

# MODULE 5

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## NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND CREDIT SYSTEMS

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# 1. Credit Systems

To implement a credit system, it is necessary that qualifications are described using learning outcomes. Learning outcomes are grouped to create units. Assessed learning outcomes constitute credit. Credit is the basis for enabling the transfer between learning contexts and for the accumulation of learning outcomes. In a credit system, learning outcomes are used as a basis for credit transfer and accumulation. Learning outcomes are not dependent on the learning process, the content of teaching or the learning context in which they have been achieved and therefore it is possible to use them to identify whether what the learner has achieved in one learning setting or context is comparable to what s/he is expected to have achieved in another setting or context.

*A **unit** is a component of a qualification, consisting of a coherent set of knowledge, skills and competence that can be assessed and validated.*

Units enable progressive achievement of qualifications through transfer and accumulation of learning outcomes. They are subject to assessment and validation which verify and record that the learner has achieved the learning outcomes expected. Depending on the existing regulations, units may be common to several quali-

fications or specific to one particular qualification. Units are accumulated based on the requirements to achieve qualifications. These requirements may be more or less restrictive depending on the tradition and practice of the qualifications system and the way qualification standards are designed. Units can also be used to structure the formal education and training programme. Box 9 develops the difference between units and modules.

CATS means Credit Accumulation and Transfer Scheme/System. It is a tool/mechanism which gives a numerical value to the outcomes of learning and makes it easier to give recognition to the learning – “to make the learning count”. A CAT scheme can work within a single institution or qualification system or between collaborating institutions or qualification systems. It can be linked to a qualification framework or stand alone.

A credit system adds some features to a framework: it establishes new relationships (equivalences/ comparabilities) between outcomes of learning, supports RPL and reduces restrictions on the place, pace and mode of learning and it provides new ways of designing qualifications, improve recognition of previous learning and create new progression routes.

## Box 9: Units or Modules

Most NQFs have been associated with developments variously referred to as unitization or modularization. Both are concerned with breaking up qualifications into smaller components known as modules or units. The evaluation literature suggests that these processes do introduce greater flexibility both for learners and users such as employers, but offers little support for the claim that they are mechanisms for broadening the distribution of, and access to, qualifications. Unitized qualifications are often proposed for slower learners on the assumption that they will find it easier to learn in (what in the UK has become known as bite-sized chunks). It is important to make a distinction which is sometimes blurred between modularization and unitization. Modularization is best seen as a teacher-led or institution-led process in which the curriculum or teaching programme is the starting point; modules are a formalisation and standardisation of the informal sequencing that any teacher undertakes. Modules divide up a programme into discrete but coherently linked components or modules, with specific opportunities for students to make choices. Modules may, or may not, be linked to specific assessments. Unitization is a more radical departure from traditional approaches to the curriculum; it refers to the

break up of qualifications not the curriculum, and is concerned with assessment rather than teaching. Traditional qualifications assume that all students or trainees begin together and are assessed at the end of a programme.

Unitized frameworks treat units as the building blocks of many different qualifications and each unit is assessed and given credit separately. Instead of the teacher deciding the sequencing of the programme in a specific field, the student or trainee registers for units and then combines the units achieved to make up a qualification. The standard setting body lays down the rules of combination of units that lead to different qualifications. In a unitized framework it is units not whole qualifications, that are registered on the framework for the purposes of quality assurance. Unitization maximizes flexibility and choice, but minimizes coherence and the importance of structure in the acquisition of knowledge and skills. Many kinds of knowledge in general education (such as physics), and many skills (such as cabinet making) that are important in vocational qualifications, depend on a particular sequencing of learning defined by subject specialists and may not be amenable to unitization.

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**Table 6: Levels of CAT scheme**

CAT can unfold at different levels

**CAT Schemes**

<b>Institutional</b>	eg in a single University an a single awarding body
<b>Sectoral</b>	eg with the Tertiary sector a single occupational sector
<b>National Comprehensive</b>	A common standard used across and between sectors
<b>Institutional</b>	Used as a basis for collaboration within sectors

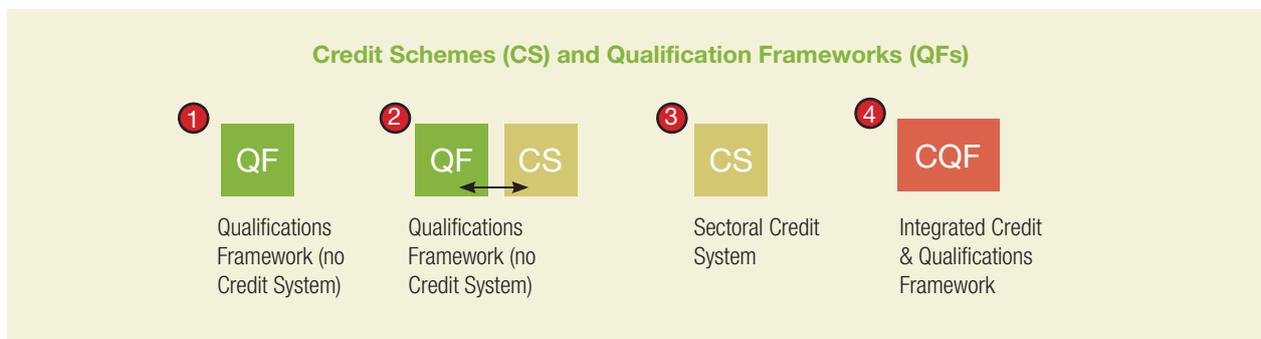
And within different types of qualification frameworks:

**Qualification Frameworks**

<b>Sectoral</b>	eg Higher Education TVET Single occupational sector
<b>National Comprehensive</b>	Single, unified framework Tightly linked subframeworks Loosely linked subframeworks
<b>Regional/Transnational</b>	Mainly used as points of reference / for comparisons

The table below shows how credit systems combine with qualification frameworks

**Table 7: Qualifications Framework and credit systems**



**The NSQF Notification** “supports credit transfer and progression routes within the Indian education and training system. The NSQF will allow people to move between education, vocational training and work at different stages in their lives according to their needs and convenience.”

A Credit is (normally) an indication of the “volume” or “weight” of the outcomes of learning which make up a qualification. It can also be seen as points awarded at a level, as a quantified means of expressing an equivalence between programmes of learning and as an award made to a learner in recognition of the verified achievement of (implied or) designated learning outcomes at a specified level

Considered as a “currency”, Credit is usually expressed as a numerical value linked to (notional) learning time – ie all learning activities required for the achievement of a set of outcomes. Commonly 1 credit point is allocated for 10 notional hours of learning.

**By bringing all learning within a common system, credit give systemic value to non-formal and experiential learning allowing previous learning to count as qualifications.**

The principles governing credit-rating must be tightly defined. The process itself should be as loose as is consistent with assurance of reasonable consistency. Overall it also need to be as transparent as possible. There must be an understanding that the CAT system cannot guarantee that all learning will be fully and automatically recognised in all circumstances.

The process of Accumulation is a process where learners are able to register learning outcomes achieved in one programme at one time and have them counted towards the full programme later on. Accumulation is built in to a system or sub-system (eg programmes /qualifications offered by a department, a faculty, an institution, an awarding body). It should be automatic. The credit accumulation value (general credit) – based on notional learning time. System Credit relates to how long an average learner will take to achieve outcomes

The process of Credit Transfer is a process where learners are able to register learning outcomes achieved in one qualification at one time and have them counted towards another qualification later on. Credit Transfer works between systems or sub-systems (especially between institutions and sectors). The credit transfer value

(specific credit) – is the value of prior learning relative to the qualification into which it will be transferred. Credit in practice is based on the match between learning outcomes already achieved and the learning outcomes required for a qualification. The Indian NSQF foresees the implementation of a CAT system (box 9).

Both are practical (pragmatic) judgements, not scientific measurements. Both require processes based on expert judgement and open to scrutiny and appeal.

#### Box 10: NSQF Notification on credit transfer

Credit transfer can be made in various ways such as allowing a learner to drop a subject already studied or take the next level course in that subject, direct admission to higher-level such as direct second-year admission, etc. This could also take the form of reservation of seats for students coming with prior learning background. The credit transfer system in each industry sector or academic domain needs to be detailed out by the NSQF, with the inputs from the respective institutions/universities/Ministries/regulators, etc. at the time of registration of qualification, so that students undertaking the qualification are clear about the possible credit transfer opportunities available to them.

### How to allocate credit to outcomes

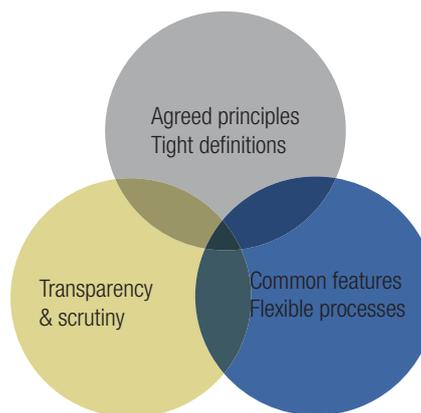
**Credit Rating Process** can be done either from scratch based on the outcomes plus experience of delivery (teaching, learning and assessing) or from comparisons with other programmes drawing on previously credit-rated programmes. It involves discussion by expert panels and validation by use and acceptance. The following needs to be taken into account:

- “distance” between recommended entry and assessable outcomes
- breadth & depth of knowledge, skills, broader competences
- kinds of learning activities required (including assessment, formal teaching/training, supervised and unsupervised practice work, private study and revision, remediation, being counselled or mentored, reflection)

### Managing Credit Rating

**Implementing a CAT System requires first that the system** is explained. Capacity building must be ensured on general credit-rating, on managing credit in practice: designing and delivering articulated pathways, and giving formal recognition to packages of learning outcomes

Figure 12: Requirements for credit rating



and Identifying and providing bridging courses. A CAT system requires national and local planning, monitoring and evaluation and that are taken to minimize bureaucracy.

## 2. The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training ECVET

ECVET is a transnational/regional Credit System aiming at bringing together National Systems through a credit exchange mechanism. The European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training is a technical framework for the transfer, recognition and (where appropriate) accumulation of individuals’ learning outcomes with a view to achieving a qualification. Guided by a European-level Recommendation, ECVET tools and methodology comprise a description of qualifications in terms of units of learning outcomes, a transfer and accumulation process and series of complementary documents such as learning agreements, personal transcripts and user guides. ECVET is intended to facilitate the recognition of learning outcomes in accordance with national legislation, in the framework of mobility, for the purpose of achieving a qualification.

ECVET aims to support the mobility of European citizens, facilitating lifelong learning (formal, informal and non-formal learning) and providing greater transparency in terms of individual learning experiences, making it more attractive to move between different countries and different learning environments. At a systems level, ECVET aims towards better compatibility between the different vocational education and training (VET) systems in place across Europe, and their qualifications.

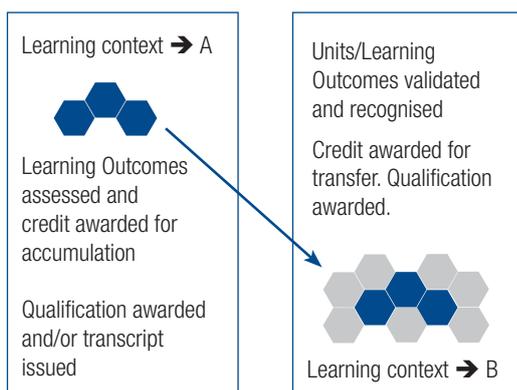
From a geographical mobility perspective, ECVET aims at facilitating validation, recognition and accumulation of skills and knowledge acquired during a stay in another country, with a view to ensuring that such experiences contribute to the achievement of vocational qualifications. ECVET was designed as one of a series of European instruments (others include Europass and the European Qualifications Framework) that target improvements in recognition and transparency.

ECVET is a tool that can assist lifelong learning by improving the transfer, recognition and accumulation of that which has been learned in the past, irrespective of the learning environment. It can ease the development of individualised and flexible lifelong learning paths which enable people to gain knowledge, skills and competence, and ultimately a qualification. ECVET supports a range of learning, and individual learner, scenarios including:

- Learners wishing to upgrade or extend their qualifications through part-time study.
- Learners wishing to study for additional qualifications that complement or build on those already held.
- Learners seeking qualifications for career progression.
- Learners returning to education or training.

ECVET relies on a series of common goals, principles and technical components, that centre on the recognition of learning outcomes and achievements for European citizens undertaking vocational education and training, irrespective of the learning context, location or delivery method. ECVET works hand in hand with the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) to provide greater transparency in European qualifications, promoting the mobility of workers and learners, and facilitating lifelong learning. ECVET brings together a wide range of actors, at both national and European levels, with a view

**Figure 13: ECVET Model**

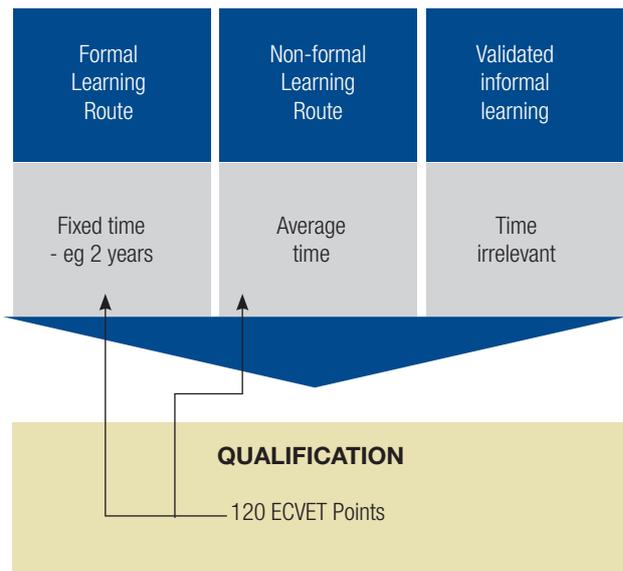


to encouraging wider implementation and use, particularly in learning mobility.

## Allocating ECVET Points

Factors counting in the allocation of points are the Importance, the complexity, scope and volume of the learner effort. "A unit may have different weights in different qualifications." Points are independent of the mode of learning.

**Figure 14: Allocating ECVET points**

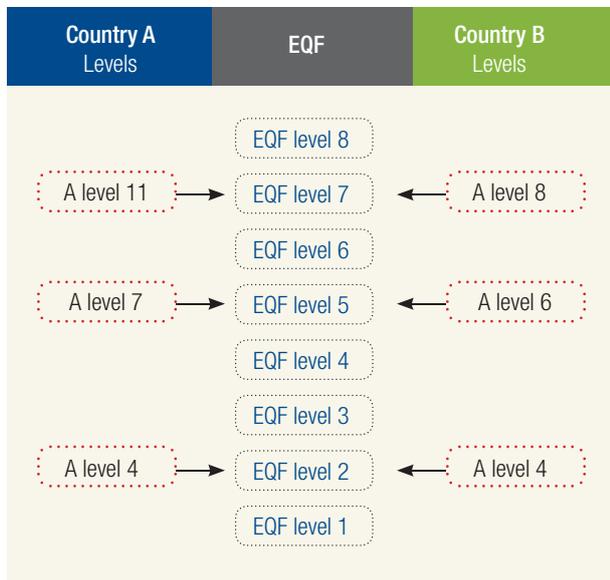
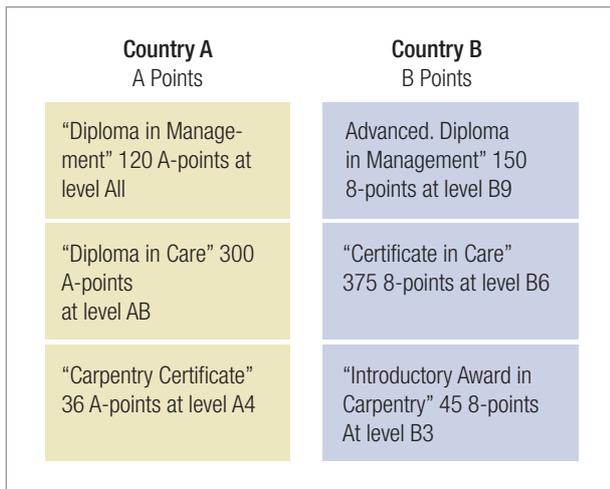
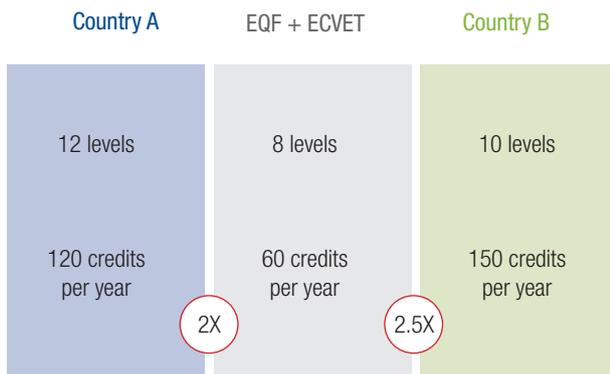


To be taken into account a unit specifications should include:

- the unit title
- the title of the qualification(s) to which the unit relates
- NQF/EQF level and ECVET credit points of these qualification(s)
- the learning outcomes contained in the unit
- the procedures and criteria for assessment of the learning outcomes
- the ECVET points (& EQF Level?) of the unit
- the currency/"validity in time" of the unit, where relevant.

The credit system can translate from one country to another (figure 15).

**Figure 15: Translation of credit system between countries.**



## Transferring ECVET Points

Arrangements for the transfer of credits between different VET systems will be agreed in a "memorandum of understanding" which will specify the scope and range of transfer. The credit transferred in practice may be different from the systems credit value of the learning.

### NSQF NOTIFICATION

Credits can be used to assist learners to transfer between programs. This can happen only when awarding bodies determine how much credit can be transferred into which of their programs. This decision will depend upon the nature/content of the learning for which the credit has been given and the requirements of the program into which transfer is being sought. This will also facilitate multiple entry and exit pathways at each level (or within a level) with the bundle of credits earned clearly certified by assessment and certification bodies which have been authorised to do so.

There are barriers to credit transfer, such as

- structure of provision – inappropriate or inadequate
- lack of clarity/transparency about processes
- suspicion between sectors and/or agencies
- insufficient or inappropriate quality assurance
- lack of trust – being too demanding
- lack of will

Conclusion a National Credit & Qualifications Framework will be established when

- All qualifications are reformed to be composed of units of learning outcomes which accord to National quality standards
- All qualifications are awarded on the basis of appropriate (competence-based) assessment standards and processes
- All units of learning outcomes are allocated to a level in the Framework according to approved benchmarks for evidence
- All qualifications and units of learning outcomes are credit-rated following Nationally agreed procedures
- All qualification and units are entered in the national register
- Links are identified between between qualifications (formal-formal, nonformal-nonformal, formal-nonformal) and pathways
- Means of recording assessed learning outcomes and credit in personal transcripts are set up
- Standards for the validation of learning outcomes between systems and the consequent award of credit to the learner are agreed and in use
- Processes for giving formal recognition for transferred credit are working
- Measures to support individual learners are in place
- National Guidelines for setting up generic Memoranda of Understanding between awarding bodies and specific articulation agreements between institutions are established and implemented

**Figure 16: A question of balance**



### 3. Skype Session

#### Developing a Policy on Credit Systems (James Keevy)

**Structure of presentation: 1.Policy process 2. Conceptual basis 3. Policy overview**

South African Qualifications Authority is mandated to develop, after consultation with the Quality Councils, national policy for Assessment, Recognition of Prior Learning and Credit Accumulation and Transfer. The National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008 was issued following a series of consultations represented in Figure 17 below.

**Figure 17: Layer of Consultation**



- Public comment period
- In and after consultation
- Drawing in credible and reliable experts in the field
- External workshop where necessary
- Ownership remains with SAQA
- Conceptual basis

The NQF is a single integrated system which comprises of three co-ordinated qualifications sub-frameworks:

1. General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework (GFETQSF) overseen by Umalusi
2. Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (HEQSF) overseen by the CHE

- Occupational Qualifications Sub-framework (OQSF) overseen by the QCTO (Quality Council for Trade and Occupations)

The sub-frameworks were determined on 14 December 2012. The HEQSF and GFEQSF policies were gazetted on 30 August 2013. The OQSF policy was gazetted on 30 July 2014.

**Table 8: The South African Qualifications Framework**

Level	Sub-framework and qualification types	
10	Doctoral Degree Doctoral Degree (Professional)	*
9	Master's Degree Master's Degree (Professional)	*
8	Bachelor Honours Degree Postgraduate Diploma Bachelor's Degree	Occupational Certificate (Level 8)
7	Bachelor's Degree Advanced Diploma	Occupational Certificate (Level 7)
6	Diploma Advanced Certificate	Occupational Certificate (Level 6)
5	Higher Certificate	Occupational Certificate (Level 5)
4	National Certificate	Occupational Certificate (Level 4)
3	Intermediate Certificate	Occupational Certificate (Level 3)
2	Elementary Certificate	Occupational Certificate (Level 2)
1	General Certificate	Occupational Certificate (Level 1)

CAT involves many related practices not always explicitly defined as 'CAT': Admission, RPL, Advanced standing, Credit transfer, Curriculum mapping, Etc. Much research has been used in the process.

## Core Principles

- A description of qualifications in terms of learning outcomes in relation to the level descriptors of the NQF
- The allocation of credits for the achievement of learning outcomes
- Other principles are illustrated by Figure 18.

**Figure 18: Core principles**



## Policy Overview

The purpose of this policy and criteria is to facilitate the development of credible, efficient and transparent CAT processes within and between each of the sub frameworks of the NQF

- Provide for the development and implementation of CAT as an integral component of qualification design within the NQF and its sub frameworks
- Position CAT in relation to the objectives of the NQF to support lifelong learning in South Africa
- Directly address CAT-related challenges faced within the education and training system
- Specify the roles and functions of bodies involved in CAT

## A Culture of Articulation

The Legislation national policy sets a formal requirement within the education and training system as well as Formal and informal agreements between specific institutional types, guided by guidelines, policies, and accreditation principles

The responsibility to implement CAT is shared among stakeholders: CAT is the joint responsibility of the Department of Higher Education and Training, Department of Basic Education, SAQA, the QCs, education institutions and skills development providers, recognised professional bodies and workplaces

## Responsibility of SAQA

- Develop national policy and criteria, after consultation with the Quality Councils, for CAT
- Develop national CAT guidelines for inter-institutional collaboration

3. Support the development of collaborative partnerships across the sub frameworks of the NQF
4. Co-ordinate the sub frameworks of the NQF, including the alignment of sub framework policies on CAT, and articulation across the system.
5. Establish and manage an adjudication process to monitor unfair exclusionary practices related to CAT, including a review of admission criteria
6. Set up and provide support to a permanent sub-committee of the CEO Committee for CAT
7. Oversee research to improve CAT in collaboration with the Quality Councils
8. Promote and enable the use of a common language to communicate credit system arrangements

## Responsibility of Quality Council

- Collaborate with the other QCs
- Formalise principles and conditions for CAT
- Initiate and oversee incubation projects
- Develop a policy on CAT for their sub frameworks, taking into account the relevant national SAQA policies, and the broader context of their specific sub frameworks and related policies
- Participate in the adjudication process of SAQA to monitor unfair exclusionary practices related to CAT
- Undertake systematic work on the development of sectoral credit schemes within their specific sub frameworks.
- Promote the collaborative development of curriculum and qualification pathways
- Actively promote the recognition of workplace experience for CAT
- Develop linkages for articulation and progression to promote CAT

## Responsibility of Providers

- Demonstrate that their policies and practices for all types of articulation support the principles
- Seek accreditation by the relevant Quality Council(s)
- In the case of private education providers be registered by the Department of Higher Education and Training
- Avoid unfair exclusionary practices related to CAT
- Collaborate to offer diverse and mutually recognised qualifications

- Set fair and transparent admission criteria that is consistent with national policy
- Undertake collaborative approaches to curriculum development across different institutional types to advance CAT
- Initiate and participate in partnerships with education and training providers to promote CAT
- Develop and maintain an information management system

## Responsibility of Recognized Professional Body

- Comply with the SAQA Policy and Criteria for Recognising a Professional Body and Registering a Professional Designation on the NQF
- Including not to apply unfair exclusionary practices in membership admission to the body or when recognising education and training providers
- Initiate and participate in partnerships with education and training providers to promote CAT

## Responsibility in Workplaces

- Adhere to the principles and responsibilities as outlined in this policy
- Proactively engage with education and training providers to contribute to the acceptance of new qualifications and a general awareness of the role and function of CAT
- Actively promote the recognition of workplace experience and provide for CAT in collaboration with the Quality Councils

## Conclusion

- The relationship between CAT and an NQF must be clearly defined:
  - Do the two systems exist alongside each other?
  - Is CAT part of the NQF (as in South Africa or in India)?
- Adequate consultation results in effective implementation
- A strong conceptual basis must underpin the policy

## FURTHER READINGS

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