

# **Implementation and impact of NQFs: Report of a study in 16 countries- Stephanie Allais**

## **International Labour Organization research into Impact and Implementation of National Qualification Frameworks**

National Qualifications Frameworks are an increasingly popular policy internationally. One of their key aims is to bridge the gap between education institutions and labour markets, and provide greater transparency for employers; another is to reform curriculum and assessment; a third is to separate awarding of qualifications from specific learning programmes and educational institutions. Many countries are turning to this approach, in some instances to improve on previous competency-based vocational education systems, and in others to reform their entire education and training systems.

Although qualifications frameworks are being implemented in many countries, and much is expected of them, there is very little empirical research into them. This study, commissioned by the International Labour Organization, examined the implementation and impact of National Qualifications Frameworks in 16 countries around the world. It is the first study to take a critical comparative look at attempts to implement qualifications frameworks internationally, and examine the results.

The study found very limited positive evidence in favour of national qualifications frameworks. While in many cases this could have been because of the early stage of development of the framework, it also found considerable evidence of many difficulties. Among these, a key one was employer involvement: in a nutshell, in nearly all cases employers did not participate in structures designed for them to lead, despite the desire of policy makers for employer leadership. In other instances, it seemed that emphasis in improving assessment mechanisms could undermine employer organizations with a history of involvement in assessment and certification. Furthermore, the idea of prescribing outcomes or competences to educational institutions met with various problems. Countries were selected to represent Europe, Africa, Asia/Pacific, and the Americas. For the five oldest frameworks, case studies synthesized existing research. For the 11 newer frameworks case studies involved interviews with policy makers, employer and worker representatives, and education institutions, as well as documentary analysis.

## **Biography**

Stephanie Allais is currently a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Educational Sociology at the University of Edinburgh. Her interests are in policy, education, and development, with a focus on curriculum, sociology of knowledge, and political economy of education.

She has a PhD in education policy from the School of Public and Development Management at Wits University in South Africa, and has published in education and development journals and books as well as in the popular press. Immediately prior to joining the CES, she managed and conducted research for an international research project for the International Labour Organization, which compared qualifications frameworks in 16 countries. Prior to this, she was the director of the Research and Development unit of Umalusi, the statutory body responsible for the quality assurance

of primary, secondary, and vocational education and training in South Africa. She has worked in various parts of the South African education system, including working for a non-governmental organization in distance education, running the education department of a trade union, and teaching in a high school, as well as teaching part time in adult basic education and training, and leading a student organization. She served on three committees by appointment of the Minister of Education in South Africa, and has been involved in numerous policy processes.

## **Selected papers and publications**

### **2010**

- (forthcoming) *The Implementation and Impact of National Qualifications Frameworks. Report of a study in 16 countries.* Geneva: International Labour Office
- (forthcoming) Outcomes-based education: understanding what went wrong. In Shalem and Pendlebury (eds). *Retrieving Teaching: critical issues in curriculum, pedagogy and learning.* Cape Town: Juta

### **2009**

- The Changing Faces of the South African National Qualifications Framework. In S. Allais., Raffe, D., Strathdee, R., Wheelahan, L., and Young, M. *Learning from the First Qualifications Frameworks.* Employment Sector Working Paper Number 45, Geneva: International Labour Office
- with D. Raffe and M. Young. Researching Qualifications Frameworks: Some conceptual issues. Employment Sector Working Paper Number 44, Geneva: International Labour Office
- 'Building and sustaining systems for delivering education: the role of the state', in McLennan and Munslo (eds) *The Politics of Delivery in South Africa.* Johannesburg: Wits University Press
- Understanding Quality Assurance in Education. Johannesburg: Centre for Education Policy Development
- 'Smoke and Mirrors: What's really informing the growth of national qualifications frameworks internationally?' Paper presented at the 10th UKFIET conference, Oxford University, 14-17 September 2009

### **2008**

- Outcomes-based education: Never having to say you're sorry? *The Teacher, Mail and Gaurdian*, August 8<sup>th</sup> edition.

### **2007**

- 'Why the South African NQF failed: lessons for countries wanting to introduce qualifications frameworks', in the *European Journal of Education*, 42 (4).
- 'Education Service Delivery: the disastrous case of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks'. *Progress in Development Studies*, 7(1)

- Special edition of the Southern African Review of Education with Education with Production. The focus of the special edition was on assessment, and I was the guest editor.
- Why outcomes can't lead education reform: Understanding the failures of the NQF. Invited column in the *Mail and Guardian*, October 2007
- With A. Ferreira, E. Dempster, A. Barlow-Zambodla, S. Grussendorf, A. Kitto, and P. Pillay. Learning from Africa: A report of Umalusi's research comparing syllabuses and examinations in South Africa with those in Ghana, Kenya, and Zambia. Pretoria: Umalusi
- Making Educational Judgements: Reflections on judging standards of intended and examined curricula. Pretoria: Umalusi
- With M. King, L. Bowie, and C. Marock. The 'f' word: the quality of the 'fundamental' component of qualifications in general and further education and training. Pretoria: Umalusi.
- 'Why the South African NQF failed'. Paper presented at the 5th International Conference on Researching Work and Learning, 2 - 5 December 2007, Stellenbosch
- 'A nation in denial—the ongoing crisis of outcomes-based education'. Paper presented at the *Annual Kenton Conference*, 25th – 28th October 2007, University of KwaZulu-Natal
- 'Beneath the assumptions: understanding the failures of the South African National Qualifications Framework as a driver of educational reform in post-apartheid South Africa'. Paper presented at the Annual Kenton Conference, 25th – 28th October 2007, University of KwaZulu-Natal
- 'Understanding the failures of the South African National Qualifications Framework as the driver of educational reform in post-apartheid South Africa'. Paper presented at UKFIET Conference 2007, 11-13 September 2007, University of Oxford
- *Being a Vocational Educator: A Guide for Lecturers in FET Colleges*. Edited with Maryla Bialobrzaska. Johannesburg: SAIDE.
- 'Qualification metamorphosis in further education'. *Quarterly Review*. Education Policy Unit, University of the Witwatersrand.