

Discussion Document

The challenges of National Curriculum
Vocation (NCV) and its planned review

8/5/2010

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Background of the National Curriculum Vocation (NCV) Programme and its challenges

The National Certificates (Vocational) NCV qualification is a Ministerially- approved qualification which was implemented in public FET colleges in January 2007 at Level 2. Levels 3 and 4 followed consecutively in the two subsequent years. Level 4 marks the completion of the full qualification across all three levels, and was offered and examined for the first time in 2009.

Numerous debates have emerged about the purpose of the NCV and the extent to which it meets the needs of industry. In particular, there appears to be uncertainty about whether the NCV is preparing learners to enter particular occupations and if so, which ones, or whether the NCV is primarily a foundational programme that prepares learners to access an occupational learning programme. This uncertainty has then raised the questions pertaining to the intended target audience of the NCV, the extent to which curricula is appropriate for its intended purpose and the cost effectiveness of the programmes.

Further, there is a concern about the level of throughput and the high numbers that appear to be exiting the qualification prior to completion as well as the large numbers that are repeating subjects. There is also related concern about the fundamentals within the NCV. This relates to both the question of whether certain students should be exempt from fundamentals if they have already achieved their grade 12 and on the other end of the spectrum whether certain programmes should have less stringent requirements for the fundamentals.

The other factor is that although the qualification was phased in as the N1-N3 Ministerially-approved programmes were phased out, these qualifications differed materially in terms of purpose, design and structure. The NC(V) therefore does not have a precedent qualification to which it may be benchmarked, and in the absence of such a benchmark has often been compared against NATED programmes, the national curriculum statements (NCS) of the National Senior Certificate (NSC) and Learnerships.

Reasons for the review of the NC (V)

Following from the challenges outlined above, the following reasons are used for the NC(V) review:

- To evaluate the manner in which the NCV has been implemented to date; i.e. weaknesses and strengths;
- To evaluate the extent to which the NCV has met its stated purpose;
- To evaluate whether this purpose is still considered relevant within the context of the proposed new role of the FET Colleges sector and the broader programmatic landscape that is envisaged and to develop a clear purpose statement for the FET Colleges sector; and

- To determine the implications of any changes to the purpose statement, taking into account strengths and weaknesses that have been identified, to the future implementation of the programme.

Areas of Review

This set out the phases of the review process and considers the key questions that should form focus of the NCV review.

Phase One: Review of implementation to date

The initial component of the review of the NC (V) should be:

- Explore the nature of learners accessing the NCV so as to ascertain whether this is consistent with the original intention of the qualification with respect to its intended purpose. As part of this evaluative process, there will be a need to understand the selection process and whether there has been an appropriate matching of learners to programmes and fields of learning with respect to ability to cope with academic demands of the programme, the extent to which the learner meets other requirements pertaining to the occupation, and whether the learner is motivated with respect to the field. This will need to consider an analysis of throughput data taking into account learner enrolments, examination enrolments and results since 2007.
- Appraise the strengths and weaknesses that have emerged during the implementation of the programme. This should consider programme delivery (theory and practical) including the manner in which the curricula is delivered, quality and level of resources (practitioners, infrastructure, equipment, textbooks and other materials for learning and teaching, costing and finding flows, workplace exposure/experience student support and career guidance, etc).
- Review the current assessment policy, structures, processes with respect to the purpose of the NCV and the extent to which these are being implemented as intended.
- Review factors that have assisted and hindered the implementation of the NCV taking into account the learning implementation process to date.
- Further, it is suggested that there is a need to explore the opportunities that learners have been able to, and are theoretically able to achieve upon completion of the programme so as to ascertain whether this is consistent with the original intention of the qualification with respect to its intended purposes.

Possible changes going forward

Taking into account the findings pertaining to the implementation of the NCV to date, the review should consider that changes should be made with respect to the NCV. During the review of the NCV, we need to consider the policy document for the purpose of the programme. This is based on the understanding that this policy will need to be amended on the findings of the review.

Policy document: Purpose of the NCV

On the policy document, we need to consider the following questions with respect to the purpose of the NC (V):

- Is the stated purpose of the NCV still relevant and considered appropriate? This should take into account the learning acquired during the implementation of the NCV and the opportunities or lack of that learners are able to access. The discussion should also be located within the Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) supported for FET Colleges sector as well as the broader programmatic landscape.
- Whether the exit point of the qualification should remain at Level 4 of the NQF, and if not, consider the ramifications of locating it differently.
- Should there be a minimum academic competency level of entry into the NCV programmes?
- Should there be any other requirements for entry into NCV programme?
- Whether the admission certificate into levels 3 and 4 should require a complete certificate at the lower level.
- What other programmes that will respond to the skills requirements based on the Medium-Term Strategic Framework's strategic priorities of the National Skills Development Strategies 111.

The structure of the NCV

Again taking into account agreement on purpose, the review must consider the following with respect to the structure of the NCV:

- Whether the current structure is appropriate in terms of principles of curricula development, i.e. does it enable learners to build on learning from previous year?
- Whether the relationship between theory and practice is appropriate, taking into account the purpose of the qualification?
- The manner in which NCV should relate to the workplace, during and post qualification.
- The extent to which support can be and should be built into the programme- including support for academics, career guidance, work readiness, other?

Assessment structure

The review of the NCV curriculum should consider whether the current assessment policies and practices are optimal and what changes may be required. In particular there is a need to consider the requirements of the external assessments of written and practical assessment components that are externally set and marked by the Department of education and externally moderated by Umalusi and/or an appropriate ETQA". Proposals must take into account the purpose of each

year of the NCV and whether an external assessment is required for each year. This should take into account long-term viability of external exams against ensuring the credibility of the qualification. This should reference decisions pertaining to purpose of the qualification and articulation arrangements. There is also a need to consider what the indicators for monitoring and evaluating NCV going forward should be. This should include the development of key indicators for determining the success of the programme as well as indicators pertaining to the inputs of the programme.

Conclusion

The purpose of this discussion document was to argue for the review of the NVC because of the challenges that were encountered in the FET College sector. Such challenges are that there are uncertainties as to whether the NCV curriculum is preparing learners to enter particular occupations and if so, which ones, or whether it is a primarily foundational programme that prepare learners to access occupational learning programme. The reason to argue for the review of the NCV curriculum is based on the premise that many college lecturing staff were not thoroughly trained towards its delivery as an occupational learning programmes and lacked the necessary skills to teach it.

In one of the provincial FET summit, the college lecturers raised concerned that the NCV programme is not clearly defined and therefore open to different theoretical interpretations. They also complained that its interpretation lead to confusion during the delivery of teaching. They raise problems such as its lack of articulation between mainstream education and college levels, and blamed it for being too academic to learners who want to embark on vocational and occupationally directed learning programmes.

Based on these concerns and challenges by its practitioners, the author of this discussion document argues that the NCV curriculum should be review as there is no use to implement a curriculum that its implementers are not ready for its implementation because of lack of capacity and readiness for its implementation in the FET college sector.