



## Draft Articulation Policy Into and Within Higher Education

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## Acronyms and Abbreviations

CAT	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CET	Community Education and Training
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
GFETQSF	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HC	Higher Certificate
HOC	Higher Occupational Certificate
MoA	Memorandum of Agreement
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NATED	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
NCV	National Certificate Vocational
NPPSET	National Plan for Post School Education and Training
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSC	National Senior Certificate
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
PQM	Programme Qualification Mix
PSET	Post School Education and Training
QC	Quality Council
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
TVET	Technical and Vocational Education and Training
UoTs	Universities of Technology
VET	Vocational Education and Training

## GLOSSARY

**Articulation** refers to the processes and mechanisms that enable student mobility within and among the institutions that comprise the tertiary system, for example, academic credit accumulation and transfer, recognition and equivalence of degrees, recognition of prior learning, and so forth<sup>1</sup>. However, the concept can refer to more substantive meaning that will include, articulation at an institutional level and the individual level. At the inter-institutional level (national, regional, and global), it will include agreements and linkages between institutions. At the intra-institutional level, it refers to the movement of students within an institution. For example, where the students would like to move from one programme to the other. For instance, the student moving from B. Ed Foundation Phase to B. Ed senior phase.

**Credit accumulation** means the totalling of credits that may be combined to complete the required credits for a qualification or a part qualification.

**Credit transfer** means the vertical, horizontal or diagonal re-allocation of credits towards a qualification or part qualification on the same or different level, usually between different programmes, departments or institutions.

**Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) system** means an arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning through progression and access to the workplace.

**Formal learning** means learning that occurs in an organized and structured education and training environment and that is explicitly designated as such. Formal learning leads to the awarding of a qualification or part qualification registered on the NQF.

**Informal learning** means learning that results from daily activities related to paid or unpaid work, family or community life, or leisure, including incidental learning. However, in some instances, such learning could be planned or structured.

**Learning programme** means a purposeful and structured set of learning activities designed to enable a student to meet the outcomes necessary for the award of a qualification (this definition aligns to the CHE Norms and Standards for Certification, 2020). This definition takes account of the fact that non-formal educational and training offerings can be highly purposeful, structured and oriented towards the attainment of specified learning outcomes.

**Non-formal learning** means planned educational interventions that are not intended to lead to award qualifications or part qualifications that are registered on the NQF.

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<sup>1</sup> (Ng'ethe, Subotzky, & Afeti, 2008). Differentiation and Articulation in Tertiary Education Systems: A Study of Twelve African Countries. The World Bank. Washington, DC.

**Part qualification** means an assessed unit of learning that is registered as part of a qualification.

**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** means the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated, and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development.

## 1. BACKGROUND

Articulation is one of the fundamental principles of the United Nations (UN) Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), specifically Goal 4. The goal seeks to address inequality between and within countries and to prioritise the most vulnerable to ensure that no one is left behind. The goal furthermore aims to provide equal access to affordable vocational training, to eliminate gender and wealth disparities, and achieve universal access to a quality higher education. The implementation of sustainable development in higher education is an important goal and one which requires much planning, including the articulation and differentiation of the system. The recurring problems and barriers that hinder the attainment of sustainable development objectives at universities are either directly or indirectly related to deficiencies in proper planning of the system which results in dead ends for students. These dead ends for students pose a significant barrier to the achievement of sustainable development.

The goal of articulation relates broadly to society and development, taking a “people-centred” or humanist approach. In this regard, inclusive and equitable quality education, and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all, are priorities.

Articulation is aligned with South Africa's national strategic policy frameworks, including, the [National Development Plan 2030](#) (2012), The [White Paper for Post-School Education and Training \(PSET\)](#) (2013) in South Africa and the [Articulation Policy](#)

[for the Post-School Education and Training System](#) (2017). The policy instruments point to the need for articulation to be located within the framework and value systems of lifelong learning, education for democracy and social justice, and active, innovative participation in the economy. The Ministerial Articulation Policy (2017) is intended to facilitate this through the movement of students between and within the three sub-frameworks of the NQF, and between institutions and also within institutions in order to enable access, progression and mobility.

At the advent of a democratic era in South Africa, it was hoped that a differentiated and well-articulated education and training system would be developed. For example, the NQF together with other policy initiatives was seen as a watershed to initiate national development, providing all South Africans with the opportunity to grow to their fullest potential. Besides the global and national contextual factors, the philosophical foundations of articulation include its conceptualisation and organisational barriers to articulation.

Articulation has been the subject of several research projects in the last fifteen to twenty years. The studies were an attempt to understand how articulation evolved and included the NATED N1-N6 and the old T1, T2 and T3 qualifications within Technikons (now Universities of Technology) to promote articulation. While there were very few islands of articulation across sectors, even within one system such as higher education, articulation was yet to be taken to scale. It has not been since the last eight to ten years that there has been a targeted approach to change behaviour when it comes to articulation, through policy intervention. Research studies led by SAQA and the CHE investigated articulation between TVET Colleges and Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Buthelezi, 2018; Badenhorst & Radile, 2018 and Papier & Needham, 2021). One of the outcomes of the research has been the National Articulation Baseline Study Report (2018).

The National Baseline Study Report sought to achieve three things: firstly, to classify, analyse, and record good models of articulation in their different stages of development. Secondly, it sought to identify and explore the potential for developing

collaborative models for articulation pathways. Its final goal was to identify the nature of activities that institutions, staff, and students need for a successful transition. Amongst other findings, the Report identified the following blockages:

- a) a lack of understanding of the need for institutions to be flexible by considering equality and equity in their support of learners as they transition along their individual pathways (for example, in pursuit of inclusivity, alternative assessment strategies might be applied for those who experience learning barriers);
- b) a lack of robust articulation arrangements; and
- c) a lack of flexibility by institutions to support learners in their learning pathways, including the different forms of knowledge, which underpin a conscious approach to boundary crossing.

While it is still in the early days, the research indicates that articulation, if steered through policy, planning, funding and quality assurance has the potential to change the face of higher education. Partnership agreements between providers who deliver occupational qualifications and HEIs – bilateral agreements – whereby credit transfer is being achieved and occupational qualifications are recognised for entry into university programmes is but one of these indicators emerging.

## **2. THE LEGISLATIVE MANDATES**

Articulation in higher education is governed by the following regulatory frameworks:

- 2.1. The Policy on Articulation functions within the following regulated environment:  
National Qualifications Framework Act, Act 67 of 2008;
- 2.2. White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, 2014;
- 2.3. Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, 2013.
- 2.4. Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), and Assessment in Higher Education, 2016.
- 2.5. Ministerial Policy: Articulation for the Post-School Education and Training System, 2017;
- 2.6. A Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) for Higher Education in South Africa, 2021;

- 2.7. Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programmes Requiring a National Senior Certificate (NSC), 2018;
- 2.8. Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programmes Requiring a National Certificate Vocational at NQF Level 4, 2009; and
- 2.9. CHE Criteria for Programme Accreditation, 2004.

### **3. PURPOSE**

The purpose of this policy is to establish articulation protocols (which includes a system of policies, rules, regulations, standards) within the higher education sector in South Africa, with the specific purpose to:

- a. Accelerate access to universities of students from TVET Colleges, CET Colleges and Schools offering NQF level 4 qualifications.
- b. Facilitate the mobility and progression of students in higher education and between the HEQSF, GFETQSF and OQSF.
- c. Accelerate the redress of unfair discrimination in the provision of learning opportunities.
- d. Promote partnership and collaborations between institutions to develop learning pathways and ensure that the learning that they offer is linked to these larger pathways.
- e. Ensure that students are supported in their individual pathways, through RPL and CAT, when entering higher education.

### **4. SCOPE**

The scope of this policy covers the following:

- 4.1 All qualifications offered on the HEQSF – access to and progression within the HEQSF.
- 4.2 All higher education providers, private and public in South Africa.



- 4.3 TVET Colleges offering Higher Certificates, and progressively, Diploma programmes, in partnership with Higher Education Institutions.
- 4.4 The implementation of articulation, especially as regards the roles and functions of the CHE, public and private higher education institutions, and students in higher education and professional bodies.

## **5. THE POLICY**

### **5.1. POLICY PRINCIPLES**

The following principles provide a foundation for implementing articulation in the higher education sector.

#### **5.1.1. A Shared Vision**

Articulation must pursue and achieve a shared vision of higher education that is coherent, principled, and forward-looking. This vision should rise above intermittent responses to conflicts and challenges and look beyond a narrow and reductive pragmatism to emphasize what students most need and set forth expectations that address those needs: the knowledge and ability to participate in a rapidly evolving global economy, the awareness and commitment to make an effective contribution to their democratic society, and the acumen and intellectual depth essential to the enjoyment of a satisfying and reflective life.

#### **5.1.2. Systemic and Specific**

Articulation within the NQF is both systemic and institution specific, which includes both the individual and the institution. While systemic articulation is based on national policy and formal requirements, specific articulation is based on formal and/or informal agreements between two or more institutions and is guided by institutional policies, principles, and protocols.

### **5.1.3. Lifelong Learning**

Articulation allows a student's achievements to be recognised even if the student does not achieve a qualification. All credits for an incomplete qualification may be recognised by the same or a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for a different qualification or may be recognised by a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for the same qualification.

### **5.1.4. Redress, Equity, Social Justice and Inclusiveness**

Access to learning opportunities is promoted actively. The policy is premised on overcoming barriers to access and promoting success.

### **5.1.5. Consensus and Alignment**

Articulation must be by design, not default, in a move toward greater consensus, alignment, and coordination with respect to standards, protocols, actions and vocabularies. The substantive focus must be on programmatic rather than institutional articulation.

### **5.1.6. Transparency**

Improved transparency, expressed through much more effective communication, and discrete objectives are desirable. Transparency will be enhanced through scrutiny of appeals processes, relative to a shared standard, for instance. Greater disclosure, coupled with a well-informed awareness of strategies for reducing potential liability, not only should enable the public to understand what higher education institutions do and the decisions they make in relation to articulation, but also should contribute to comparative information supporting informed decisions on university choice.

### **5.1.7. Fair Procedures**

All policies and procedures relating to articulation should be easily understood and readily available. It should be relevant, reliable, fair and transparent criteria, procedures and practices for validating learning must be used.

## **5.2. POLICY STATEMENT**

Articulation is about the mechanisms that enable student mobility within and among education and training institutions to pursue lifelong learning and career pathing. The establishment of pathways of access and success of students from other parts of the PSET system, such as TVET college students, into higher education, depend fundamentally on the creation of a fully articulated system at universities. The current PSET system is still very wasteful with extraordinarily high dropout rates, very low throughput rates in schools, TVET colleges and higher education with unnecessary repetition of learning and is not geared to allow students to find multiple pathways to success. Multiple pathways should exist to allow students to build towards their educational and career destinations. Articulation is a compulsory intervention in contributing to students' improved access and success in their career and employment destination.

## **5.3. POLICY IMPLEMENTATION PLAN/STRATEGY**

The following barriers to articulation have been identified:

- a. There is a lack of minimum norms, standards and targets for PSET institutions on (TVET-HE) articulation and the monitoring of implementation.
- b. The process of designing programme articulation/learning pathways for and into every qualification ([GFETQSF](#), [OQSF](#) and [HEQSF](#)), by SAQA and the QCs is still a challenge. This is since the QCs are legally independent and as a result operate separately.
- c. Generally, most universities are not yet sufficiently informed and prepared to admit students from other PSET institutions. There is a general misunderstanding, for example, of the TVET College graduate, their needs in the university and the management of the transition from college to university.

- d. The national enabling environment does not adequately and robustly translate into enabling and flexible implementation environments in institutions (admission, programme/curriculum design, student support) to admit, provide teaching and learning opportunities. Universities are still viewing articulation as an option, rather than a necessity.
- e. Few universities are not yet ready to offer NQF Level 5 programmes as bridging in some of their programmes for students from other PSET institutions. Most universities prefer to work with a homogeneous group with the same prior knowledge, skills, values and attitudes, with the NSC outcomes as a basis.
- f. A lack of Higher Education Institutions' (HEIs) understanding of programmes in other PSET institutions, and the skills that these institutions target and develop, for example in TVET colleges. The lack of understanding by HEIs in general perpetuates certain negative perceptions held by the TVET students themselves that became a barrier.
- g. There is no broad implementation of articulation in PSET institutions, faculties, or departments, to ensure consistency, fairness, and communication regarding the flexible opportunities. Where it is done, as in the case of individual TVET-HE projects, it is mainly done on an ad-hoc faculty/department/ programme level.
- h. Universities are not adequately using and advocating the NQF regulatory system to accommodate students from other parts of the PSET system.
- i. DHET, SAQA, QCs and institutions are not adequately communicating the details of PSET articulation possibilities.
- j. Inadequate Career Development Services for PSET students on the possibilities and requirements for access to universities.
- k. The lack of incentives, and of resources (human and financial) to drive and implement articulation and lack of support to students who entered universities from other PSET institutions. For example, TVET College graduates need academic and funding support as they transition into higher education.
- l. Inadequate examples of good articulation practices are shared across PSET institutions, including universities.

- m. The current support section at some universities does not understand programmes and qualifications, yet they are given powers to decide on admissions and registration of students.
- n. Articulation (as well as RPL and CAT) is generally not managed by professionals who may understand better curricula and learning pathways.

The above issues and barriers focus more on articulation into higher education by students from other PSET institutions. This is important as it helps shape the CHE's response as the Quality Council for Higher Education. These barriers will only be overcome if deliberate, systematic and sector-wide planning is developed and adequately resourced. The following section outlines some such planning for formalizing and infusing articulation as it has been described here.

The plans that follow formalise and operationalise articulation into higher education to open access, redress, mobility and progression, development, transformation and social justice, and create the conditions for an ongoing lifelong learning approach to the labour market so that it retains flexibility and relevance. Articulation within universities, does however remain a serious concern, in large part a remnant of the legacy of inequality. Therefore, some of the plans stated in this section of the policy to drive articulation are relevant to enforcing articulation within programmes and qualifications across universities.

The extent to which the proposed plans become solutions to the barriers mentioned above depends on the decisiveness of all major stakeholders, i.e., DHET, CHE, QCs, SAQA, Universities and other PSET institutions. Although universities may argue for autonomy, there is still room for public accountability, since universities are, in fact, fulfilling a public purpose with national obligations. Therefore, it is possible that this policy, together with other DHET parent pieces of legislation, regulations and policies will contribute to higher education institutions giving meaning to articulation.

### **5.3.1. Short-Term Plan (0-5 Years)**

- 5.3.1.1. The CHE will establish a standing national HEI Articulation forum/committee consisting of the role-players such as academic faculty/department qualification/programme developers, with clear terms of reference and a regular reporting mechanism to the CHE.
- 5.3.1.2. At the systems level, all HEIs should report on articulation planning and processes to the DHET as part of enrolment planning reports, and agreements, and reporting on colleges from colleges to universities.
- 5.3.1.3. The CHE to develop advice to the Minister to standardise funding arrangements for articulation partners. For example, students registered at TVET colleges for Higher Certificate qualifications in partnership with a university must be able to also access the university's facilities. The student fees are collected by college and the subsidy is split on an agreed-to ratio between College and University.
- 5.3.1.4. The DHET, in partnership with the CHE and QCTO, to develop a policy on Minimum Admission Requirements into Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor Degree studies with a qualification achieved on NQF Level 4 of the OQSF, taking into consideration what has already been achieved by some institutions.
- 5.3.1.5. Formal partnership and collaborations through MOUs, MOAs among institutions at programme and course levels should be intensified.
- 5.3.1.6. Identify and incentivise support services needed for articulating students into HEIs. This must be part of the advice to the Minister as indicated in 5.3.1.3 above. This will address barrier (11) mentioned above. Financial support and other forms of incentives should be adequate to enable universities to implement articulation of TVET college students into universities.
- 5.3.1.7. The CHE, in collaboration with the other QCs and SAQA, should facilitate a comprehensive mapping of NCV fundamentals in relation to Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree studies, starting with scarce and critical skills as a start. This would assist in standardising criteria for NCV

certificate holders entering higher education. The same process will need to be done for updated NATED qualifications, and other OQSF qualifications.

- 5.3.1.8. Confusion with the portability of qualifications at the same NQF levels within different sub-frameworks, for example, the Level 5 HEQSF Higher Certificate, and the Level 5 OQSF Higher Occupational Certificate. Building this understanding will be crucial to embedding parity of esteem in the system.
- 5.3.1.9. Articulation within higher education should be aligned with the SAQA Level Descriptors to give effect to the parity of esteem principle.
- 5.3.1.10. The CHE to develop a comprehensive standard, with guidelines and criteria, for HEIs to adhere to and be reviewed within the context of its new Quality Assurance Framework (QAF).
- 5.3.1.11. The CHE does a themed Quality Review based on the standards, guidelines and criteria that were established within the QAF for articulation, CAT and RPL across all HEIs.
- 5.3.1.12. All HEIs should organise along regional hubs, which will collaborate to enable capacity at institutional levels so that institutions will in time become fully functional to deliver articulation.

### **5.3.2. Medium-Term Plan (0-10 Years)**

- 5.3.2.1. TVET colleges in collaboration and partnership with HEIs should offer NQF Level 5 Higher Certificates, with students qualifying to progress into an Advanced Certificate and then a Diploma at a recognised HEI.
- 5.3.2.2. Bridging programmes and equivalency schemes that are recognized and accredited by relevant QCs are in place.

## **6. ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES FOR IMPLEMENTING ARTICULATION IN HIGHER EDUCATION**

The legislative and policy mandate of the CHE includes, *inter alia*, promoting quality assurance in higher education, promoting access to and success of students in higher education institutions, complying with policy, as determined by the Minister responsible for Higher Education and collaborating with SAQA and the other Quality Councils.

## **6.1. Responsibilities of the CHE**

The legislative and policy mandate of the CHE gives it the following responsibilities:

- 6.1.1. Ensure, in terms of Section 27 (h) (iii) and (iv) of the NQF Act, that all new qualifications submitted to SAQA for registration contain clear articulation routes, and statements elaborating articulation in a clear and practical way. Where articulation is not possible, reasons must be provided.
- 6.1.2. Work with higher education institutions to develop and implement new progressive access, articulation, and CAT and RPL policies, including mapping the curriculum to create learning pathways and eliminate any dead ends.
- 6.1.3. Work with the other two Quality Councils, the General and Further Education and Training Quality Council (Umalusi) and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), to identify the articulation points between qualifications on the three sub-frameworks and broker articulation agreements across institutions in the PSET system to enable articulation across the sub-frameworks.
- 6.1.4. Advise the Minister responsible for Higher Education on means to incentivise articulation between higher education institutions and other institutions, such as TVET Colleges, in the PSET system.
- 6.1.5. Simplify the HEQSF by managing the proliferation of higher education qualifications submitted by higher education institutions for accreditation and subsequent registration by SAQA on the NQF.
- 6.1.6. Ensure that higher education institutions have articulation policies in place that are aligned to this policy and that the institutional policies are implemented fairly and credibly.



- 6.1.7. Monitor articulation agreements entered between higher education institutions and institutions from other parts of the PSET system.
- 6.1.8. Develop standards, guidelines, and criteria for articulation for all HEIs and develop capacity in HEIs to fulfil the standard.
- 6.1.9. Review the extent to which HEIs fulfil articulation through themes and / or institutional quality reviews.

## **6.2 Responsibilities of Higher Education Institutions**

Higher Education Institutions have the responsibility to:

- 6.2.1. Develop and implement institutional articulation policies, aligned to this policy and the Minister's Policy on Articulation.
- 6.2.2. Promote an institutional culture of articulation through implementing articulation holistically, including RPL and CAT in line with the institution's quality assurance framework. This articulation culture should enable articulation from one academic programme to another or from one department/school/faculty to another within the same institution.
- 6.2.3. Use articulation agreements to enter inter-institutional partnerships and arrangements ensuring vertical, horizontal and diagonal articulation of qualifications guided by parity of esteem principles. Inter-Institutional partnerships include those between HEI and other institutions within the PSET such as TVET Colleges.
- 6.2.4. Ensure clearly defined learning pathways in qualifications submitted for accreditation and registration as well as in both inter-institutional and intra-institutional articulation agreements.
- 6.2.5. Develop and maintain information management systems that are compatible with HEMIS and the Higher Education Quality Committee Information System (HEQCIS) and other relevant government information management systems and submit the relevant articulation data to the CHE using effective systems.
- 6.2.6. HEIs should provide timeous, appropriate, and ongoing support. If a student transitions from a private to public, HE, or vice versa, he/she might require

different kinds of support as the environment might be different, etc. Institutions make known the types of support provided but monitoring and evaluation of this is key.

- 6.2.7. HEIs use the CHE standards, guidelines, and criteria to develop their internal systems for articulation.
- 6.2.8. HEIs regularly reflect and review their institutional policies for and practices in articulation, including getting student feedback on their experiences.

### **6.3 Responsibilities of Students**

Students are responsible to:

- 6.3.1. Familiarise themselves with the articulation policies of the higher education institution where they are enrolled.
- 6.3.2. Promote articulation possibilities amongst their peers.
- 6.3.3. Provide all documentary evidence of their prior learning required by the HEI.

### **6.4 Responsibilities of Professional Bodies**

Professional bodies are required to:

- 6.4.1. Co-operate with the CHE in respect of qualifications in the HEQSF and quality assurance in the professional bodies' occupational field in terms of section 28 of the NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008.
- 6.4.2. Comment on qualifications submitted for accreditation by the HEQC of the CHE including specific reference to articulation between the proposed qualification and the world of work or professional/occupational practice.
- 6.4.3. Provide articulation maps between professional qualifications and qualifying for professional practice.

## **7. IMPLEMENTATION, TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS AND REVIEW**

### **7.1. Implementation**

- 7.1.1. The custodian of this policy is the CHE, and the implementation of articulation is the function of institutions, that is, between and among the universities and other PSET institutions. HEIs and colleges, will conduct widespread advocacy and communications to inform learners about the different learning pathway opportunities.
- 7.1.2. Standardised admission requirements for similar pathways and lifelong learning should be considered for learning categories. At the same time, the system must be flexible for social justice and efficiency. Admission requirements into higher education institutions must be fair and transparent. The CHE should facilitate consistent tracking mechanisms to monitor articulation from TVET institutions into higher education institutions.
- 7.1.3. This policy becomes effective on the date it is published by the CHE.

## **7.2 Articulation offices**

HEIs should have articulation offices, working within regional hubs, to oversee articulation in all programmes and qualifications, and between institutions, including from the TVET sector. The articulation officers should be composed of professionals who understand curricular and educational/occupational programmes. Such articulation professionals should participate in regular capacity development initiatives.

## **7.3 Review**

The Policy shall be reviewed every five years or earlier if necessary. Those who have input to make would be welcome to contact the CHE email address: [MHEQSF@che.ac.za](mailto:MHEQSF@che.ac.za)

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