

Background Document:
Draft Qualification for Environmental Assessment Practice

A Draft Qualification for Environmental Assessment Practice has been developed by a task team of subject matter experts facilitated by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The draft EAP qualification is presented for your consideration and comment. You are also encouraged to forward these documents to other relevant stakeholders for their comment.

Please note that the final draft qualification will also be formally advertised in the Government Gazette prior to its finalisation.

Comments during this phase of consultation **must be submitted by 9 May 2008** to:

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A key element in the process for establishing a registration authority for environmental assessment practitioners was the development of a qualification for environmental assessment practice in collaboration with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). A task-team of environmental assessment practitioners (EAPs who had been involved in the workshops held as part of the registration initiative) met with a SAQA appointed consultant for three two-day meetings to develop a draft qualification that meets SAQA requirements. This draft is attached and will in due course appear in the Government Gazette to allow opportunity for formal comment. This notification is a preliminary alert to those that have been involved this far in developing the registration procedures for EAPs.

The SAQA process is complicated; it requires some understanding by those who wish to comment on the content of the newly developed qualification. Firstly, documentation to be submitted to SAQA has set formats—in layout, language and jargon. The draft qualification meets all these requirements. Secondly, the SAQA process culminates in either a “qualification” or in “unit standards (US)”. A “qualification” is a stand alone deliverable—certificate, diploma or degree, to which tertiary institutions relate by adapting course content to achieve the outcomes specified in the qualification. “Unit standards” as the name implies, are small units of instruction (short courses) linked by a common theme, for example, environmental assessment practice. Unit standards can be achieved one by one, and credits can be obtained per unit standard. Few South African Universities have adopted unit standards.

The development of unit standards for environmental assessment practice was initially considered. However, the fact that South African Universities—which are the dominant institutions offering training in environmental assessment—have not adopted this model led the task-team to instead develop a qualification so as to achieve consistency in university based training for environmental assessment practice. The qualification stipulates the outcomes that training must achieve but it does not specify a curriculum or method of instruction.

A SAQA qualification requires specific headings / topics.

These are

- the rationale for the qualification
- its purpose
- exit level outcomes and associated assessment criteria
- learning assumed to be in place
- international comparability
- integrated assessment
- articulation possibilities
- recognition of prior learning
- moderation options
- criteria for registration of assessors and
- critical cross-field outcomes.

Both the **rationale** and the **purpose** for the qualification outline the need for and background to development of the qualification.

The critical portion of the qualification is the **exit level outcomes** (ELO), as these describe those things that the person would have to be able to do and to know in order to obtain the qualification. The **associated assessment criteria** are the measures by which it will be determined whether an individual has achieved the exit level outcomes.

Integrated assessment in this context refers not the environmental assessment, but to the manner in which individuals will be assessed against the exit level outcomes contained in the qualification. For example, theoretical and practical components should be assessed together and assessment should ensure that all outcomes are evaluated in an integrated manner. Anyone wishing to “test” individuals against these ELOs will be called an assessor, and such assessors will have to be registered as per the SAQA legal framework—university lecturers are deemed appropriately qualified. These assessors therefore have an educational function and should not be confused with environmental assessment practitioners (EAP) or the registration of such EAPs.

Exit level outcomes:

These were drafted as per advice given by the SAQA consultant. ELOs must be simple statements that can be measured by means of the associated assessment criteria. The latter are formulated in such a manner that they are “tangible”. These must provide assessors with sufficient guidance to develop particular assessment tasks as part of their teaching modules. The number of ELOs should preferably be between 4 and 8. In the ELOs, ranges have been included where necessary to explain the meaning and extent of terms used.

The relationship between the qualification and the registration process

In this draft qualification, ELOs have been formulated so that EAPs responsible for assessments as well as those responsible for review are provided for. Further distinctions between these two

categories of EAPs will take place as part of the registration process. The registration process will also distinguish between EAPs and candidate EAPs, based on expertise, experience, etc. (See the draft proposal document previously distributed for comment.) Although there are clear links between the process to develop the qualification and that to create the registration authority, there are also differences. Recognition of prior learning will, for instance, be dealt with during both processes, while matters relating to ethical conduct and the actual registration/certification as an EAP will only take place as part of the registration process.

It must be stressed that the draft qualification will most probably not lead to new degrees/certificates being developed by tertiary institutions. Much of the content contained in the ELOs is already covered in existing qualifications. However, universities wishing to have their degrees recognized as meeting the standard for environmental practitioner registration will have to ensure that the students they train attain the ELOs. The content covered under the headings “Learning assumed to be in place” and “Articulation possibilities” indicate how this qualification can be used as a supplement to existing qualifications.

Further explanations

1. This qualification focuses on environmental impact assessment, strategic environmental assessment and sustainability assessment. Where other assessment types are necessitated in practice (by means of specialist studies), the skills and knowledge required to recognize the need, and to set terms of reference, have been alluded to in the assessment criteria.
2. The qualification is pitched at Level 7 under current Level descriptors and would fit in Level 8 under the proposed Level Descriptors.
3. The term “Certificate” in the qualification title relates only to the SAQA norm that this qualification can be obtained through 1200 hours of student effort. The term does not imply that tertiary institutions will or must offer certificates. It is probable that the requirements of this certificate will be incorporated into the requirements of existing Honours and Masters degrees so that students obtaining these degrees will also be qualified to register as EAPs.