcomes. Higher education institutions taking the lead on identifying the student learning outcomes that should be developed and measured. If universities take the lead they will cease to let governments establish learning outcome goals independent of them. This will ensure that higher education keep their autonomy rather than sitting idly while being re-invented by external forces. Finally becoming learning organisations themselves – continuously learning how to produce more learning with each entering and

graduating students (Barr and Tagg 1995:14), committing themselves to continuous quality improvement. This implies that only those aspects that contribute meaningfully to attainment of learning will be kept as a central core to the soul of higher education, rather than simply holding on without question for over centuries to practices that are not promoting learning.

2.4.6 The significance of the NQF for the future of Higher Education

This discussion has utilised Newman's notion of the soul of higher education as a basis to explore the nature of the role that higher education played in the past, in the present and for the future. Drawing from international and national authors on the subject, I established that this conception of a special status of higher education is indeed shared at least in America, Europe and Africa. What I can draw from this discussion is that there is general consensus from the authors reviewed in this discussion that higher education institutions are sitting in a very strategic position to drive change and lead development in their own countries. In the past they have not always been open to change, but the intervention by governments in implementing National Qualifications Framework spell out that change is inevitable.

There is also consensus that some of the challenges that appear to be threats, through educational policies like the NQF and the National Plan for Higher Education in South Africa, could be turned into opportunities if they can be taken advantage of. In the African context, the development and promotion of African indigenous knowledge systems is in its infancy which if fully exploited could catapult Africa's development and civilisation. Finally, protecting the special status that defines the soul of higher education is what puts higher education institutions in the strategic place to drive societal development.

In essence the goals of higher education as articulated by Newman (2000:17) as being to socialise students so that they are ready to undertake their responsibilities in society as contributing citizens; to provide all citizens with social mobility through access to higher education and to uphold the university as a home of disinterested scholarship and for open and unfettered discussion of critical issues remains the key function that higher education will play in the future and is enabled to a large extent by educational policies such as the NQF. However protecting this special status does not necessarily mean being resistant to change, not being accountable to society or blindly holding on to traditions

over centuries without question or recognition of their impact on society. It means being constantly engaged in self-reflection and anticipating what the future holds and how higher education institutions can adapt to position themselves strategically in order to ride the wave of change for their own sake and for the sake of the countries they serve. It also means retaining those qualities that higher education institutions have that serve the purpose of driving societal development while accommodating new goals that redefine higher education institutions to remain relevant and responsive in the immediate and future scenarios.

Although the discussion above explains one of the reasons why there is a gap in translating educational policy into practice, it has done this from the perspective of universities. The reality is that the situation involves other players and it is more nuanced than presented in the discussion above. The next section offers a broad explanatory framework for the gap between policy and practice in implementing the NQF. In this study I hope to test the relevance of this framework in accounting for the distance between policy and practice of change. The point of departure is that the conceptual framework problematizes how the meaning of policies change as they move from the hands of its developers to those of the end users. It explores the relationship between the role players and their individual conception as policy makers, and policy implementers linking more closely to National Qualifications Framework.

2.5 Conceptual Framework

In this section I will discuss two conceptual frameworks which will form a basis for my analysis of the data. The first I call *policy positioning* and draws on the work of Michael Young (2000) in which he explains the failure of South African educational policy reform in general, and the NQF in particular. It is important to note that Michael Young writes from a perspective of an outsider who is knowledgeable about NQF policy formulation and implementation. However his thoughts are mainly reflective, they are based on his experience and have not been tested in practice. In this study I hope to go beyond where Michael Young ended, in that I propose a conceptual framework as a way of understanding the discrepancy between higher education policy and practice, furthermore I hope to test this theory.

Policy positioning formulates a macro understanding of what motivates policy makers to adopt a particular stance when formulating policies. It highlights the hidden political agenda that sometimes, within the educational context, goes contrary to what is best for educational practice. Macro in this aspect reflects what occurs at legislative and government level when policies are developed, the political agenda being pushed by the government of the day, and how they interpret change and progress. However the discrepancy between policy and practice does not exist at a macro level only, it also occurs between policy developers and end-users as policy implementers.

The second part of my conceptual framework draws on the work of Argyris and Schön (1974) looking at *theories of action* and *theories in use*. Their work seeks to explain the discrepancy between what policy in theoretical terms aims to do and the assumptions underpinning its formulation about what requires its successful implementation as compared to what happens in practice as a policy is actually implemented, and what implementers perceive to be feasible within their contexts. I will begin my discussion with the first.

2.5.1 Policy Positioning

Michael Young (2000) explains the process that South Africa followed when educational policies were revised during the early post-Apartheid era. He argues that the ANC-led government's early focus in policy formulation was driven by a need to take a political stance that distinguished them from the previous apartheid regime. This position meant adopting policies that were in direct contrast to those that the apartheid regime advocated. Thus if the apartheid government advocated for segregation in education according to race, the new government opted for policies that advocated for integration. Where there was inequality in the distribution of resources amongst higher education institutions, the new government advocated for equal distribution of resources; and where there was insular specialisation of skills as characterised by Fordism, they argued for multi-skilling characterised by post-Fordist principles.

On the surface such a redistribution of resources are admirable and necessary to reverse the inequalities perpetuated by the system of apartheid. The values of non-racialism, equity and access, are noble in themselves and were reflected in the new education policies. These were focused on promoting racial tolerance and nation-building while at

the same time correcting, in principle, the inequities and atrocities caused by the apartheid regime. Young (ibid) argues that in this sense, political motives and values drove the educational policy formulation.

On the one hand this is a problem and a limitation because educational policy formulation is supposed to be a process of critical analysis and reflection. While political values might provide the impetus and direction of where we should be focusing as a country, it should not replace the process of critical inquiry into why we are adopting a particular stance over another. Instead educational policy formulation is supposed to be driven by:

- what works in the current policy and practice;
- under what circumstances does it work;
- what are the limitations of the current system;
- how can we improve on what we have now;
- how should we restructure our current practices and policies in line with where we want to be in the future.

Michael Young (2003) argues that instead of this process of critical analysis directing our process and goals of policy formulation in education, our government focused what they deemed to be the best-case scenario or the ideal state of where they would like to see South Africa in the future. Such a stance involved the government looking outwards, in particular west-wards at America, Britain, New Zealand, Canada, Australia, at who they deemed were successful, progressive countries. And then adopting their ways of doing things, because they are perceived as the leaders in education, in their economy, and to be able to compete with them and others globally, South Africa needed to learn and adopt their way of doing things and then transferring it into South Africa.

He argues that the drive behind Outcomes Based Education, the National Qualifications Framework, the drive for a single nationally coordinated education system, the move to articulate education and training all emulate the educational policies of western countries that South Africa was benchmarking itself against. He also argues that these countries are stronger economically. The legacy of apartheid left South Africa in immense debt, the majority of South Africans living in adverse poverty without proper education beyond elementary level, and unskilled beyond basic skills. This meant that the majority of South

Africans could not participate and actively contribute towards making the economy grow. Since these western countries were stronger economically, and were using their education system as the drive behind their economic growth, South Africa also adopted a neo-liberalist approach to education, where business principles were incorporated in educational policies to help modernise and accelerate economic growth.

There were other models of educational policies that could have been considered by the government such as those adopted by Asian countries such as China, Singapore and Malaysia. But it was acting under pressure to be seen to be doing something that made a difference, fast. The consequence is that our government neglected to look at these western practices, policies and procedures critically. In their haste they neglected to study other countries who had done the same like in South America, Brazil in particular, who tried the same approach and instead intensified the inequalities between the poor and the rich. They also neglected to focus on what characterised South Africa as unique, our culture influenced by segregation, the skills shortage and poverty and how these could undermine the successful transference and implementation of these policies into our country. They neglected to focus on what was good about our old policies that needed retaining. They neglected to look at the practical implications of implementing these policies, and their feasibility within the South African context. And without preparing the ground and thorough consultation with all the key stake holders; and building capacity and expertise amongst people who would be required to implement the policies, and without the means to check that the quality of education would not be compromised, they imposed them on the education system at an alarming pace, expecting ordinary folk to learn to crawl and walk at the same time.

Young (2003) argues that the result is education policy that is completely removed from the needs and context of South Africa. It does not translate the policy ideals into practical strategies of implementation. It has failed in delivery and achieving meaningful change amongst the disenfranchised members of our society.

As mentioned before policy positioning formulates a macro understanding of what motivates policy makers to adopt a particular stance when formulating policies. It unveils some of the hidden political agenda pushed by the government of the day, and how the government interprets change and progress. However the discrepancy between policy and practice does

not exist at a macro level only, it also occurs between policy developers and end-users as policy implementers.

The next part of my conceptual framework unveil the discrepancy between what policy in theoretical terms aims to do and the assumptions underpinning its formulation about what will require its successful implementation versus what happens in practice as a policy is actually implemented, and what implementers perceive to be feasible within their contexts.

2.5.2 Theories of Action, Theories in Use

Argyris and Schön (1974:4) argue that theories of action determine all deliberate human behaviour. Using the basic understanding that theories serve to explain, predict or control, the authors argue that so too can human behaviour. By observing over time how individuals behave, one can formulate a theory to explain, predict and control human behaviour in as far as it leads to action (ibid). A theory of action serves to explain or determine what one ought to do in order to achieve certain results, defined by a particular situation “S”, and a particular consequence “C”. In this context then policies such as the NQF intended to reform the curriculum and educational practice represent theories of action. They articulate a particular process of action that is intended to achieve specific goals – policy goals. Policies also assume that implementation will lead to the attainment of those goals equally across the different contexts where the policy is to be implemented. The analysis of the NQF policy and other legislative documents will indicate what these goals and underlying assumptions were regarding the successful implementation of the NQF.

Higher Education Institutions also hold their own theories of action. In response to the demands of the NQF, many of them developed policies and put in place structures to oversee the implementation of the NQF. They also made assumptions about what would be required to achieve the goals of the NQF within their institution.

Theories in use can be constructed from observations of people’s behaviour (Argyris and Schön 1974:7). Theory in use represents what people actually do while implementing policies in practice within their different contexts. By studying the experiences of end-users in implementing the NQF we will gain a bit of insight into their theories in use. However their experiences only capture their experience in retrospect, and these might

not accurately reflect what they did in practice. A more accurate reflection of institutional and end-users' theories in use will be to study the changes they actually effected within their institutions and scholarship in terms of access, teaching and learning. By utilising institutional data and documents one will be able to test what they said they did against the changes they actually effected within their institutions and classrooms in terms of the NQF policy goals. This will reflect consistencies and inconsistencies between their theories of action and their theories in use.

2.5.3 The Value, Use And Application of the two Conceptual Frameworks

Argyris and Schön (1974:14) argue that it is important to explicitly state the theories in use that we hold, particularly if they are inconsistent with our theory of action. This is because when the opposite is true i.e. when the theory of action is consistent with the theory in use, it allows the individual to perform effectively; in which case it does not indicate a problem or necessitate a need to state the theory in use explicitly. A study conducted by Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (2003) serves to illustrate this. In describing the relationship between physical education teachers' educational theories of action and theories in use, the study aimed to determine the extent to which the teachers' theories of action in terms of their beliefs about teaching and learning were consistent with their theories in use in as far as they guided their professional practices. Using informal interviews, conducted before observational data were collected, the teachers' beliefs about teaching and learning were established to determine their theories of action. Their theories in use were determined using class observations, formal and informal interviews, vignette interviews and journals. Except in three instances, the authors found that the teachers' theories in use were consistent with their theories in action, which the authors argue, is contradictory to the findings by Argyris and Schön.

One needs to note however that this study in fact confirmed Argyris and Schön's position rather than contradict it. Their argument was that when actors are aware of their theories of action and how they influenced their theories in use or what they do in practice, they are more likely to behave consistently with their beliefs. The study by Tsangaridou and O'Sullivan (2003) enabled the Physical Education teachers to become aware of their theories of action. By conducting the preliminary interviews, they enabled the teachers to think critically and reflect about their practice, maybe even formulate their theories of

action during the interview. Later on when they were observed, it followed that they would act accordingly with what they had already indicated to be the goals of their teaching.

Inconsistencies in theories of action and theories-in-use compromise efficiency, the quality of provision and practice. For instance an article by O'Hare (1987) examines the limitations of career decision-making (CDM) models from a theory in action perspective. She argues that career decision making models remain at the level of espoused theory; they do not focus on theories in use in that they do not make explicit what is to be done during counselling with clients. They also do not indicate how a counsellor should bring his/her theories of action in line with the clients' own theories in use (O'Hare 1987:301). The result is that counsellors follow their own preconceived ideas and interpretations of what is required during counselling unaware of the incongruities in their practices. On the other hand clients are apt to follow their own directives, unaware that they are behaving incongruently with what the counsellor expects. She advocates for a development of CDM models that move beyond the descriptive and predictive level towards models that emphasise invention and discovery of solutions to CDM problems.

Grant-Lewis and Naidoo (2004) examine South Africa's experience in promoting broader participation through the establishment of local school governance structures called School Governing Bodies (SGB). The SGB's are, in policy terms, intended to contribute to the democratic transformation of South African society. In their study Grant-Lewis and Naidoo explore whether the SGB's led to transformation in shifting the locus of control over school governance to parents, and whether the nature of participation in school governance involved negotiation, conflict management and compromise. Their findings suggest that SGB's are instead managed to serve technocratic, managerialistic goals that are more focused on increasing the efficiency of the school, rather than on broadening participation in any authentic way. They argue that instead, they are instrumental in reinforcing the status quo where power imbalances between parents and school management is maintained. Decision making is interpreted in a narrow way, emphasising formal, quasi-legal ways defined by the most powerful actors at the school.

The two conceptual frameworks provide a basis to explain any discrepancy between the policy goals of the NQF and its implementation. They also serve to explain the effects of the discrepancy on the daily lives of end users. I argue that the extent to which

institutional theories of action are consistent with their theories in use is largely dependent on how the implementation process was driven i.e. top-down approach or faculty-driven. In the next chapter I describe how this investigation unfolded in the implementation of the NQF at the University of Pretoria, and the NQF was interpreted by the university management and teaching staff.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

In this section I will explain the design and methods employed in conducting my study. I will also justify the decisions that I made that helped shape how I conducted this study as well as how I saw my role as a researcher in this study. My main goal was to determine the impact of the NQF on higher education institutions from an end-user perspective. I recognised that most of the studies in this area had neglected to explain the discrepancy between policy and practice using the perspective of ordinary academics charged with the responsibility of implementing the NQF (see 2.3) focussing particularly on access, teaching and learning. Instead these studies focused on addressing and questioning structural and organisational issues in the NQF and SAQA, they focussed largely on Recognition of Prior Learning. Secondly, while some researchers (see 1.3) polled the experiences of the institutions in their process of implementing the NQF policy, they did not test the extent to which what institutions said in the interview was reflected in practice or validated across institutional voices. The studies also fell short of providing a theoretical analysis that would explain the discrepancy between what policy had intended to happen, and what end-users experienced in the process of implementing the policy.

The question therefore remained: How effective was the national qualifications framework in delivering on its founding objectives? And how could we explain its lack of effectiveness in facilitating the implementation of its objectives in higher education institutions? This was the main point of departure for my study and it influenced my decision in choosing a research design. I was looking for well-grounded, rich descriptions and explanations of processes. I was hoping to determine which events led to which consequences and thereby derive fruitful explanations.

This study was therefore designed to fill the gap where previous studies had fallen short – capturing the voices and experiences of academic practitioners. As a result, I chose a qualitative research design. I wanted to gain the perspectives of end-users by focusing on the experiences of higher education institutions in implementing the NQF. I wanted this study to add empirical data to our understanding of the relationship between policy and practice in the context of qualifications frameworks. I also wanted to develop a conceptual framework that

deepens our understanding of the complexities that challenge, promote and hinder successful policy implementation in education.

I describe this study as qualitative because unlike quantitative research the purpose of this study was not to determine general, universal laws that govern human behaviour (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000:19). Instead I sought to understand the NQF from the standpoint of the individuals who are part of the implementation process. The conceptual framework that I used to make sense of the information gathered from the study is an attempt to understand individuals' actions. This is based on the fundamental assumption that I hold, and that is shared by interpretivist inquirers who work with qualitative data, that people interpret events, contexts and situations, and act on the bases of those events; that there are multiple interpretations of and perspectives on single events and situations; and finally, that events and individuals are unique and are largely non-generalisable (Cohen et al 2000:21). I also recognise that my understanding of the individual behaviour is best represented through a frame of reference common to that of the practitioners being studied (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000:20). Hence my role as a researcher in this study is problematised to show how it enabled me to gain access and develop a deeper understanding of the issues and the people under investigation. I did not seek to separate myself; my understanding of the individual interpretations of the NQF came from being part of the institution as a student and staff member, therefore as an insider my own understanding is influenced by what Cohen et al (2000:20) refer to as insider accounts i.e. my own involvement in the institution.

The next section explores these issues in more detail, further justifying the research design and methodology that I undertook in conducting the research.

3.2 Choosing an approach to educational research

The type of study undertaken here can be broadly described as qualitative and falling within the domain of interpretivist research. Bryman (2001: 13) notes that interpretivism holds a view that the subject matter of the social sciences i.e. people and their institutions, is fundamentally different from that of the natural sciences. Interpretivists argue that the study of the social world requires a different logic of research, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans against the natural order. It differs from the positivist approach because it emphasises empathic understanding of human action rather than the forces that are deemed to act on it (Bryman 2001:13).

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:22), interpretivist research is characterised by a concern for the individual and its central endeavour is to understand the subjective world of human experience. This study is concerned with individual respondents, their experiences and the meanings they assigned to their experience with implementing the NQF. Thus the aim of this study was to understand the subjective world of the end-users' experience. Interpretivist research is concerned with how individuals interpret the world around them. To retain the integrity of the phenomena being investigated interpretivist research focuses on getting inside the person, to understand from within (ibid.). To achieve this I chose a case study design because it offers detailed, in-depth study of a bounded phenomenon, in a university setting – in this case, the NQF (Merriam 1988: 6). It enabled me to obtain the end-users' perspective on their experiences of implementing the NQF and how it impacted on who they taught, how they assessed learning, and how learners learnt.

However, my goal as an interpretivist researcher is not to simply lay bare how academic practitioners understood and interpreted the NQF, I also aim to place these interpretations that have been elicited into what Bryman (2001:15) calls a social scientific frame. My conceptual framework on policy positioning and theory of action/theory in use is a means to provide such a social scientific frame. The result is that there is a double interpretation going on because, as researcher, I am also providing an interpretation of other's interpretations (ibid.). This process is extended further by the conceptual framework to a third level of interpretation where my interpretations are further interpreted in terms of the concepts, theories, and literature of the discipline in education policy (ibid).

3.3 Choosing the Case Study as my research design

Merriam (1988: 6) explains that a research design is similar to an architectural blueprint. It is a plan for assembling, organising, and integrating information, and it results in a specific end product. The selection of a particular design is determined by how the problem is shaped, by the questions it raises, the amount of control desired in the study and by the type of end product desired (Merriam 1988:9). I will explore these issues in more detail as part of my justification for choosing a case study as my research design.

According to Yin (1984:29) research questions such as “What?” and “How many” are best answered by survey research while questions such “How?” and “Why” are appropriate for case study, history, and exploratory designs. My research questions were concerned with the latter, more specifically: How effective was the national qualifications framework in delivering

on its founding objectives? And how could we explain its lack of effectiveness in facilitating the implementation of its objectives in higher education institutions? Universities in particular had already proven to be key role players in the implementation of the NQF, and in earlier chapters I have demonstrated how their history, tradition and identity as initial sole providers of higher learning made their role prominent in challenging the implementation of the NQF. Because cases can include a study of a single individual, an event, a community or a single organisation (Bryman 2001:47 and Merriam 1988:10), I recognised that as an entity the story of universities would be different to that of other role players such as industry and private higher education institutions.

I recognised that I could also have chosen a survey design to conduct my study. Surveys are more structured and less time consuming. Through a survey I would have been able to gain large-scale data and provided that my sample was representative of the population, I could make generalisations to other universities (Cohen, Manion and Morrison 2000:78 and Bryman 2001). However in this study I was not looking to obtain descriptions and explanations that were devoid of their context (Cohen et al 2000:78).

A case study, therefore, offers me the opportunity to interpret within a context. By concentrating on a single phenomenon or entity, case study research enables the researcher to uncover the interaction of significant factors characteristic of that phenomenon (Merriam 1988:10). According to Yin (1984 33) case studies are particularly suited to situations where it is impossible to separate the phenomenon's variables from their context. In my study I have made the argument that the NQF policy was formulated as a one size fits all, it failed to take into consideration the individual contexts of higher education institutions as end users and therefore assumed that the policy would be implementable in the same way within the same time frame.

I needed to capture the meanings and interpretations of the academics, because ultimately I wanted to understand if their interpretations led to a gap between policy development and policy implementation. Therefore I needed to capture their experiences and still indicate what in their contexts led to differences in interpreting the same policy amongst academics within the same institution and education sector. I was not intending to make generalisable conclusions that would embrace all institutions affected by education policy reforms or in this case by the NQF. I was more interested in a holistic, intensive description and interpretation of a contemporary phenomenon, which could be achieved by a case study research design

(Merriam 1988:9). I recognised that higher education institutions in South Africa differ in their history and constitution, and the legacy of apartheid had further widened these differences. Therefore I recognised that although universities represented a 'bounded system' (Smith 1978 in Merriam 1988:9) wherein my problem of interest was located, different universities would tell very different stories and would have very divergent interpretations of the NQF. My final decision was to focus on the University of Pretoria.

In this study, the University of Pretoria is the 'bounded phenomenon' or 'case' being investigated. The university is a historically white institution, which means that during the apartheid regime it enjoyed generous financial support from the government and it is presently well resourced in comparison to historically Black universities. The University of Pretoria is also the largest in the country with the highest number of faculties, departments and programmes offered. It also has a history of compliance with state-directed reforms and studying its response to and implementation of the NQF would show case a unique experience.

It is also unique in that the demographics of its staff and student profile has not changed significantly in the ten years since democracy. Policies such as the NQF, that are intended to redress the unequal participation of designated groups of learners in higher education by facilitating greater access, can be studied in this institution more clearly. That is, one can see the extent to which compliance to state-directed reforms have driven the transformation process at this institution. Moreover as an institution embedded in its history, traditions and its role in the apartheid government, it would be interesting to test the effects of policy reform on such an institution. The idea presented earlier that the NQF is perceived as a threat to institutions of higher learning can be further tested here.

The other reason for selecting the University of Pretoria as a case, is that it was convenient for me as a temporary staff member and full time student. It was easily accessible.

3.4 My role in the process of research and how it facilitated access

As a student and staff member of the University of Pretoria I had the vantage point of studying the effects of the NQF on access, teaching, learning and assessment. As a student, I would be able to determine these effects and how they changed the quality of my learning experience. As a staff member I would be able to determine how much of them influenced my practice as well as those of my colleagues.

My role was also influenced by the fact that the Council on Higher Education (CHE) commissioned a broader study on higher education change – of which my case study forms a small component. The study is part of an initiative driven by the Council on Higher Education to review progress in higher education after ten years of democratic rule. As a body that sees itself as an advisor to the Minister of Education on higher education issues, the broader CHE study forms part of initiatives intended to encourage reflective practice in South African higher education. The goal is to analyse and crystallise the emergent key trends within South African and international higher education. The review also aims to identify and analyse the major challenges that confront South African higher education, and advance new ways of thinking about and understanding higher education and change in higher education and society.

The importance of who commissioned the study had a number of implications for my study because it influenced how people perceived my role as researcher and therefore how they related to me personally during the interviews. Firstly it influenced how people responded to my questions and what they were willing to say on the record. Secondly their responses were also influenced by their perceptions of what the CHE represents and their position as staff in a historically white university who need to appear to be in line with the policy ideals that the CHE represents which are those of the [black] government. And finally the responses were influenced by the respondents' perception of the role they played in implementing the policies instituted by the government versus the role they actually played during the implementation process as well as their perceived success or failure in this regard versus their actual success or failure in practice.

My role as a student and a staff member enabled me to get access to the social setting that I was studying as well as to the respondents. I disclosed my role as researcher to the respondents as well as the purpose of my study. In fact most of the respondents requested clarification regarding my role in the study before the interview could take place. I was also able to gain access to junior members of staff through their Department Heads.

The research leader of the CHE study who is the Dean of Education at the University of Pretoria, Professor Jonathan Jansen, facilitated my initial access to the respondents. On the one hand his influence and position of authority enabled me to gain access to very senior members of staff who were involved in the initial implementation of the NQF when the university was first required to register its qualifications with SAQA. On the other hand it hindered my research process because as an influential man, and given that the CHE

commissioned my study, people were suspicious of me. I had the impression that I was perceived as an instrument of the Council on Higher Education and was there to check up on their activities. I also felt that most of the respondents felt compelled to participate because of the level of influence that Professor Jansen had. They were agreeable to have the interview and were very accommodating regarding their time and availability, yet they were also very wary to give too much information. One of my concerns in this regard was that they told me what they deemed to be what I wanted to hear. Bryman (2001:297) warns that in such instances it is possible for respondents to appear as if they are going along with your research, but in fact sabotage it, engaging in deceptions, misinformation and not allowing access to other sources that may serve to verify the information provided.

Bryman (ibid.) advises that one of the things that researchers can do to retain ongoing access is to play up your credentials in terms of past work and experience; your knowledge of the institution and understanding of their problems. I found that this advice worked best for my circumstances. The fact that I was a student and staff member appeared to win them over, that I was one of them and my research interests enabled them to contribute to my development as a colleague, and as one of their students, I could be trusted to represent their interests more fully. Therefore I used my role as student and staff member to gain the confidence of the respondents. But it also meant that where respondents wanted to test my competence or credibility, the fact that I was a student allowed me to claim the required level of ignorance and inquisitiveness appropriate to lower their defences. I also recognised that as academics they generally assumed that my collaboration with Professor Jansen in the study implied that I had the required competence and credibility worthy of their time and input. I also found that explaining my role as well as the role of the CHE gave a measure of control and influence back into their hands. They felt that through this study and the CHE they could influence what the current Minister of Education will do in future when instituting educational policy reforms.

Nonetheless I needed to verify that information disclosed during interviews was valid and reliable. I used other respondents to verify and cross-check information, I also had informal discussions with other staff members within those departments to verify the information. I also used the documents prepared by the departments and faculties for interim registration of qualifications with SAQA as a way of verifying the data gathered. Merriam (1988:10) states that unlike other research designs such as experiments, surveys or historical research, case study designs do not claim any particular methods of data collection or data analysis. As a

result any and all methods of gathering data from testing to interviewing can be used in a case study, although certain techniques are used more than others. This was another advantage of using a case study.

3.5 Data Collection

I used multiple methods of collecting data that included analysis of policy documents, interviews with key respondents and statistical data on the University of Pretoria's student records. Below I describe each method in detail and discuss the process followed in gathering data through each method.

Data sources included policy documents about the NQF developed by SAQA, as well as the University of Pretoria's Admissions policy, documents of meeting proceedings when the institution's strategy in response to the NQF was tabulated, communiqués to faculty on how to comply with SAQA's requirements for interim registration, and curriculum plans submitted to SAQA for the interim registration of qualifications. I used the NQF policy to provide baseline data on the initial policy goals of the NQF. The documents from the University of Pretoria captured how the institution and individual faculties responded to the NQF policy. These documents represented facts about policy developers' understanding of the intended policy goals of the NQF and how they should be achieved as well as the University of Pretoria's Executive Management and Faculty Management's interpretation of the NQF policy goals and how they perceived these goals would be achieved within their context.

Bryman (2001:369) explains that the term 'documents' covers a very wide range of different kinds of sources including personal letters and photos, official documents, mass media outputs, internet sources and so forth. The emphasis is placed on the fact that these documents have not been produced at the request of the researcher; instead, they are out there simply waiting to be assembled and analysed (Bryman 2001:370). The advantage of using documents in research is that they are non-reactive, meaning that because they have not been created specifically for the purposes of social research, the possibility of influencing or changing their content can be largely discounted. As a result the validity of the data is protected (Bryman 2001:370).

My second source of data was face-to-face interviews with senior members of staff. Using snowball sampling where a small number of individuals who have the characteristics in which the researcher is interested are interviewed and then used to identify others who qualify for

inclusion (Cohen et al 2000:104). My interviews began with a senior member of staff who was coordinating the submission of programmes to SAQA for interim registration of qualifications on behalf of the entire university. From this interview he suggested names of other senior staff members who had been in the committee with him or who had been responsible for similar coordinatory functions within their own faculties and departments.

The key participants were selected firstly on the basis of whether they had been tasked with facilitating the formatting of programmes for submission to SAQA within their departments. This automatically meant that I would have in my sample staff who had been employed by the university for five years or more. I was hoping that they would be able to provide a before and after account of their experiences with the NQF. Secondly, using university records on student admissions, I identified faculties and departments where learners were admitted into the institution through RPL. I then asked academics responsible for those programmes to participate in the study.

I ended up with one senior member of staff from the administrative department and nine senior staff members who were heads of department or deputy heads of department. Amongst them there were staff who had RPL learners in their classes and those without. Except for the staff member from an administrative department, all the other respondents were also teachers within their own faculties. One of the nine respondents was also a dean of a faculty. In total I had ten respondents.

As senior members of staff and academics who were also involved in the actual teaching, learning and assessment of learners, the respondents interviewed would be able to provide the academics' perspective on their interpretation of the policy goals of the NQF and what they found feasible to implement within their contexts and the type of challenges they faced during implementation. An indication of institutional practice in terms of how end-users implemented the policy goals of the NQF. These respondents would also help determine the differential impact of the NQF on the various faculties at the University of Pretoria, showing whether it facilitated any real change in teaching, learning and access and any discrepancies between what the policy intended, and what the institution understood.

I also consulted statistical data indicating how RPL was used as an access mechanism into the University of Pretoria. In addition the respondents teaching RPL students were interviewed on the type of learning support these learners required.

I used semi-structured interviews, which I recorded with a tape recorder. I had prepared an interview protocol that included a list of topics to be covered during the interview. The topics were derived from the literature review and my personal experience; they focused on access, teaching, learning and assessment (see appendix 1). From the literature I gathered that previous studies had focussed more on the impact of the NQF with regards to RPL, I sought to focus on its impact on access into the university. I also gathered that previous studies had focussed on the structural and administrative aspects of the NQF and SAQA. I sought to focus on the impact of the NQF on the core business of higher education institutions, which is teaching and learning. I included aspects on assessment because the main way that education institutions verify the effects of teaching and learning is through assessment, and for me to determine the extent of the impact, I would have to see how the NQF led to changes in the assessment practices of the institution.

I found the interview protocol useful because it provided a clear guide of what I needed to cover and it provided flexibility for me to ask questions arising from the conversation which were not initially included in the protocol. As Cohen et al. (2000:314) notes, the interview protocol ensures that even when some questions arise from the conversation, by and large all the questions will be asked and a similar wording will be used from interviewee to interviewee. The level of flexibility offered by semi-structured interviews also allows for questions that are not directly relevant to a specific interviewee to be reworded or eliminated during the process of the interview.

As mentioned the major limitation that I encountered in using the interview protocol in my study was that some respondents insisted on seeing the questions that I wanted to cover in the interview prior to the interview and they insisted on preparing themselves in line with the questions. This made it difficult for me to exercise the flexibility afforded by semi-structured interviewing as outlined above in the fullest sense. For example I had situations where the respondents were uncomfortable when I asked questions that were not included in the protocol but were more related to what they were saying. There were also respondents who wanted the interview to follow very strictly the order of the topics included in the protocol. As mentioned already I used other data sources such as informal discussions with other staff members and documents to overcome this limitation.

The interviews provided descriptions of the experiences as well as explanations behind the experiences of the end-users. According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000: 146)

interviews allow the gathering of facts, accessing beliefs about facts, identifying feelings and motives, commenting on the standards of actions [i.e. what could be done about situations], present or previous behaviour and eliciting reasons and explanations from the respondents. Table 3.1 below summarises the methodology that was followed in the study.

Table 3.1 Summary of Research Design

Research Question	Instrument for data collection	Purpose
Q1: Impact on Access	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Records on RPL admissions 2. Interviews with RPL managers 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To determine how many students were admitted through the RPL mechanism of the NQF 2. To determine the mechanisms they used to facilitate access, retention and throughput of RPL learners
Q2: Impact on teaching and learning	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Interviews with key higher education personnel involved in the initial compilation of qualifications according to NQF requirements 4. Interviews with academic staff with and without RPL learners in their classes 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. To determine how the teaching, learning and assessment practices of the institution have changed in response to <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the emergent learner needs of RPL learners • the rearticulation of programmes into OBE, unit standards and level descriptors as required by the NQF • vertical and horizontal articulation of qualifications • the ways in which teaching and learning support enabled the achievement of the critical cross-field outcomes
Q3: Differential impact on faculties	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. comparative analysis of faculty data collected from steps 1-5 above 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 4. Determine how NQF was implemented in the different faculties of the University of Pretoria and the type of challenges they faced

3.6 Validity

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000:105) note that earlier versions of validity were essentially based on the view that validity was a demonstration that a particular instrument in fact measures what it purports to measure. They posit that more recently validity has taken many forms, and in qualitative research it can be addressed through the honesty, depth, richness and scope of the data achieved, the participants approached, the extent of triangulation and the objectivity of the researcher (ibid.).

Bryman notes that very often qualitative researchers have tended to employ the terms reliability and validity in very similar ways to quantitative researchers when seeking to develop criteria for assessing research (2001:272). He offers instead alternative criteria

suitable for evaluating qualitative research (ibid.). Guba and Lincoln (1994 in Bryman 2001:272) raised the concern and made the assertion for developing alternative criteria for evaluating qualitative research. They argue that the simple application for quantitative evaluation measures in qualitative research presuppose that a single absolute account of social reality is feasible. Instead they argue that there can be several accounts of social reality (Bryman 2001:272).

Guba and Lincoln (1994 in Bryman 2001:272) propose two primary criteria for assessing qualitative research - trustworthiness and authenticity. Trustworthiness is made up of four criteria each of which has an equivalent criterion in quantitative research: credibility, which parallels internal validity; transferability which parallels external validity; dependability which parallels reliability and confirmability which parallels objectivity. I will discuss these in more detail and follow with a description of how I ensured that my study adhered to these criteria.

3.6.1 Credibility

Credibility is concerned with ensuring that the account that a particular researcher arrives at in their study is acceptable to others. This is ensured by establishing that the research process is carried out according to good practice and that it stands up to scrutiny by scholars in the discipline who will confirm that the researcher has correctly understood the phenomena under study (Bryman 2001:272). Triangulation is recommended as one of the techniques that ensure the credibility of a study (ibid).

Bryman (2001:274) notes that triangulation entails using more than one method or source of data in the study of social phenomena. In this study I used institutional documents drawn from student records, reports of meetings capturing the institution's handling of the implementation of the NQF and interview data from respondents. All these methods of data collection facilitated triangulation as it enabled the use of multiple sources of data. This ensured that what was tabled in meetings as institutional strategies to respond to the NQF goals could be cross-checked against what ordinary academics were doing on the ground thus enhancing the credibility of the findings.

Other techniques to ensure credibility recommended by Bryman (2001:272) include respondent validation. This technique involves the researcher providing the people on whom she has conducted research with an account of her findings. The aim of the exercise is to seek corroboration or otherwise of the account that the researcher has arrived at. In my study I used auditing* and peer-debriefing processes. I made a presentation to members of the editorial team for the CHE study group as part of the peer-debriefing process. From this meeting comments regarding my progress in the research, the type of data that I had gathered as well as the preliminary conclusions derived from the patterns developed from the data were made and the necessary changes were made. Through these processes a trail of evidence collected through the research process as well as copies of interview transcripts were reviewed and discussed with senior researchers for further validation purposes.

3.6.2 Transferability

Qualitative researchers are encouraged to produce what Geertz (1973 in Bryman 2001:272) call thick descriptions – rich accounts of the details of a culture. Guba and Lincoln (1994 in Bryman 2001:272) argue that a thick description provides others with what they refer to as databases for making judgements about the possible transferability of findings to other milieux. By conducting a case study, I was giving in depth accounts of the University of Pretoria that would provide thick descriptions on which other researchers could determine the possible transferability of the findings to other universities.

3.6.3 Dependability

To enhance dependability Guba and Lincoln (1994 in Bryman 2001:273) recommend using auditing. In the previous section (see 3.6.1) I have demonstrated how I used this technique to ensure credibility.

3.6.4 Confirmability

Confirmability is concerned with ensuring that the researcher can be shown to have acted in good faith i.e. they have not overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations to sway the conduct of the research and findings deriving from it. Through auditing and peer reviews, it was possible to ensure that this was minimised in my research.

* where a trail of evidence collected through the research process is kept

3.6.5 Authenticity

The criteria to determine authenticity include fairness – i.e. whether the research fairly represents different viewpoints among members of the research setting; ontological authenticity – i.e. whether the research helps members to arrive at a better understanding of their social milieu; educative authenticity – i.e. whether the research helps members to appreciate better the perspectives of other members of their social setting; catalytic authenticity – i.e. whether the research acted as an impetus to members to engage in action to change their circumstances and lastly tactical authenticity – i.e. whether the research has empowered members to take the steps necessary for engaging in action (Bryman 2001:274). I recognised that the inclusion of senior members of staff in my study gave on the one hand a before and after perspective in the implementation of the NQF, and it also gave a perspective of senior management and teaching staff on the NQF. On the other hand it gave a one-sided perspective on the matter. I could have included teaching staff from the lower ranks of the institution to ensure that all the viewpoints among the members of the research setting were fairly represented. This is a major limitation of my study, which affects the authenticity of the study. However as the first empirical study on the impact of the SANQF from the perspective of the end users focussing on access, teaching and learning, the study offers an in-depth descriptive-analytic recount of the change process. Through triangulation the credibility of the data gathered is ensured and therefore the study serves as a basis for further research where its limitations could be overcome.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data gathered through interviews were transcribed using a standard transcription machine. The qualitative data analysis was done on three levels. The first identified the emerging themes from the literature on the NQF. Miles and Huberman (1994:58) refer to a start list. This list comes from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problem areas and key variables that the researcher brings to the study. In my study I used the start list to develop the first level of codes, which were used to conduct the first level of analysis. Where additional themes were identified, these were included in the first level.

The second level of analysis involved combining themes that are related together to form what Cohen et al. (2000:148) call a domain analysis. The third level involved making

linkages between the domains and establishing relationships between them. Speculative inferences were also made to determine the relationships between the domains. Summaries of each domain were made, then clustered according to those that collaborated with each other and those that indicated discrepancies. This process involved testing the conceptual analysis on policy positioning, and theories of action and theories in use developed at the beginning of the study. The other component involved generating alternative explanations to the patterns of the themes. Descriptive analysis on RPL student admissions was compiled to describe institutional patterns.

The next chapter presents an analysis and discussion of the data gathered through documents and interview transcripts. The analysis is given according to end-user accounts on the impact of the NQF on access, teaching and learning at the University Pretoria.

CHAPTER 4

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS:

ANALYSIS AND REFLECTIONS ON THE IMPACT OF THE NQF

4.1 Introduction

This research distinguished itself from competing research on the NQF by drawing empirical attention to the end-user perspectives on the impact and effects of the framework on institutional practice. In pursuing this focus, the data on impact was collected within South Africa's largest residential institution (i.e. before the recent mergers between higher education institutions in SA) with arguably the broadest range of higher education programmes and qualifications. This chapter presents the findings from this impact study and foregrounds the voices and experiences of end-users within the university environment as they tried to make sense of the NQF within their own Faculties, Centres and Departments.

I will begin by describing the broad institutional response from the vantage point of senior managers, leaders and administrators at the University of Pretoria; I will then describe and analyze three categories of responses from the academic department level (broadly speaking). The three categories of responses are (a) those that indicated a complete adoption and implementation of the NQF i.e. showed compliance; (b) those who adopted only the format of the NQF for structuring their programmes and (c) those who only implemented aspects of the NQF that were relevant to their context while excluding those that were not. Within each of the broad categories I will indicate how academics [faculty] initially responded to the NQF policy; the outcomes of the responses i.e. what were the effects of the policy on individuals; the justifications given to how academics responded to the policy thus answering the 'why?' question to their behaviour and perceptions; the models that were used to implement, challenge or reject the policy and/or some of its goals and assumptions and finally other factors outside of the NQF that impacted on the individuals and how they were driving change in their practice. This cluster exposes the fact that there were other forces that had nothing to do with the NQF that were also driving curriculum reform. I will conclude by explaining these responses in the evaluative canvas offered in the conceptual framework adopted for this inquiry.

4.2 Institutional Responses to the NQF

In this section I present findings that indicate the general response adopted by the university management in responding to the NQF. It illustrates how the University of Pretoria interpreted the NQF policy, how the university positioned itself with regards to the NQF policy, what informed that positioning as well as what became the institutional theory of action i.e. the working definition of the role that the university would undertake in implementing the NQF policy. I also indicate what the university hoped would inform theories-in-use for faculty practice i.e. what academics on the ground would do in response to the NQF policy. I begin with this analysis because it indicates the first signs of discrepancy between policy and practice, and provides the scope for interpreting the NQF policy for academics in the various faculties.

4.2.1 Teaching – curriculum development

In this section I discuss how the teaching, learning and assessment practises of the university of Pretoria changed in response to implementation of the NQF policy. I begin by discussing how pedagogical matters dealing with the practice of teaching, learning and assessment as proposed by the NQF policy were reduced to formatting qualifications into looking like there was real change. Formatting refers to putting programmes together in the structure required by SAQA for registering qualifications on the NQF. Drawing from interviews with senior members of staff, work samples of assignments and projects completed by students in various departments, university calendars of programme offerings; I illustrate how modularisation, identification of elective, core and fundamental knowledge, allocation of credits, and formulating teaching and learning into Outcomes Based Education was reduced to a 'cut-and-paste' exercise that largely left the university of Pretoria continuing with business as usual without any fundamental change to how it teaches, facilitates learning and conducts assessment.

The concept of modularisation was simply interpreted in terms of equating semester subjects into modules and dividing credits equally between the different subjects.

“To a large extent yes I think we were equating outcomes with modules...Look at the way that qualifications or programmes were published in the year books prior NQF, ... prior 2000 many of the programmes consisted out of what we called at that stage courses or subjects. And the subject was structured into two semester courses for the year course. In many instances students had to pass the first semester course before they could continue with the second semester one. And they should pass one year course before they could continue with the next level. One of the aims of the NQF was in many faculties to say that try and put

modules in place with prerequisites so that a student can enrol for a module and then after having done that module continue with other modules. Other ...[eh]... impact was identifying what was fundamental in programmes, what was core modules and what was elective modules. Again one must look at the history and say but students always had the option to select major subjects and ...[eh]... subjects of choice."

The identification of core, elective and fundamental modules was also done arbitrarily without real consideration about what a qualifying graduate would need to demonstrate.

"With the implementation of the NQF we started identifying certain modules as fundamental modules, core modules and elective modules. Those were terminology that came in when the NQF was implemented. It might have been around under different names but faculties never really concentrated on the differences between modules. With the implementation people had to restructure their qualifications they had to identify what was fundamental, what are the core modules and what are the electives. One of the other things that came in was loading credits onto modules. Credits being based on notional hours was sort of a new concept at that stage; not sort of I think yes we can say it was a totally new concept."

Credits were allocated according to the number of modules rather than the actual weight of each module or the notional hours required to complete a module.

"The NQF requires a qualification of a 3-year degree to be 360 credits minimum, we know that to study a degree normally takes 3 years; so it was sub-divided into 120, 120, 120 per year. And then based on the number of modules that traditionally goes into a first year of a degree in humanities they say that this is the number of modules that goes into the first year so he will get to plus minus 120 if we work on the basis of 6 credits per module in the first year, 10 credits in the second year then 15 credits in the final year"

The formatting of the qualifications therefore appears to be in line with the requirements of the NQF, however closer inspection indicates that the processing and deep thinking that was meant to accompany requalification was not done. Proper audits of programmes in terms of what content really needs to be retained and how applied knowledge can be incorporated was not really done. That is the details that indicate in-depth processing and analysis of restructuring programme offerings is really lacking, which implies that even the formatting of qualifications was cosmetic, done for purposes of interim registration with SAQA rather than rethinking teaching and learning.

The above quotes illustrate that the university only did the minimum requirements demanded by the NQF policy. Unlike technikons they did not translate this into anything else that would change the practice of teaching and learning.

"My sense is that with the Technikons people went much further than that; they went down originally to range statements, and indicators and all of that crap whereas the universities never took the finer formulations of the NQF seriously; very few universities did. The

Technikons took these things literally, so they would go down and design every single thing ...[eh]... in fine detail ...[eh]... according to every stipulations of the NQF; the universities by and large didn't do that."

The university management made it possible for faculty to continue with business as usual and allow as minimal interruptions as possible. This they did in two ways, through the South African Universities Vice Chancellor's Association (SAUVCA) and through what one senior member of staff referred to as 'technocrats'. SAUVCA ensured that the programme offerings and structure of qualifications would remain the same by arguing for whole qualifications instead of adopting the unit standards approach proposed by the NQF policy.

"...universities fought very hard through SAUVCA to not even get involved with unit standards; they wanted whole qualifications.... whole qualification is nothing more and nothing less than the *status quo*, that's what we've been doing all the time....it simply meant that in terms of the submissions of our programmes for approval by SAQA it appeared as if we were conforming; in reality, it was just the outer cover, if you will, of the book that had changed, but the content, everything else, remained the same."

The 'technocrats' ensured that the process of registering qualifications on the NQF would be as painless as possible.

"...So they got a few technocrats who would package this stuff in what appeared to be appropriate language but it was very very superficial. It didn't really take down the NQF language and the NQF discourses"

A senior member of staff tasked with coordinating the process of registering qualifications with SAQA recalls what his role entailed.

"...firstly we studied the material that came in from SAQA, then we provided that material to the Deans; and the Heads of Departments. We had meetings with various faculties on an individual basis, provided with the format that qualifications had to prepare for registration. We gave assistance while they were busy doing this, and then eventually in June 2000 everything was received by our offices. The material was organised in a meaningful way per faculty, and then we delivered it to the SAQA."

The level of interrogation of the NQF policy remained focused on the technicalities surrounding registration of qualifications. It did not include developing a strategy on how the university will ensure that issues around access, teaching and learning would be addressed in accordance to the policy. Yet another comment from a different senior member of staff demonstrated this further.

"A colleague of mine [XXX] and I the two of us together compiled a program in Microsoft Access which enabled you to type in the, the things that was asked little bit by little bit. And

in the end it would give you that big involved report... In the form that they wanted and that made the process much easier because it was... you only got this little bit on the screen that you have to think about, what the real purpose of this could be and what knowledge... what of the imbedded knowledge that you had to have to start this. How are you going to assess this? So being... the program broke everything down into bits so you could only think of that little bit at a time. And at the end it would give you the entire structure.... Well we decided that we saw that there was a whole lot of struggles and we decided, "But this is not that difficult if you break it down to little bits, to chunk it. Then it could work". And we actually ...[um]..., demonstrated our program at various conferences and there's a whole lot of universities and companies that bought our program... "

Therefore implementation focused on giving SAQA what it required, in a way that it required and then returning to business as usual. What is remarkable is that this worked because the university management did not press for anything further, simply because their interpretation of the policy remained at this level and did not go further into pedagogical matters. In turn the university management responded in a vague and superficial way, and overall they appeared to have done what the policy required of them.

The following quote from a senior member of staff illustrates this:

"There was buy in, I think, to the broad goals. But the broad goals are so ...[uhm]... well formulated in the SAQA Act, and so incredibly universal and progressive. And nobody could really disagree with the broad goals. I mean, who would disagree with increasing access, who would disagree with the goal of ...[ehm]... enabling people to move up and across the ladder of the NQF. It was never the issue for higher education. I never got the sense that people were resisting that..."

In turn the message carried down to faculty ensured that the implementation remained superficial with emphasis placed on the format of qualifications. Here respondents used what I call broad criteria meaning that they specified unit standards, learning outcomes, assessment criteria, purpose statements etc. The quote below captures this:

" ... in implementing the NQF very often we were given a template by the university and that template would say these are the kinds of things that need to be reflected in every qualification and in every programme. And the typical things were ...[ehm]... you need to have very clear statements of outcomes or outcome based statements of the purpose of the particular qualification or that particular programme all the way down to a particular module. So the outcomes based language or the outcomes based format for each of these ...[eh]... educational activities was probably the most ...[ehm]... [eh]... obvious implication for us on implementing the... the NQF. The second thing was that we were... and continue to be encouraged to use assessment criteria that are made explicit in the ...[eh]... organisation and ...[eh]... design of our programmes. Those are the two big things the statement of outcomes and the assessment criteria. That in my view was the only way in which universities ...[ehm] ... grappled individually with the NQF."

Therefore while the university in principle agreed with the policy goals of the NQF, they also had reservations with implementing it 'as is'. Therefore they adopted a position that would allow flexibility to keep what worked in their context and exclude what didn't agree with their context. In order to explain the response by the university, a number of issues come to light. The first one alludes to a fight for institutional autonomy; one senior member of staff explained this in the following quote:

"...The universities have a different history to technikons or colleges of education. They have a tradition of being very autonomous with respect to how they deal with the curriculum; so, deeply embedded in the culture of universities is "we will decide how we teach and to whom we teach - so they do not have a tradition of state intervention in curriculum, and so they are always very suspicious...."

The second issue alluded to practical challenges of implementing the NQF policy with very little guidelines informing practice:

"Did we know at that time how to address Assessment...? Associated Assessment Criteria with Outcomes and to define it through principle? To define separately the two concepts of an Outcome and Associated Assessment Criteria. And we were very confused. Because SAQA came with the presumption that this was a brand new system and all of us had to learn and knew how to teach... So we didn't think to put in a lot of energy to, to, to... relearn how to teach ... So we were not all that cooperative and we simply took the examples that they said and we put that in there because we didn't... we were uncomfortable with what they were at. We couldn't understand the philosophy for one, we don't believe that if something is Democratic then it is above criticism. And therefore we were hesitant to the last one."

In introducing the policy, policy developers neglected to provide sufficient capacity to end users to make the language of the policy accessible to them. The policy remained a foreign concept that did not begin at the level of end-users, it did not begin from the known to the unknown i.e. there was no migration [scaffolding] from current practice to the desired state. This was a fundamental flaw that kept the vision of change proposed by the NQF policy locked in the minds of its developers, and inaccessible to end-users.

"So we had all different concepts and when you put them all together there was total confusion. It was quite clear that there were different perceptions. So the rules were not clear. Not in the way that the SAQA thing was proposed to us. Right from the very start it said that the rules were not going to be clear..."

A senior member of staff explained how the administrative work that accompanied the implementation process seemed divorced from the initial goals of the NQF.

"...Where I think universities got disenchanted with was when that [the NQF] came with an administrative language and a bureaucratic packaging which made the original goals seem very very distant from the policies of SAQA and the NQF. And that's where I think the

universities just stopped engaging, however they were under ...[eh].... you know legislation required to submit their programmes... what people resisted was that the mechanisms for getting there was so obtuse, was so complicated, was so alienating because it was language that you know institutions just couldn't see the connection between all this arcane language and the sublime goals of the NQF; and so people just didn't buy in at that level..."

In the quote below, another senior staff member from a different department tasked with coordinating the overall implementation of the NQF policy at institutional level indicated the additional work that the NQF implementation demanded from academic staff:

"...But the fact that implementation of the NQF was generating a lot of paper work and a lot of administrative work made many staff negative about it... Again looking at the NQF one must look at SAQA; the way that SAQA was structured. I'm talking NSB's and SGB's; and the goals of putting in fields of study in NSB's and SGB's. On the whole I think it was unrealistic to expect that universities could conform to ...[pause] such structures as was supposed to in my view to put the NSB's and SGB's in place... people had to attend to meetings of SGB's every afternoon;"

The link between the NQF policy, pedagogy and quality improvement was not clearly visible and convincingly articulated in the NQF policy – creating another barrier to facilitating implementation of the policy from an academic perspective. As this respondent so eloquently put it:

"Right from the very start it said that the rules were not going to be clear. They are supposed to be formulated as you go on. Now this is based on what we in Biological Sciences see as the process of evolution. That means ...[uh]...[um]... you get spontaneous mutations and then you get a process of selection. And whatever survived that becomes the rule. However everything can become like dinosaurs and then within one crisis you will have that whole... in what you thought was correct then die down. Because you did not correct at all and it was not ready to stand up to the new circumstance. Which is why we hate to put anything above criticism. I mean we are human beings, not just evolved. We are human beings and that is where the crucial thing comes in..."

What is significant about the above quote is that it captures the origin of the resistance towards the NQF policy. Reference to a process of evolution suggests that although the principles of the policy were not under question, the strategy adopted for implementation implied that as part of a democratic process, only the most popular and common perspectives would survive and determine the strategy for how the entire NQF policy would be implemented. This would be done without having tested whether the strategy for implementing the NQF was necessarily the best for the different contexts of various higher education institutions, programme offerings and the South African educational context in general. The fact that the NQF policy was not tested and was intended to be implemented 'as is' simply because of its utopian ideals posed a serious challenge

because the possibility of leading the whole country into an educational crisis were most evident. The democratic process within which the policy was developed assumed that the policy was legitimate, even when no empirical research was suggesting that such curriculum reform was educationally sound.

Participating in the committees that were overseeing the implementation of the policy, presented a conflict of interests for academics. For instance the quote below from one of the lecturers records that participating in the SGB's and other structures meant time away from conducting research, and marking papers. For academics, research, teaching and marking of papers were core activities that defined their roles as educators, this was more a priority for them than the activities presented by the NQF policy implementation.

“...they [academics] want to be busy doing research and marking papers, and now they have to be busy with rewriting, and sometime for the first time to write things like that you had been teaching for many years..”

The policy also suggested that people had to adopt a new way of formulating and writing their programmes. Which is ironic because the link between the old and the new ways of developing curricula and teaching was not made evident to academics in the policy. The policy did not include capacity building which would have made it possible for academics to see the need for change in how they taught and how they assessed learning. As experts in their own teaching practice and subject offerings, the policy was suggesting that non-experts would have a say in what academics had been doing for many years – as this quote from a lecturer suggests

“Because now in perspective I can tell you that we already were progressing far in terms of Outcomes Based Education in terms of how it evolved now. And to say that look you've got to think right from the beginning very new and all that you've learned is of no application now. But that already was very exaggerated to put it mildly. But that is the way that it came through from the people who presented SAQA at the university that day.”

Moreover the NQF policy was driven by SAQA, a body that did not seem to connect to the goals of improving teaching and learning practice. For instance one lecturer indicated that the distance emanated from the background of people constituting the structures that were meant to develop criteria for standards.

“...and people sitting on SGB's were not always academics. Academics sometimes can best get into discussions with colleagues also from academia. On the SGB's you didn't always find just academics, in many instances people coming in from the market place, from industry were sitting on the SGB's....”

The composition of the people sitting in Standards Generating Bodies seemed to widen the distance and make the relevance to teaching and learning practice even more distant. The impression created is that part of the stakeholders were not traditionally considered to be custodians of teaching and learning like in the case of universities. Moreover it was unnatural for university delegates to discuss pedagogical issues with people from industry who were outside academia, unlike in the case of Technikons. Therefore while the process was recognised as democratic in that it included stakeholder participation. Its relevance to education practice was not evident to respondents, further making implementation of the policy difficult because it did not seem to address issues about teaching and learning, but rather emphasised issues around formatting of qualifications and employability of graduates.

The next quote, problematises the role played by SAQA in facilitating the implementation of the NQF policy. The idea presented is that from its conception, SAQA by virtue of its constitution, emphasised the administrative process of registering qualifications rather than emphasising quality improvement and requalification of instructional offerings. One senior member of staff indicated this:

“...putting in place structures like the Council on Higher Education that has had a lot of impact on the quality of teaching than the NQF as such; because the HEQC's role was to ensure that the quality of each qualification is always at the highest possible standard. Now they are bringing into place the areas of quality assurance from time to time in higher education institutions. Which forces academics and academic departments and faculties from time to time to evaluate what they are doing. By sometimes upgrading the standard of what they are offering and to me the continued implementation of the continued upliftment of quality is more ready to initiatives from the CHE than the initiatives from SAQA. In my frame of mind the NQF was perhaps too close to SAQA which is a body that really records and registers qualifications. It might have had bigger success if the whole exercise of implementing the NQF did not come from a body that is registering the qualifications, but from a body like the CHE which is the guardian of quality.”

The fact that SAQA drove the NQF implementation further increased the distance between policy and practice, whereas initiatives by the Council on Higher Education was interpreted as directly impacting on teaching and learning practice, and thus led to continuing implementation and review of practice much more effectively than the NQF.

4.2.2 Access

The university policy, titled “Policy with regard to postgraduate students cases” document number S1791/96 [amended G 27/96] makes provision for admission on the basis of an academic route and of standard competence. The academic route refers to where a student has proven himself on the basis of academic achievement. This access route mainly describes how access is traditionally provided into the institutions for the majority of learners. The second option resembles Recognition of Prior Learning in that access can be granted on the basis of standard competence. Standard competence can be evaluated in three ways; by means of a written motivation by the student, which is evaluated by the head of the department; the successful completion of an oral or written entrance examination in which one or more external examiners are involved; and a submission to the senate. Although I describe access provided through evaluation of standard competence as Recognition of Prior Learning, it needs to be said that no mention is made in this policy about Recognition of Prior Learning. In fact I learnt that the university of Pretoria does not have a written access policy focusing only on RPL.

Access through evaluation of standard competence as described in the university policy is only limited to post graduate admissions and is not applicable to undergraduate students. Firstly this suggests a position adopted by the university of Pretoria that RPL does not extend to first degrees; the entrance requirements for first degrees is largely still matriculation exemption. This point was corroborated in the interviews with senior management staff. The following quotes from senior members of staff from two different faculties illustrate this point.

“Universities use, not a special system, but an existing senate system in which the prevailing discourse was one of standards and not one of open access.”

Therefore with regards to policy on admission into the university, the findings indicate that the university access policy mainly remained the same. The university continued to rely on traditional methods developed before the NQF policy was instituted to facilitate access into undergraduate programmes. While the above quote speaks of the general practice regulating access into the university, the one below is more detailed about the access routes employed by the university. The quote from another senior member of staff also alludes to learning support in the form of academic development programmes offered to under-prepared learners entering undergraduate programmes.

"We have in place programmes like what one can call bridging programmes at the Faculty of Natural and Agricultural Sciences but it was then just Natural Sciences. There were programmes in place to allow students to master certain skills, life-skills and to address the basic science subjects before starting with formal first year level and second year level courses. Eventually it evolved into what is nowadays called the UPFY programme, it stands for the University of Pretoria Foundation Year programme... The people that goes into those programmes are students who come from the rural areas in many instances and students who did pass matric but not at the required levels that allows them to commence with university studies. During that programme they are given the opportunity to master subjects that are at matric level or grade 12 level and higher and eventually commence with degree studies. If they pass the foundation year"

At undergraduate level, the university appears to rely on academic development programmes to accommodate the needs of under-prepared learners, and Recognition of Prior Learning is not included in facilitating access. As one senior member of staff suggests in the quote below, the university rules make it difficult to fully implement RPL across the board as it was intended by the NQF policy

"... the university has rules and regulations for basic reasons. You know you can't allow anybody in. Because if you do it once you work for quality. And you know you can't just allow mediocrity to slip in by the door."

However, RPL, as discussed above, is being implemented at post-graduate level across numerous faculties. One other senior member of staff indicates how it is being implemented and some of the challenges that make it difficult to implement RPL fully in the university context.

"The Senate Sub-Committee would meet and it would be a combination of deans, the registrar, the vice-rector. The Senate Sub-Committee would be the forum for dealing with that. There would be a combination of academics and administrators. There would be a group of academics who feel that by allowing people in who fall short of the criteria was to compromise standards. And so there would be this hell of a debate that would break out in every meeting between a dean in a particular faculty who says but this person is really good, this person has 30 years experience here in disability education, how can we insist on an honours degree for a masters. The other person would say but experience is not the same as theoretical and abstract training; ...[eh]... we should not allow the University of Pretoria to go down the sewer pipe and reduce standards."

Concerns about dropping of standards appear to be the main concern regarding the implementation of RPL. As a result implementation of RPL is minimal and justification for this includes the fact that the university is able to attract learners who meet its requirements without having to rely on RPL. One of the senior members of staff indicated that

“...a university like Pretoria says we have large numbers of students coming in the normal way, that is, with exemption, and the last thing we want to do is struggle with ...[ehm]... admitting students who don't meet the requirements, “we don't need them” so to speak”

Another senior member of staff indicated that

“...when you have 40 000 students as your primary clientele, and most of those students are students who have matric exemption passes, you don't need ...[ehm]... RPL students, you know what I mean...”

However, the issue of demand is not the only factor that makes RPL less appealing to university management. The quality of prior learning that learners bring with them to higher education has also been cited as a fundamental issue that make RPL less appealing. One head of department indicated this in the following quote:

“What is the quality of the students coming in from the three-year Diploma plus the ACE into the Honours?” Do they cope? They battle. They really battle with the Honours because there is one thing that we miss here. ...[Uh]... actually what we miss is the students. And that would be if there were such a thing as the Essop of the Higher Education Institution of the University. The university culture that was normally inculcated from people that work within an environment. There is a big difference between that traditional university culture. Even if it is from Venda or it doesn't matter where it was. It differs from the culture from a college.”

Another senior member of staff made the connection to the quality of formal education in general

“Needless to say there is enough evidence that even students with matriculation, and even students with the minimum qualifications struggle enormously to meet the demands of higher education - in part because there has been a watering down of matric.... When I think of our current masters students, I can tell you now that the honours level qualification has an enormous range in South Africa from really really poor to very good. And so the student might have met the formal admission requirements but would struggle enormously. Now when you have that experience the last thing you want to do as a university is to take students who don't even meet the formal requirements; unfortunately.”

The issue about the quality of prior learning is indicative of the challenges faced by under-prepared learners. The head of department elaborated on this point in the following quote

“So those students were also the main culprits, if I can call them as such....[they] battled with the work. They come through a system where work was being done in terms of prescribed material, where they followed the rule you could say and tried to equip themselves in terms of prescribed material. And they never worked beyond that. And the thing is that they come into the Honours programme it's another style, it's another dimension. It's another way of subjecting the person to the learning environment. So their learning environment is changed and the way the people want them to respond is different.”

Another factor that makes RPL less appealing refers to the type of teaching instruction that learners are exposed to prior to entering university. The quote above compares students who enter post graduate studies with a basic university degree and those with a diploma or certificate from a college. Therefore prior learning, be it in the form of formal education from matric or other forms of learning, make tertiary education very difficult for under-prepared learners. In short, the narrative indicates how the university responded to the NQF policy – it agreed in principle with its goals, however the policy gave little direction on how it should be implemented. It required a lot of time and resources to implement and therefore to minimise disruptions the university committed limited resources and effort to its implementation. Since the goals linking teaching and learning practice were not clearly visible in the NQF policy, and the body mandated to drive the implementation of the NQF policy had very little to do with quality assurance of teaching and learning practice, this issue was ignored and business continued as usual.

The position adopted by the university of Pretoria can be described as what in psychology is called “approach avoidance”; a defence mechanism that appears conformist and agreeable in principle, but does not result in major visible change. Instead of adopting a firm stance and challenging issues that it did not agree with, the university avoided outright confrontation and conflict, and left individual faculty to their own devices to see how best to respond. The result is that there are different permutations of how faculties interpreted and implemented the policy.

This is reflected in the types of responses adopted in practice with regards to access, teaching, learning and assessment. I am not however suggesting that this was necessarily a ‘wrong’ approach to take by the university. I am merely describing it, the decision about whether this was the best strategy under the circumstances needs to be made with all the findings in mind, and can be a subject of further research. I elaborate on this description in the next section, which discusses the findings in terms of three categories of responses that fall along a continuum from blind compliance to avoidant implementation of the NQF policy.

4.3 Response Types to the NQF

4.3.1 Response as 'blind compliance'

This group of respondents constituted academics teaching programmes that were largely designed to respond to specific client groups. In turn their programmes, teaching and learning methods had to adjust to the changing learner needs directly. Examples are the Centre for Augmentative and Alternative Communication, the Computer Integrated Programme and the Centre for Evaluation and Assessment. All these centres offer post-graduate, specialised programmes that also incorporate community work, tenders for training to government and other organisations. The programmes were intended to drive change within specialised markets and therefore were in the process of revolutionising instruction and making it more accessible to target learners, the following excerpt from one interviewee illustrates this point:

"...obviously we are very, very involved with the specialised programme...we do a lot of community work...so...what we do is we go out into the communities as a group to ... help them facilitate the development....because it really is an ongoing thing, obviously "

Another respondent also heading a centre at the university described the function of their centre in this way:

"So we undertake various projects, contract projects as well as community related projects in the field of evaluation and assessment. So that'll range anything from an individual student test into how to relate assessment, multiple evaluation, institutional evaluation, program evaluation and systemic national and internal assessment. So it's very, very broad... very broad range. ...It focuses mainly on educational evaluation as opposed to psychological assessment"

It appears that the service nature of the centres forces the formulation of programmes to take the needs of the clients as priority, in turn the curriculum of programmes was meant to fit client needs instead of trying to fit in with the requirements of the NQF.

"No, it has nothing to do... I must be frank It has nothing to do with the NQF it's a personal vision of the type of professional I want.... A professional now in the field at least has been through assessment and evaluation cannot be a person who relies completely on their memory. It has to be a person who's gone through the required elaborate process of developing knowledge and acquiring knowledge and developing skills. So today's professional goes beyond let's say just designing, developing and designing colourful tests. That's not going to work any more and one of the reasons that we put in some computer skills for our students. And many Master students would come to university, they don't have information literacy and computer skills we insist that they either have them or develop them in the very first term. It's purely because they can't operate in today's society without them. It's nothing about standards, it's nothing about external profiling, it's about my belief that they can't operate without it. Even though teachers in classrooms where the technology is not available I believe it's going to have an effect on teachers in the classroom. They need to

have access to information, and that's the way they are going to access it particularly in poor communities."

Another respondent from a centre offering a different programme reinforced the client-centred emphasis to curriculum development and teaching practice:

"...our focus really has to be on people who have grave difficulties. We have to work in an additional way so that we communicate in a different way so that they can learn. ...our commitment is to get the persons of the country..."

It is interesting that in these cases the adoption of NQF principles of Outcomes Based Education, learner-centeredness, applied competence are used to formulate qualifications as a direct response to clients needs and not a response to the NQF policy requirements, although the programmes appear to follow the guidelines of the NQF. In elaborating on how they incorporated the goals of the program with those of the NQF the respondent indicated that:

"Firstly we started off with our vision, in terms of what are the kind of professionals we feel we need in the field of evaluation and assessment out in the field. Out in the field there anywhere from Umalusi SAQA to classroom teaching. ...And from then we developed a set of Outcomes that we wanted to come out of the program. Our own Outcomes. Once we'd got those Outcomes and that vision in place then we started to look at what are the different kinds of evaluation and assessment in terms of content that we wanted to put in place. And we developed those modules. Then looking at individual modules we then went the exit level outcome and looked at "What if we required standard in terms of knowledge (most of it is knowledge) and skills?" And try to apply that almost like in a matrix. To say these are the modules, these are the different components of the modules, how do those fit into life with the Outcomes? And to a large extent most... most of the Outcomes were covered. But I have to say there are... there are one or two that don't seem to fit that comfortably they were quite difficult to measure"

By virtue of being post-graduate programmes means that they have enrolled learners into their programmes through Recognition of Prior Learning. In terms of the NQF policy, universities are supposed to develop RPL policies to facilitate access into the institution however statistics indicate that very few learners have been admitted into the university through RPL. Table 4.1. indicates a breakdown of learners admitted through RPL from year 2000 to 2004. The figures illustrate RPL admissions for the whole university, with the Faculty of Education being the major contributor to RPL admissions at post-graduate level.

Table 4.1 Number of Students admitted through RPL

Year	No. of students
2000	23
2001	10
2002	12
2003	65
2004	32

The group of respondents characterised under ‘blind compliance’ used ‘RPL’ to allow access into programmes offered by their centres. As mentioned already access through RPL is regulated on the basis of the admissions policy for post-graduate students under a clause that recognises standard competence. The policy document recognises the head of department as the person responsible for facilitating the admission through ‘standard of competence’. Details of how to facilitate access through this medium are left completely to the discretion of departmental heads, and could differ with each individual case.

The silence of the policy on RPL as a concept is very loud. A possible interpretation is that RPL is seen as a contentious issue within the university. Silence provided a way for the management of the university of Pretoria to appear supportive of the principles of RPL by making provision for access into the institution through alternative means of admission that seem to recognise learning acquired from work experience.

The silence also meant that heads of departments within these centres are largely on their own in facilitating this process, the ultimate decision would be left up to senate. The policy does not give clear guidelines of what the head of department should look for in evaluating standard of competence, or what senate would look for in making its decision. This could be interpreted as a means to discourage excessive reliance on RPL as a means of providing access. It also indicated that very little support was given by the university to the head of department in facilitating this process.

Findings from the interviews corroborated this very clearly. In fact most of the senior members of staff who relied on this clause in the policy to admit postgraduate students into their departments expressed a sense of powerlessness and frustration. The insert

below with one head of department captured the sense of frustration and the length of time the process takes and its impact on individual learners

"Well we have two learners that... that's in the Masters program now that applied February and they still don't know if they um, will be accepted for the Masters program. They have completed the first year of study on their own... own accord and they don't know if they will be accepted before the end of the year."

The lack of policy direction is captured in the quote from one head of department when she attempted to implement RPL in her department

"The first students, the first learners um, applied to come into doing a Masters with me. First-year Research Masters. And I in fact... I'm trying to think of how many I've got... I think I've had four/five learners... five students who have been RPL'd, okay. And the first really... the first couple really suffered because the process took so long. There was no process in place in the faculty when I first sort of announced that I really needed these people to be RPL'd because we announced to the world that they had to have an Honours Degree or equivalent qualification. Or should have prior knowledge or prior learning. But when I found that there were students who wanted to apply who were in fact coming without Honours Degrees I was quite shocked to find that there wasn't a process already in place. And in fact I think that the Faculty tried to catch up with policy and likewise the university was trying to do so. So first couple of students really struggled because it took I don't know how many months, I would have to go back and look under Communications, but it took months, and months and months and months, to find out what the policy was. To find out number two what the process should be. Number three implement the process. And meanwhile I was working with all five students assuming they would get in... And I have got a staff member who was RPL'd. And I must be frank that four of the five students that were RPL'd had turned out to be the strongest students in the program."

The lack of certainty in what to expect from the RPL process makes it a very unpleasurable experience for staff and students. One head of department mentioned how unpopular she was becoming amongst her peers because the RPL process was demanding additional administrative work from her colleagues.

"But I would be getting less and less favour, you know favour for it. But it is a popular...[um]... wavelength. Because you have to go through special pig-in-a-poke, you have to learn people at the top. And you have to sit and work though these stuff and dah, dah, rah. It's a lot of paperwork for them. And they don't like it...the bureaucracy doesn't like it etc. And the point is that actually what it does is write a report on the recipient which obviously we might turn down you know. But in the interim you're annoyed. I think now when we go to faculty I'm told; "Ag nee man, here she comes again". Something like that but I've no doubt you know. I don't have a formal study of how many of the people have approached by just this one have failed. But I think it is safe to say that it is very small."

Recognition of Prior Learning is used as a means to facilitate access mainly because the target clientele do not have formal education to enter the training, but instead have relevant experience. Client commitment to the process and the demand for RPL is

actually what is driving its implementation in the institution, rather than a real desire of the university to provide alternative access for non-traditional learners

“...I think the issue of prior learning was put on the table quite heavily. And ...[um]... ja... it is not unproblematic. But I like the philosophy. I don't think we have the staff that are laden to the fact that this is happening. But I think it's got a good start in terms of... I think it has got a good base from where to work..... I can give you an example. ...[Um]... in the field that we are working the level of the expertise....Our focus really has to be on people who have grave difficulties. We have to work in an additional way so that we communicate in a different way so that they can learn. I feel that... you know we also deal with broader disabilities. But our commitment is to get the persons of the country to make sure that people with disability don't end up being locked up in rooms. Now you can imagine that the people who are involved with people with disabilities, with this person's time and are giving a lot of time and experiences and facilities etc. Are not necessarily you know the kind of people that can act and who have been trained on heavily because of our strained budget...”

The need of the students is what forces RPL implementation, rather than the university actively seeking learners with relevant prior learning or standard competence. The quote from a senior member of staff indicates how RPL is used to drive change in building the capacity of professional expertise within communities for people already doing the work but without the necessary qualifications. The RPL process is also used to drive change within communities by developing advocates who continue educating and supporting others.

“Well ...[um]... they apply for the course. And then we check if they have all their basic requirements which is a Honours in any... any ...[um]... more or less area. It doesn't really matter to us what Honours they have but they must have a Honours Degree. And to prefer that they some sort of education background a Diploma... Ja, a teaching background somewhere. If they don't have, they can also come into the program and then we have separate courses for them to enable them to understand what the educational part is. Because with many of these people aren't teachers. They don't go into a teaching profession. Most of them are trainers um, at various private companies and ...[um]... but they need a little bit of education background to enable them to do a good training job. So we have separate programs or, or courses for them that they go through to bring them on par.... They will meet the entrance requirement and those that don't really meet them but are strong candidates we put through the RPL pro... program... process”

However very little change is indicated on how this information has been fed back into the university to streamline the university administrative processes to be more friendly towards RPL. At this stage there isn't a central committee in the university tasked with coordinating the implementation of RPL. Moreover the practice on RPL indicate that faculties do not have a standard way of implementing RPL, they are left mainly to their own devices and there isn't an institutional mechanism of tracking progress made by RPL learners. What distinguished this group of departments as compliers is that they appear to

implement something that resembles an RPL process although it might not be RPL as per the NQF requirements.

“So ...[um]..., we have large numbers of people that have to go through you know sort of orals and stuff like that you know... And there is a good bureaucracy... But it [an essay] must be there written by them. You know it must be written. So they will come to me and write an essay for half-an-hour or so and say; "What do you want to say?" And the other half-an-hour you do ...[um]... answering sort of questions based on the prescribed book that we use for them. So we will be sympathetic, but we have a book on severe disabilities that we will use ...[um]... there's a couple of chapter's... introductory type chapters that we would like you to read and to go through and we would want to discuss with you an oral. On the basis that you get the external in from books and stuff like that.”

The two inserts below represent comment from senior members of staff in two different programmes that appear to have an RPL process in place which differ from each other and are unique to each department.

“Well it [RPL process] depends. It... it differs from learner to learner.... They have to compile a portfolio, an extensive portfolio. Firstly we have to get the requirements of, of what... what we thought would meet the standards. They then both compiled portfolios of... Well their portfolios were quite different... but they both compiled portfolios as to say how they, they perceive having meeting these requirements. Then we had an interview with each of them with an external person from another university in the same field to determine if this, this was legitimate and if they did meet these requirements. And then many, many letters and conversations ...[um]..., and then it went to the faculty... the faculty and to one another faculty meeting. And then it went to the Faculty Board and I hear that it was at the Senate last night. But it is a year later.”

“Now the process involves writing a motivation from either the essential Supervisor or the Coordinator of the program. That then goes to the Head of Department. The Head of Department reviews that and either adds to that or modifies it. And then a task team is put into place, a committee if you like is like a panel comprising staff of the university, staff of the faculty primarily plus additional external experts in the subject. The application comprises of two portfolios, also a CV but also an example file of the campus work, or the experience or reports they've written or anything else that could provide evidence of the candidate's ...[um]... pro-creativity. And, and then that's reviewed by the panel. Who then interview the candidate extensively for half an hour or hour and ...[um]... then the panel makes a decision in terms of the appropriateness of the candidate. That then gets sent through to the faculty. And the Faculty Board approves or doesn't ...[um]... the application of the candidate.”

Another faculty uses a very flexible form of RPL, where the HOD offers applicants support and advice on the process of selection and the requirements for admission. The process involves one-on-one consultation with the student before the actual formal application process is initiated, which then follows the format described above employed by the other two departments. This quote illustrates how

"Well firstly I would get them in and ask them very clearly why they want to do this? I need to be convinced that there's a ... chance. And then I would talk to them about the studies entailed and what you can do with it and what you can't do with it.... And then after that I would have the interview and I would say to the person that this is going to be tough, let me get the importance here this is the reality. And that then we would go out and do this. Can you think of people that who could be able to support you ...[uh]... in your community where you're are at school or whatever scenario? And then we can talk about things like what you're doing out there. I mean it doesn't help to tell me you know that we are great friends and that you have great potential. It needs to be something that's convincing in terms of the impact of what you are doing at the moment. The impetus that it would make. ...[Um]... you know where you are... And then normally I ask about two or three things . And if we need to go back to them and they they must draft a letter to me.... Now we get the application form, fill it in and send it to me. And then normally what happens is... is I will... because you know the thing is Applications through witness, through... but that's obviously.... That's not enough because ...[um]... I would also you know.... We will want to get some idea of, of the level of business owned. But through a wide description. So that's only part of it is to get the application in and get yourself motivated. The other part is making sure they will come."

RPL is used to provide admission into the programme as illustrated in the quote above. But in other programmes it is used to give learners exemption from doing certain modules

"At least the ones I've been involved with so far have not been exempted from modules in terms of the current course. They have been exempted in that they didn't have to obviously do any modules from the Honours level"

4.3.2 Response as Selective Adaptation

This group describes faculties and departments that developed a combination of what their practice demanded and what the NQF required. Their first point of response to the NQF policy was to restructure the department according to what would define the new core business of the faculty. This was done on the basis of what a professional trained in a particular qualification would be required to be. In the following quote a Head of the Department in the Education Faculty explains

"What we immediately did we took... we took norms and standards in terms of teacher Education. And we looked at the criteria, at the standard that's being described in the norms and standards. And we found that when you look at education and training there are a number of specific foci that are important to our balance of the Sciences that we are dealing with"

The NQF structure of formatting programmes and qualifications was used as a basis to restructure instructional offerings in the department. The next quote illustrates how specific areas of specialization was redefined on the basis of norms and standards for Teacher Education to define the core business of the department.

“So you could say assessment is an important component. Curriculum development is an important development aspect. The general pedagogy underpinned that learning is a crucial issue. Instructional Design or then rather you could say link Instructional Design to the Learning Adaptation could be an important focus. As well as aspects related to the Media Computer Integrated Education. We identified those as core business within our departmental structure. Because main staff of an academic department is to oversee all the interests within the department that relate to your field of specialization. Those are the sciences that we are driving. Or those are the foci that we are driving within the department.”

What is notable is that the connection between what the NQF was recommending in terms of formatting and structuring qualifications was taken beyond this to redefine the identity and strategic niche of the department. This led to some programmes that were traditionally offered in the department being discontinued, while new ones were introduced. A quote from the same HOD illustrates:

“I had to then, we had to go and have a look if we were starting certain areas that were important to us. We have to eliminate those areas. We have to... we have to... we, we have to you could say ...[uh]... target them, and describe them and specify them. And make it part of our departmental structures. So that when the first programme... and then the next step came into play. We decided to design a new number of programmes. Because the old programmes were much departmentalized. And each department had programmes but became part and parcel of the old department. So just for example Psychology of education, History of education, Esoterical education, Comparative education, Education management... remember those old instructions and Post-Graduates. We had to break those down and put into place a new core that's the essence of education. And the new core that's the importance of the department and a number of electives that would photograph for the department.”

The restructuring also forced them to look at their articulation with other programmes, qualifications, department and faculties that were offering similar qualifications or that they were drawing students from other departments into their own department.

“When you look at the Science Faculty. You could do a proper B.Sc. ignoring the fact that you want to become a teacher. After your third year you decide but now I want to go into teaching. You finish your other Graduate qualification. You graduate with a B.Sc. then you did the old post-Graduate Diploma...There's still a second option available. And on the main campus the four-year qualification, that's and integrated B.Sc. with an X component. What happens there? Remember the old BAX. B.Comm.X and a BCX. So you once again you did your core subject in the proper Science department. But now you have one or two options. In the Science Faculty you do your pedagogue in the Science Faculty. There are people there who will do with you Science Education, Philosophy something, some esoterical work, some educational psychological work. So that can be maintained within those specific ...[uh]... well if you want options. The other option was that the B.Com.X and the BAX there the pedagogues were done by the Education Faculty.”

The pitching of programmes was reformulated in line with the NQF levels and learning outcomes for the qualifications, the following quote explains this.

"If you have a look at the uh... at SAQAs requirement and the different level descriptors that are put into place from the Honours programme, you'll find in the Honours programme much more critical analytical problem solving fields and work that must be put into place. Those level descriptors uh...uh, by the way many of them fell away. They were put into place by SAQA by the beginning of '94/'95. And they gave the strong distinction between under-Graduate work and post-Graduate work. Because what is the difference now between a NQF level 6 and a NQF level 7? You expect the NQF level 7 they're critical, analytical, problem solving, reflective... Now they enter the BS Honours programme and now immediately there is limited material available, they have to search for their material. They have to enter the Library systems. They have to look for searchable material. They have to use articles and then the nature of the place just changed..."

The restructuring also forced them to review the access streams and integration across the different disciplines, as indicated in the quote below.

"Now the fourth... third model at this stage which in fact is here, is an integrated approach. Integrated in a sense that you will find that the education components are done by the faculty as a whole. And the Science proper matter is dealt with by the Science department here. But also the methodology has been dealt with, with ...[uh]... Science... Science department. Department of Science, Mathematics Methodology education. The difference is now they don't do Science 1,2 & 3 Chemistry 1,2 & 3 as Bach. But they do an integrated say Biology, Physics, Chemistry at a lower level as would be the case on main campus. The level that's applicable to people who are going to teach those subjects at a time in a secondary school."

The type of change and restructuring was radical and it was met with resistance, as the quote below suggests, the restructuring was perceived as an infringement on independence and autonomy.

"But it didn't work out at the end exactly in those parameters because the departments still went and covered and protected their boundaries to a certain extent. And that I understand because we want to remain our independent departments as our main specific foci. But then the programmes came into place. We... we put into place approximately five main areas. We put into place programmes in assessments. We put into place programmes in Instructional Design and Curriculum Development. We put into place programmes A programme in Computer integrated education. I go through them now again and we also put into place programmes Adult and Community Education. And something that... that remained from one of the powers and foci that we had was also the subject Methodology of certain field specializations. Science education, Biology Education, Mathematics education, Language education, all those components were also part and parcel of our own departmental structures. And we also tried to focus on those"

As a Master's student in the faculty I personally experienced some of what the respondents were indicating in the interview in terms of problem-based learning and assessment. Within my first year as an MEd. Psychology student, besides attending regular classes, I am also required to work in Places of Safety numerous times during the week to develop my practical skills in child psychotherapy. Our work includes offering

parent guidance sessions as part of providing holistic intervention to children. These sessions are planned beforehand with your supervisor. I also have to video-record my sessions with clients as well as include reflections on the sessions as evidence of my practical competence and reflective practice. During class we are required to make presentations on topics related to the subject matter. Our mid-year examination was in a form of a practical exam where a case study about a real client was used. We were required to score and interpret psychometric assessments administered to the client beforehand. We were also required to make a diagnosis as to the intellectual, emotional and overall psychological profile of the client, design a therapy plan for the client as well as any intervention required for any persons that form part of the client's system and make recommendations for further intervention. We were also required to defend our diagnosis and therapy plan to a panel of examiners. This exam required us to demonstrate the applied competence we had acquired through the practicals, application of theory to practice and to synthesize all this knowledge in a meaningful way that helps resolve a real life problem situation.

As a staff member I learnt about staff in the faculty that had lost their jobs due to restructuring. I also learnt that most of the restructuring was affected by the merger processes between the faculty and the college. The following quote from one of the senior lecturers explains:

"At the university we were one ...[um]... of the people who were at the old Pretoria Onderwys Kollege. And then we applied for posts so officially, in this office I've been now 9...10... no 12 years. But working for the university in this office - 2 years...Because it was such a sensitive process with the mergers of the colleges ...[um]... that people thought that they could design a program according to the people which they could... the people that were still at the colleges. There were some... we had to um... the posts were advertised. So we didn't just come over to the university we had to apply for our posts again. And what people thought this was the other program coordinators... if they would curricula the program in such a way that they could make space for those people, those people will be employed. But people used different criteria so what they did, they didn't... they looked at the criteria but they didn't really... They ...[uh]... some of the other programs... I think, that is my personal opinion was very much influenced by the people that could do certain things. It wasn't influence by the criteria. And I think with our program ...[um]..., we really tried to use the criteria and not to look at who the people were. And I think it wasn't a very... it was a difficult process because people pulled up the merger program. People felt very, very threatened and they didn't... It was very difficult when you've got this emotional process and you have to keep to Academic criteria"

The result of this is that most of what is captured as adaptation for these faculties was in fact about strategic survival. The registration of qualifications with the NQF meant removing a lot of the dead wood, the quote below explains this point.

"...[Um]..., what actually happened in the beginning was when the merger started with the universities ...[um]..., we had to curricula a new program. And we had a program...which we were lecturing. So what we had to do was to look at the guidelines of the norms and standards. On the guidelines of the NQF and SAQA and see how we could curricula them into a new program that would um, that would fit into the book because we hadn't registered a program at the Department of Education and also SAQA. And we also had to ...[um]..., ...[uh]... put the new curriculum attached to the Outcomes. Because we had to write the program on the Outcomes Based Education format. So that was a process....So you had to study all the new things ...[um]... [um]... we were in a process where we had workshops by the department. But because our program also involved other departments we also had to look at how we could ...[um]... incorporate some like Academic subjects. How we could incorporate ...[um]...those margins".

What is evident about this type of response is that adoption of NQF principles was actually much more strategic in the light of changing client needs and client profiles as well as mergers. The result is that the process of change went much deeper than simply formatting of programmes. The implementation of the NQF policy was intended to ensure the survival of the departments.

4.3.3 Response as Strategic Avoidance

In this section I describe faculties and departments that achieved very little change in the access, teaching and learning practice. Access into the department is based on the traditional entrance requirements, and the university's own initiatives to admit under-prepared learners. The quote from a senior member of staff explains:

"No we have not introduced the recognition of prior learning at this stage. What we've introduced is ...[uh]... in our ...[uh]... selection criteria, we've got a criteria for ...[uh]... Ontology disadvantaged students. And then they come into the program and in the first-year then we've got ...[uh]... bridging courses that they take extra supervision for those students. So they come in as a category A of 'Disadvantaged' and the criteria is much lower than for the other students. So they come in on lower level but we try and bring them by the first and second year by means of the bridging courses. So they do the first-year say in two, in two years and not in one year".

As illustrated in the quote below, the reliance on traditional entrance requirements is so entrenched that even learners who could be admitted through Recognition of Prior Learning are required to first meet the basic entrance requirements.

"We want them to have a matriculation certificate. And they must have Science and Mathematics which counts as 20 credits"

This requirement has created a boundary that makes it difficult for RPL to be implemented, the senior member of staff explains why in the next quote:

"If they have a Dentist's Technicians qualification they most probably will qualify accordingly.... You see the experience and the things of Dentistry... nobody can do any procedures if they are not registered with the Affiliated Aid. So we can't give acceptance to the man who is working there in the field extracting people's teeth."

What the respondent suggests here is that the entrance requirement for Dentistry is nationally determined and controlled by the Health Professions Council. Therefore the opportunity to acquire any relevant prior learning is limited to people who at least hold some form of formal qualification in a related field to Dentistry, which is a qualification as a Dental Technician. This requirement thus excludes any other learners acquiring experience in the field of Dentistry without a minimum qualification and registration with the Health Professions Council.

"They won't get... they won't get uh... preference or ...[uh]... recognition for say certain modules or whatever. Because the modules won't be on the same level as our modules. We haven't got this multiple entrance and exit facility. We've got a category of our Agenda and due to the fact that the first two years of a Dental curriculum is the same as the Medical curriculum. We cannot accommodate them except if they come into first-year again. Even if they have got a Diploma in, ... RPL isn't a factor in our school. So ...[uh]... it's the type of professional... professionals we train. A bit of experience outside the school of Dentistry because you must be... a student must be registered with the Health Professions Council to work on patients."

The influence of the Professional Council on curriculum structure and teaching practice determines the type of changes to access, teaching, learning and assessment that can be introduced in the department. This influence poses limitations on the departments affiliated and accredited by the Council on the types of concessions and adoptions possible on who to teach (access), how to teach and what constitutes meaningful learning as described in the NQF Policy. What is evident is that very little dialogue has occurred between the policy developers of the NQF and the Professional Bodies, and the lack of dialogue manifests in minimal implementation of the NQF policy.

The attachment to the Council, and its way of doing things is made significant by the history surrounding this practice. In response to a question about what would need to change in order for the department to have the independence to accommodate learners through RPL, the head of department explains this point.

“Detach ourselves from the Medical profession. We developed our curriculum from that from the first-year onwards our own curriculum.... Fifty years we have been meeting with Medicine. Dental curriculum is like Medical curriculum level 5”

What the quote illustrates is that any form of change in the curriculum, particularly in terms of facilitating articulation and mobility across disciplines would require a break or detachment from the Medical profession. This is a practice with a long history of 50 years, and what the NQF was in fact proposing is a detachment from that history into something that has not been tested. The impact of the professions and its tradition also form part of why change in curriculum is difficult for some departments. In the quote below from a senior member of staff he indicates that traditionally a degree offered in his faculty is made up of many specialist areas.

“So we've got different specialists, I'm not going to.... We've got the Specialist Othodontist. He's responsible for crown and bridgework etc. And then you've got a Periodontist he's responsible for treating all the diseases of the gums. And so we've got different flanks. And some of them are specialist, a specialist discipline. Where others are not. So the, the problem with the ...[uh]... teaching of Dentistry is fragmented”

He further explains that each specialist area has a training site fully equipped with all the resources housed in its own specialist building. The fragmentation in the specialist areas is also reflected in the infrastructure of the buildings where learning is meant to take place.

“So because our building is not developed for a discipline based curriculum. Meaning by that is we've got a clinic for Orthodontics, we've got a clinic for Periodontics, we've got a clinic for Oral surgery. So if a student goes to that clinic and he learns about, about ...[uh]... Oral Surgery or Orthodontics and ...[uh]... then, then, the new trend is to ...[uh]... train students more comprehensively. He goes into one clinic and he does everything there as if he is a Dentist in a private practice where he is doing everything for his patients. Now he's doing the gum treatments here, Orthodontic treatment here, and the restorative treatment there. So it's not integrated.”

The result is that where integration is sought the different areas of specialization and the structure of the buildings i.e. all the aspects that make up the tradition of the profession make integration difficult. Attempts to infuse academic development into mainstream programmes where the critical cross-field outcomes can be developed, is instead accommodated through an add-on academic development programme called Comprehensive Patient Care, the quote below explains this.

“Okay so then and in our curriculum, because we got discipline based ...[uh]... or are building that one, for a discipline-based curriculum our, our ...[uh]... curriculum cannot be totally integrated. And that's a pity. That is a pity. So ...[uh]... what we do now to

compensate for that we've got a subject Comprehensive Patient Care where the student trains as a... is trained to treat a patient, or to manage the help of a patient holistically. Apart from all this other treatments we've now also got this Comprehensive Patient Care to handle apart from trying to bring everything else together. In the different disciplines we try to, to help a student to integrate all this little parts into a whole part...."

In this chapter I have discussed the findings from the study culled from documents and data resident in the segments of the transcripts. The analysis was given in terms of what the impact on access, teaching and learning has been. Also included were my reflections of my experiences as a learner in the Faculty of Education and a staff member. In the next chapter I will link the theoretical framework with the findings from the data.

CHAPTER 5

SYNTHESIS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the impact of the NQF on higher education institutions focussing specifically on access, teaching and learning. The study aimed to answer the following research questions: What was the impact of the NQF on increasing access to higher education? In particular how did the RPL process facilitate access into the University of Pretoria? Secondly, how did the NQF influence the processes of teaching and learning at this particular institution? And finally, why did the NQF have differential impacts on different faculties within the same higher education institution?

These research questions were in response to a gap in the literature, which indicated that the perspective of the end-user in terms of the experiences of higher education institutions and academics in implementing the NQF were not exhaustively explored. Conducting the study aimed to add empirical data to our understanding of translating policies into practice. Where studies in this area were conducted, they fell short of explaining the gap between policy and practice. Therefore this study also served to develop a conceptual framework to provide an understanding about the complexities that challenge, promote and hinder successful policy implementation in education. The analytical framework of policy positioning and theory of action and theory in use was put forward as a way to explain the discrepancy between what the NQF initially intended to do in policy terms and what higher education institutions did in practice.

To gain the end-users' perspective, a case study of the University of Pretoria was conducted. Using interviews with ten senior members of staff at the university working in nine different departments with a service record extending for more than five years. The interviews captured their experiences in implementing the NQF and how it impacted on how they taught, how they assessed learning, and how learners learnt. Student records indicating admissions through RPL into the University of Pretoria were also consulted. I also consulted institutional documents and academics teaching RPL students to determine the type of learning support these learners required.

In the next section I will summarise the main findings in terms of what the impact on access, teaching and learning has been. I will also link the theoretical framework with the findings from the data. The goal will be to show how policy positioning explains how the policy goals of the NQF were formulated. It will also be to explain how the University of Pretoria interpreted and internalised this position in the strategy that they chose to follow in the implementation of the NQF within their institution. The theory of action/theory-in-use will be used to explain the gap between policy and practice at two levels. Firstly the gap between what policy developers intended and what University of Pretoria management understood in their institutional response. Secondly the discrepancy between what the University of Pretoria management understood and what academic staff on the ground did in practice. The chapter will end with conclusions and implications for further research as well as limitations of the study.

5.2 Impact on Access

The NQF proposed Recognition of Prior Learning as an alternative means of facilitating access into higher education. The NQF policy was thus making recommendations to higher education institutions on who to teach, and how access into the institution should be provided. The rationale given was to increase the participation rates of non-traditional learners into higher education and to increase the skills of the majority of people so that they can be economically active.

In my analysis of the data I sought to find out what the university of Pretoria did in response to access. So I looked at their admissions policy as well as their practice regarding RPL. I found that there was no policy on Recognition of Prior Learning at the University. The university was using a policy developed to facilitate access for post-graduate students. This policy did not address RPL directly and instead used a term 'standard competence' to refer to learners with relevant experience without formal academic qualifications that are prerequisites for entry into postgraduate studies. From the interviews I gathered that senior members of staff recognised and supported the founding principles and policy goals of the NQF policy on RPL in ensuring equity and redress. However on paper, a policy on RPL for the university was not formulated, indicating the University of Pretoria's position in 'support' for the implementation of the NQF policy. I put support in parentheses because I learnt from the interviews and the statistics on student enrolments through RPL that the support was mainly in theory. The

records showed that in practice very few students were admitted in this way. Lack of support is also indicated in the variance in which RPL was being implemented in the different departments. This revealed that the university developed a 'make shift' policy that resembled RPL. This policy spoke volumes about how the university positioned itself in response to the new government policy. With a history of being compliant with state-directed reforms it became evident from the findings that the compliance or support was mainly cosmetic.

Research on NQF implementation had largely sought to describe the various ways in which RPL was being implemented in the various higher education institutions. The literature has suggested that mainly technikons had taken the lead in the implementation of RPL, but had not explained why universities were lagging behind in RPL. In my study I found that RPL was being implemented in the university but not as the NQF policy had intended or how technikons were implementing it. I also found that not all faculties were implementing RPL.

An explanation for this partial implementation of the NQF with regards to access can be based on the theory of action communicated in the admissions policy of the university. The theory of action communicated a message of "business as usual". Where faculty were vigilant in implementing the RPL policy, the response was discouraging for both the heads of departments entrusted with facilitating RPL in their departments and the students concerned. The university offered very little assistance to staff and did not provide for a central office to coordinate RPL matters. The message communicated down was that there is no need for RPL at the university of Pretoria. On the other hand the presence of this policy implied that in departments where RPL was required, they had room to implement it. The result is that there are inconsistencies in what happens across departments because there is no common policy that properly regulates implementation and practice of RPL in the university.

The impact of secondary schooling, as observed in the Australian case study, made NQF implementation in that country difficult. As Keating (2003:6) noted, access into higher education in Australia was limited by the quality of secondary and vocational education as well as high fees. In the case of the University of Pretoria, the poor quality of school education and the variance in the level of quality of prior learning is also regarded as

affecting access through RPL. Faculties who relied on matriculants with specific matric results and were not implementing RPL adopted this position.

The other departments where RPL was being implemented found the justification about quality and standards against RPL not applicable to all students. By focussing on post-graduate students, they made it possible for RPL to be implemented in their departments. Although data on throughput and retention rates of RPL learners were not sourced to verify this, the findings suggest that there is reason to investigate the use of RPL at post graduate level. Simply disregarding a policy on RPL on these grounds was considered by respondents to be discriminatory to those learners with potential and commitment.

5.3 Impact on Teaching and Learning Practice

As in the case of access, the response of the university in this regard has been superficial. For many of the departments the impact on teaching and learning has been minimal. Largely because the connection between pedagogy and the NQF was not evident to most of the respondents. The exercise remained focused on the technicalities surrounding registration of qualifications. It did not include developing a strategy on how the university will ensure that issues around access, teaching and learning would be addressed in accordance to the policy. However investigation into the different departments suggest various degrees of implementation of the NQF policy.

The theory in use driving implementation of the NQF policy in departments where it appears to have been implemented show very little concern with regard to satisfying policy requirements. Instead the drivers for implementation had nothing to do with the NQF. They were mainly as a result of response to client needs, strategic positioning of departments as service centres or business oriented departments, or they were mainly as a result of mergers.

The literature on NQF across the world, particularly as indicated by the New Zealand and Australian case studies, suggested that threats to institutional autonomy were a major obstacle in the implementation of the NQF. While there were indications that autonomy was an issue in the case of the University of Pretoria, this was not a major factor for academic staff in implementing the NQF and changing teaching and learning practices. Rather the accreditation and registration of programmes with professional bodies posed a

major challenge against NQF implementation, and its ability to change how academics teach, assess and structure their qualifications. Moreover the NQF was perceived by some academic staff as providing opportunities for expansion, and reaching broader markets such as adult learners. Here the threat to autonomy were not as pronounced as much as the opportunities that the NQF policy presented to these end-users.

The New Zealand case also suggested that the body driving the NQF implementation, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority, created another obstacle to NQF implementation. In South Africa the same was found, the implementation of the NQF did not lead to quality improvements in programme offerings and programme designs because the role of SAQA was not associated with quality assurance and promotion. Findings from my study suggest that the NQF implementation could have had different – and probably more positive – outcomes had it been driven by a different body such as the CHE instead of SAQA i.e. emphasising the quality promotion focus of the NQF exercise and its ultimate improvement to scholarship instead of the top-down, once-off administrative and bureaucratic nightmare that many end-users experienced the NQF to be.

The New Zealand case study suggested that implementation of the NZNQF was perceived by universities as rendering themselves open to government and political pressure and possible censorship (Phillips 2003:6). The University of Pretoria on the other hand viewed the implementation of the NQF, even at a surface level, as a strategic positioning or alignment with the political position of the ANC-led government and the ideology that underpinned its policies. Therefore their alignment was seen more as aligning with the strategic role that higher education institutions would play in the new South Africa.

In earlier chapters (see section 2.3) I have made the argument that the NQF policy was formulated as a “one-size-fits-all” policy. That it failed to take into consideration the individual contexts of higher education institutions as end users and therefore assumed that the policy would be implementable in the same way within the same time frame. The findings from this study support this argument, and identify this as a major hindrance in implementing the policy. The findings suggest that the democratic process that informed the formulation of the NQF policy assumed that the policy was legitimate, even when no empirical research suggested that such curriculum reform was educationally sound. The

following factors inherent in the formulation of the NQF policy made it difficult to implement the NQF as is, these are the technical language used, the administrative burden that required its implementation, emphasis on registration tasks that demanded priority and time away from real teaching and learning issues; the lack of synergy between requirements defined by professional bodies and councils and those of the NQF; the lack of a coherent implementation strategy that served to improve the quality of teaching and learning.

Factors that were inherent in the structure of the institution that made implementation difficult include factors such as the traditional role of universities as custodians of teaching and learning practice, university's perceived sense of autonomy, the legitimacy of non-academics driving academic and pedagogical issues, the role of the SAQA as a driver of the curriculum reform matters; and finally the influence of professional bodies on professional training, teaching and admission of learners. The end users at the University of Pretoria identified the influence of professional bodies on teaching and admission of learners as a major hindrance to NQF policy implementation.

The conception of the NQF policy remained in my view locked in the minds of its developers because they failed to formulate clear guidelines on how it should take meaning in practice. In this sense, the policy remained an espoused theory. My argument is that the policy developers were not aware of their theory of action and how it influences their theory-in-use. According to Argyris and Schön (1974), when actors are aware of their theories of action and how they influenced their theories in use or what they do in practice, they are more likely to behave consistently with their beliefs. Similarly there was lack of synergy between what policy developers conceived and what university management understood, hence there was limited implementation of the policy. Had the actors or policy developers been aware of their theory of action, they could have identified some if not all of the factors that could have threatened its implementation, and adjusted their strategy accordingly to enable better implementation of the NQF policy. The first major conclusion is that the mistakes made by other countries across the world in the implementation of the NQF were also repeated in South Africa. The policy developers of the SANQF did not study institutional contexts to learn about how they operate and how processes of curriculum reform are implemented; hence they had no way of raising their own level of awareness about their own theory of action and therefore did not achieve

great success in implementing the NQF policy. Contrary to policy developers at government level, management of the University of Pretoria was aware of their theories of action, and their possible impact on the theories in use of academics. The institutional implementation at the University of Pretoria focused on giving SAQA what it required, in a way that it required and then returning to business as usual. This worked because in keeping with their history of compliance to state directed policies, the university management articulated their position of support and compliance to the NQF. They consciously did not antagonise the system by pressing further for anything. They kept their autonomy and independence through SAUVCA and basically kept their access, teaching and assessment practice unchanged.

My argument is that the strategy employed by the university management of “approach avoidance” was successful. Firstly it allowed a piece-meal implementation of the NQF policy. The vagueness of the RPL policy and institutional strategy to the NQF implementation allowed the flexibility to heads of departments to do as they saw fit in their contexts – hence the variance in the implementation of the NQF policy. What this means is that those who have shown initiative in implementing the policy can now become a ‘pilot project’ for the entire institution. Awareness of the theory of action by the university management led to academics employing caution in their practice and implementation of the NQF. Therefore the theory-in-use of academics was consistent with the university management’s theory of action.

Secondly it bought the university management time. The findings only confirm a gap between policy and practice regarding policy developers in the form of government and policy implementers in the form of academic institutions. I argue that the gap is a result of the different positions adopted by each actor; policy developers used the driver of ‘do it as is’ while the academic institution used the driver of ‘lets wait and see’. I make this argument because the university did not actively engage in any activity that led to deep, meaningful implementation of the NQF. Any factors that led to such deep implementation of the policy were environmental and arose from the general context of higher education in the country and not the University of Pretoria in particular.

The time gained by the university management served to allow academics to experiment with the policy. Therefore I also argue that the gap is relative to one’s point of reference.

From the outside it looks like there is implementation, however close inspection reveal that there is partial implementation. In fact a closer look reveals that there are pockets of implementation, with certain departments leading the race. An even closer inspection reveals that actually implementation is more partial than it initially looks. The pockets of implementation that appear to be on the right track are in fact on an island with very little support from the university community. There is very little consistency in what happens within departments and very little regulation and monitoring with what happens across the institution. Yet a zooming-in focus on individual departments showed that giant strides have been taken in implementing the policy. Although the motivations leading to its implementation are not directly linked to the NQF policy per se, these departments are becoming sterling examples for others.

Indications for further research are that a more distant look at the impact of the NQF on access, teaching and learning in higher education is less revealing than a more closer look. I would recommend that future research zoom-in on individual departments within higher education institutions because such case studies reveal the deeper and more nuanced impact of the NQF. The discussion suggests that we cannot assess specific issues in isolation of their contexts and only focus on particular types of evidence while disregarding others.

5.4 Limitations of the Study

Tracking the progress of RPL learners within the different faculties was not possible. As a result analysis of the progress in terms of learner's throughput and retention rates was not done. Such an analysis would have provided verification of how the university and staff were responding to meeting the needs of RPL learners, and how different faculties compared with each other on RPL admissions and throughput. The lack of data made such verification not possible, this means that the theories in use of academics in this area could not be tested in practice.

Staff from the lower rankings of the university structure was also not included in the sample. Further research could include a more diverse profile of respondents to ensure the authenticity of the data so that it represents all the viewpoints among members of the research setting.

5.5 Conclusion

The case of the University of Pretoria reveal that the impact of the NQF on access, teaching and learning differed across departments, overall it resulted in a partial implementation of the policy. The extent of change to access, teaching and learning effected by the NQF policy lies along a continuum that distinguishes between departments that 'blindly complied', that selectively adapted and those that strategically avoided implementation of the policy. The partial implementation of the NQF policy at the university was facilitated by factors inherent in the policy itself and factors inherent to the institution.

Autonomy was not perceived by the end-users as a major factor against implementing the NQF and changing teaching and learning practices. Rather the power and authority held by professional bodies on teaching and learning practices of end-users posed a major challenge against NQF implementation.

The management at the university of Pretoria viewed the implementation of the NQF as strategic alignment with the political position of the ANC-led government and the ideology that underpinned the NQF policy. The end users at the University of Pretoria followed the guidelines of the university management rather than those of the policy developers in their implementation of the NQF policy. Therefore the NQF policy had a differential impact on access, teaching and learning across the faculties because the end users were responding to needs specific to their context, which the formulation of the NQF policy had not considered. In turn, its implementation was shaped by a myriad of internal and external factors that put priority and emphasis on certain aspects of the NQF policy being addressed while completely neglecting others.

5.6 Recommendations

As mentioned in the introductory chapter a draft Higher Education Qualification Framework has been tabulated with comments from stakeholders invited. Recommendations derived from this study, although primarily based on the NQF could help in the refinement of the Higher Education Qualification Framework in terms of improving its potential impact at institutional level and for further research in general. Drawing from the findings in this study, it is essential for policy makers to recognise policy making as a contested and unpredictable process that is influenced by social, political

and cultural contexts. This implies that policy makers need to recognise that the policy as it is conceived at the point of development will be interpreted in many different ways according to the contexts of the end-users. Therefore on the one hand contextual differences have to be taken into account when formulating policies e.g. the historical background of different higher education institutions, their access to resources and capacity to implement the policy. On the other hand, interpretations that might deviate from the initial intentions of the policy makers have to be anticipated and addressed with proper planning in place to ensure that implementation is not stalled because end-users cannot agree on what the concepts entailed in a policy document mean for their specific contexts. In addition, it is necessary to acknowledge the dynamic relationship between context, interpretation and implementation. That is, how the different contexts make sense of the policy will lead to them redefining the meaning of the policy and ultimately giving emphasis to some aspects of the policy while neglecting others.

The role of other players such as professional bodies needs to be acknowledged as they also represent a source of policy authority. Institutional culture also shapes which aspects of the policy can be implemented, for instance the profile of entering students at a university will determine whether RPL is a necessity or not as an access mechanism. Therefore as policy makers what is put as priority for implementation should be in line with the end-users' interpretations and their contextual priorities i.e. what they deem the policy should address in their context. It is therefore recommended that end-users be engaged in dialogue at all the stages of policy development, however not only for the purposes of consultation, but also as a means of developing proper planning and capacity building to facilitate policy implementation. Finally it is recommended that policy makers and future researchers should focus research not on claims of non-change, but rather on how policy implementation happens, when is it implemented as intended and when is it not, and then provide explanations of the discrepancy in order to enhance planning and capacity building.

The impact of the NQF on access, teaching and learning at the University of Pretoria took different forms leading to different interpretations and implementations of the policy across faculties. The result is that the overall impact cannot be truly expressed in a global way by focussing on the institution as a whole, studying end-users within the faculties revealed the nuances involved in how policies influence educational reform.

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APPENDIX 1

Interview Guide

THE IMPACT OF THE NQF ON HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

The purpose of this interview schedule is to obtain information from key HEI personnel on their experiences in implementing the NQF and how they saw its impact on their institution

Opening/Introductory Question

What do **you do** in your institution in relation to NQF matters

- Relationship with academic departments,
- quality assurance and
- curriculum development
- learning support

Interview Questions

1. What did the NQF **mean** to your institution when you decided to implement it in your institution? [how did you make sense of it?]

Probes:

- Goals
- Implications in terms of programmes and structures
- Demands

2. What **structures** exist in your institution to **manage** or implement the NQF?

Probes:

- Faculty level
- Institution-wide
- Industry-institutional liaison
- Inter-institutional

3. One of the goals of the NQF was to improve access; how did the NQF impact on **access** in your institution?

Probes:

- Admission of designated groups of learners
- Admission of learners with relevant prior experience
- The throughput and retention of such learners
- Credit exchange vs developmental model to RPL
- Using entry (RPL) assessment for diagnostic vs achievement purposes

4. What kinds of **learning support** did your institution provide for learners admitted through RPL?

Probes:

- Foundation programmes
- Bridging programmes
- Tutorial support in general and in portfolio development specifically
- Development of critical cross-field outcomes

5. How did the NQF impact on **teaching** in your institution? That is, how did the teaching of academic change in response to the NQF?

Probes:

- Accommodation of prior learning in instruction
- Recognition of prior learning in instruction
- Ways of teaching

6. How did the NQF impact on **learning** in your institution i.e. did learners learn differently as a result of the NQF?

Probes:

- Meta-cognitive [thinking about thinking/more reflective]
- Surface vs deep learning
- Incorporating applied competence [practical knowledge]

7. How did the NQF impact on the **curriculum**, i.e. how was the curriculum designed differently in light of the NQF?

Probes:

- Outcomes based
- Assessment criteria
- Social relevance
- Level descriptors
- Unit standards or whole qualifications
- Vertical and horizontal articulation of programmes
- Mere compliance vs serious educational incorporation of NQF requirements

8. How did it impact on **assessment** i.e. were there changes in the ways of conducting assessment at your institution as a result of the NQF?

Probes:

- Recognition of diverse learner needs?
- Fairness and equity in assessment
- Outcomes based assessment
- Methods of assessment

9. In general, how did the **academics respond** or relate to the NQF in your institution?

Probes:

- Positive vs negative
- Compliance vs responsive
- Threat or opportunity

10. In general, how would you assess the **overall impact** of the NQF on your institution

Probes:

- Time
- Effort
- Programmes
- Organisation
- Academic achievement
- Resources

11. There are some academic practitioners who argue that universities implemented the NQF in superficial ways only. That is, that the NQF did not lead to *deep changes* in teaching and learning in higher education. How would you assess this position?

12. There is also the perception that universities did not take RPL seriously as a mechanism for broadening access to higher education. That is, that very few students entered universities on the basis of RPL. Do you agree with this perception? How many students have you admitted into your Faculty on the basis of RPL as envisaged under the NQF?