

OCCUPATIONAL ASSESSMENT MODEL AS A REGULATION TOOL IN THE WHOLESALE AND RETAIL SECTOR

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to critically evaluate the implementation requirements of the new system of occupational qualification and part qualifications in South Africa, from the perspective of industry and other stakeholders who are affected by the change. The methodology adopted was qualitative, including an analysis of secondary data, namely South African and international policy documents on assessment. This was followed by empirical research, using individual interviews and a survey applied via regional focus groups. A purposive sample of 67 stakeholders, made up of business, training providers, quality assurance experts and W&RSETA staff, was selected. Data was analysed using a thematic identifier, looking for common trends that were then grouped according to categories. Each questionnaire was dissected and classified according to the categories. Independent checks were put into place in which data was cross-referenced and audited to ensure that all findings produced were error free. The main findings were that an assessment model would need to be flexible to meet the industry's various needs. Furthermore, a standard operating procedure is required, industry consultation on their needs and assessment planning is needed to minimise disruption of operations, and a formalized process by which roles are linked to standard operating procedures and the ability to perform competently against them is necessary.

Keywords: Assessment, National Summative Assessment, Wholesale and Retail, Occupational

1. INTRODUCTION

The framework for occupational qualifications in South Africa has changed from unit standard based learning to occupational profiles, which do not have pre-defined minimum credit requirements, but rather focus on the needs of the occupational profile, as per industry requirements and needs.

In the new framework, assessment takes place at each stage of the learning cycle, after training (formative), practical (formative), workplace based assessment (logbook as well as formative) and then the summative which is controlled and standardised and which all learners complete in order to be awarded the occupational certificate. The learner needs to exit with a statement of credits for the preceding three formative stages which form part of the qualifying criteria for accessing the summative.

Therefore there are multiple role-players in the assessment, which include skills development providers (training providers), the workplace as well as the institution which manages the national summative assessments.

The institutions in the new framework are Assessment Quality Partners (AQP), which administer the summative assessment component of the assessment cycle, in a controlled assessment administered nationally for all learners who qualify to meet the requirements of external summative assessment. There is the requirement to both

develop the assessment instruments as well as to manage and administer the national assessment. It is the national footprint which makes this process complex as South Africa has a large geographic spread, has different resources available in the rural and urban areas as well as multiple industries with very different needs and which do not necessarily have the national footprint in order to offer the experiential or workplace component of the assessment, which is noted in the precursor to access to the summative.

This paper considers the various role-players' perceptions on how to implement this model in a manner which specifically suits the wholesale and retail sector. The focus is not on assessment methodology, or guidelines provided by the overarching quality assurance body but the opinions and perspectives of those linked to the largest economic sector in South Africa namely the wholesale and retail sector. This paper provides an opportunity to understand a point of view looking at assessment management and practice rather than that of assessment expertise.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Understanding the wholesale and retail sector

As noted in the research of Winther and Klotz (2013), there are multiple needs across professions

and even within them. One only has to consider the various chambers that make up the Wholesale and Retail Sector Education Training Authority (W&RSETA) responsible for education, training and development of learning within the sector to acknowledge the vast, and very different needs.

The W&RSETA Sector Skills Plan 2011-2016 (W&RSETA, 2010: 1) notes the diversified sub-sectors that are managed by one body:

Profile of the Wholesale and Retail Landscape: Hypermarkets, Supermarkets, Discounter, Convenience Stores, Forecourt Retailers, Mixed Retailers, Health and Beauty specialists, Clothing and footwear specialists, Furniture and Furnishing stores, DIY, Home Improvement and Garden Centres, Electronic and Appliances Specialist Retailers, Leisure and Personal Goods Specialist Retailers, Vending, Home shopping, Internet Retailing Direct Selling, and Fuel retailers.

Therefore educating within the wholesale and retail sector requires a careful analysis of both the knowledge and practical requirements of each sub-sector. One therefore cannot make assumptions that learning as well as the model of implementation of the national summative assessment will be the same.

One only has to compare the assessment requirements of the service station attendant (forecourt retailer), which includes knowledge about health and safety issues as well as the practical requirements of operating a fuel pump against a small retailer (noting there is no reference to small or small-to-medium enterprises) that only employs 20 people and has staff fulfilling multiple roles, against which possibly two occupational qualifications would be linked, to acknowledge that a singular holistic model for assessment cannot be implemented (le Grange, 2015).

The UK Commission for Employment and Skills (Mosley et al. 2012) conducted an extensive review of various economic sectors, which included the various challenges that wholesale and retail sectors face. A large component of the report focused on the devaluing of skills and considered how skills, or lack of skills, impacted the sector. As noted, there is always a high turnover in the sector as people move around and therefore “the sector always has jobs available due to churn levels and new businesses opening” (Mosley et al. 2012: 75). As a result there is a need to continuously employ staff, even when skills transfer has taken place with staff that have left. This is a general concern in the wholesale and retail sector and in most cases there is a tendency to short learning programmes which are more appropriate due to the turnover.

Although there is a movement of staff and some skills transfer, “[t]he main reason across all of the nations for skills shortage vacancies was the lack of job-specific skills” (Mosley et al. 2012: 85), which simply highlights the impact of the movement of staff. Therefore the sector has to continuously adapt. The tendency to continue training, store or organisation specific is a reality, as if this is not done, “loss of business to competitors, increased operational costs / difficulty in meeting quality standards and new working practices” (Mosley et al. 2012: 98) is the direct impact.

Therefore, an understanding of the wholesale and retail sector and its various workplaces is

critical in implementing a new model of assessment and learning.

2.2. Considering an international quality assurance delivery partner

There are multiple providers that offer delivery of learning for these kinds of qualifications and delivery methodologies. Considering various quality assurance models notes how an education tool is considered for occupational assessment models based on current international quality assurance partners.

One can consider the research conducted by Damons, le Grange, Louw and Mason (2015) which evaluated the City and Guilds model. City and Guilds are a private institution in the United Kingdom offering vocational qualifications. The model that is used combines both theoretical and practical assessment in the form of exit summative assessments, which could assess both theoretical and practical competency. City and Guilds have produced various documents that list the process and procedure for accrediting, conducting and providing the administrative and data support for assessments, using a national, or in their case international, exit summative assessment. These documents include:

Providing City and Guilds Qualifications: a guide to centre and qualification approval (City and Guilds, 2008)

Guide to the assessment of practical skills in International Vocational Qualifications (City and Guilds, 2003)

Guidance for Centres: Our Quality Assurance Requirements (City and Guilds, 2011)

Amongst the resources that are noted as being required in terms of the abovementioned documents are external resources such as quality systems consultants, external verifiers and setting and marking examiners (City and Guilds, 2008, 11-13) as well as an internal quality assurer (City and Guilds, 2011, 27) for the initial phases of accreditation and assessment. In addition to these roles, monitoring post-registration as an assessment centre is conducted by a consultant to ensure that the assessment centre meets all requirements (City and Guilds, 2011, 23).

In addition, where there is a practical component such as a workplace-based assessment, or a practical assessment that is a component of a summative assessment, then it is up to the assessment centre to manage this and to ensure the credibility of the assessment (City and Guilds, 2008, 15).

Considering that the wholesale and retail sector looks to ensure that assessment of learning, the model and its challenges form part of the analysis of meeting sector requirements. The concern about this model is that there is a reliance on organisations wishing to register as assessment centres. As this is a voluntary process, and one linked to various requirements for continued compliance, it will be driven by the willingness of organisations to register as assessment centres, presumably on their seeing value in doing so. There could also be challenges if organisations choose not to register as assessment centres in certain regions, resulting in learners having to travel, at a cost to be borne by someone or

some organisation, to undertake an assessment at a centre away from where they are located, noting that there may be no assessment centre for a considerable distance. Considering this, although this model is the best from a management and cost perspective, it could become exclusive.

A recommended model to review is that developed by the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (2014). Its' process of implementing assessments should be considered in relation to the following parameter.

Firstly, there is a strategy that defines how the assessment will be implemented and considers amongst other things, the purpose and need for the assessment in relation to the curriculum. This is then followed by a process of industry engagement, which is seen as a critical step as the strategy must consider industry needs, validated through such industry engagement.

Assessment in this model is conducted based on both the original strategy and the industry engagement, and this ensures fit-for-purpose assessment instruments as well the assessment process. This is then followed by a systematic evaluation that considers the efficacy of the assessment and reviews the various phases in the implementation of the assessment.

What is important to note from this model, is that there is industry engagement prior to the assessment, as the validation and validity of the assessment by the industry is considered crucial.

Winther and Klotz (2013, 3) note that there is no singular model or content applicable when considering assessment within any sector and specifically in a situation in which competence should be demonstrated, "[t]hus VET content is heterogeneous not only between countries and also across different professions within nations but across workplaces". Thus, the idea of 'action competency' has been developed to ensure that the individual needs of the profession are catered for when students engage in a learning methodology, which is measured through action and that this is linked to the workplace to ensure authenticity. As Winther and Klotz (2013, 4) note:

"Since then students by law have to be instructed in a way that enables them to plan, execute and monitor a whole action process in a working environment."

The 'action competency' model helps to determine the level of competency and to consider future learning pathways, specific to a learner.

The Australian Qualification Training Framework as referenced by TAFE NSW (2008) combines numerous models into a new model which is somewhere on the spectrum between: the currently implemented South African Qualification Authority model (unit standard based with provider developed summative assessments), and the one which is being adopted by the Qualification Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) in South Africa (AQP-developed national final integrated summative assessment). However, the Australian model refers to making sure assessment is reliable and meets industry needs. For example, the following need had been identified by industry:

Assessors work with the candidate to collect a range of evidence using the appropriate, nationally

endorsed, industry competency standards as benchmarks.

As noted in the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority documentation, the need to ensure participation of all role-players in the design and collection of evidence requires a framework that is circular in nature, always returning to the efficacy of the assessment.

As the assessment must be accessible to all, as noted in various QCTO documents, learners with special needs will also be able to follow the MAGIC model noted by Lombard (1994) of the National Center for Research in Education, Berkeley. This model requires a pre-assessment with very specialised data requirements, which are used to analyse the learners' needs and ability, in order to navigate assessment in a way that is empowering. This requires that significant attention be paid to the pre-assessment model.

What is evident through the various models used is that there is a need to have a structured assessment process in which there are various models, considering not only national but also international competency requirements. This process must be flexible to meet all learners needs and it must have a clear set of outcomes in terms of requirements.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The initial phase of the research included a literature survey to consider current practice used both nationally and internationally. Findings from this research were then considered for selection of the most appropriate models for the target audience and the W&RSETA, as well as the regulatory authority, the QCTO.

National Policy, as well as draft policy, evaluation instruments and other documents supplied to the researchers were analysed in terms of whether a model could be developed and implemented based on this.

Following this, qualitative research was conducted using small focus groups, industry experts as well as stakeholders from the education providers as well as those linked to SETA's and quality assurance bodies. Due to the nature of the research problem and key outcomes indicated, a limited range of expert participants were able to provide the bulk of relevant high-level inputs, rather than a broad-based quantitative survey collecting and analysing relatively low-level inputs.

The total sample was 67, with 19 in Durban, 22 in Cape Town and 16 in Pretoria. In terms of the sectors represented, 25 (37.3%) were business, 31 (46.3%) were training providers, 6 (9.0%) were both, 1 (1.5%) was quality assurance and 4 (6.0%) were from the W&RSETA.

Participation of role-players currently engaged with the vocational and occupational learning environment, was noted. The researchers engaged with the role-players in a controlled environment, through focus groups, as well as in structured interviews with other role-players like those that worked in Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVET), private providers with national footprints who conducted national summative assessments, as well as the W&RSETA staff who were considering the role-out of the

occupational certificates and part qualifications, and quality assurance consultants.

The collection of this data thus formed the base on which the assumptions and coding of data was considered. In order to explain the research methodology the following critical influencers should be noted:

- Currently, the suggested model has not been piloted, nor has it been tested. Therefore, there is nothing on which to base findings or for interview participants to benchmark against;

- Similarly, the quality assurance body that is ultimately the policy developer as well as system processor has not provided documents in their entirety, which are noted as being draft. There are certain policies, which have been developed and published, but these are not always supported by procedure and more importantly templates (draft) for guideline purposes;

- The model selected from a previous project challenges the current policy as well as the pre-conceived concept of how the final summative will be conducted.

3.1. Research instruments

Research instruments developed for purposes of the research were surveys, with open-ended questions, which allowed the participants to provide their unique perspectives in considering the model and how it would be implemented. As there were role-players from all spectrums of the vocational and occupation environment, ranging from skills development providers, quality assurance experts, industry and workplace, professional bodies as well as W&RSETA staff, the surveys had to be generic in nature so that all role-players would be able to participate and provide data. This ensured that the data collected would be comprehensive in nature.

In addition to research surveys developed for the role-players in the W&RSETA sector, a structured interview were designed specifically for:

- National skills development providers who conduct national summative assessments, to consider current implementation models to manage assessment centres nationally.

- TVET Colleges who have a national footprint, to understand capacity requirements to be an assessment centre which can meet the requirements of W&RSETA qualifications and part qualifications.

- Qualification Management Board (QMB) of the W&RSETA to understand the design of the Assessment Specification Documents, the rationale in selecting the assessment tools and how QMB envisaged implementing and managing them.

3.2. Data

As the research is qualitative in nature, the sources of data need to be considered and defined. The data becomes the primary source for the perceptions of how to manage assessment for the wholesale and retail sector.

The sources of data were evaluated based on the kinds of data that would be available to the researchers and the validity of it. Thus, a list of data has to form part of the research methodology to indicate what has been used as reference points.

- Research surveys formed part of the focus groups which were held across the country in Pretoria/Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. The surveys were collected in a controlled environment, ensuring authenticity in the response and validity. In addition to this, the data which was collected from semi-structured interviews held with research subjects of TVET Colleges, skills development providers with a national footprint, as well as the QMB.

- Research surveys for the focus groups consisted of two sections. Seven qualifications have been developed and the participants were asked to consider these individually and consider a single assessment model per qualification. After which they were then asked to consolidate their data and try to develop a singular or holistic assessment model which could be applied to all:

- Section A considered the AQP's role in setting up, implementing and managing all requirements of an AQP, the capacitation requirements as well as information dissemination for external stakeholders.

- Section B in which five questions were interrogated asking the research subjects to consolidate their analysis and consider a holistic approach which could be applied to the wholesale and retail sector at large simultaneously using the same methodology and resources.

- Focus Groups were held across the country in Pretoria/Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban and research subjects were afforded the opportunity to discuss the key ideas which formed part of the research brief. Data was collected in the form of recorded sessions, which was later extracted and coded.

- Current policy published by the QCTO was available from the QCTO website.

- Draft templates developed by the QCTO were provided to the researchers by the W&RSETA senior management and forms part of a workshop held by the QCTO for information dissemination purposes.

3.3. Data extraction and sample consideration

All participants' data was extracted and coded. In order to help classify the data surveys were categorized into three types:

- Completed - the research subject had completed all fields within a section, and had attempted to answer all questions within the survey.

- Partially Completed - the research subject had completed some fields within a section, and had attempted to answer all questions within the survey.

- Incomplete - the research subject had completed some fields within a section, but had not answered all the questions within the survey.

For this purpose, when considering the data extraction, data was considered per field of the questionnaire in which a singular source of data could be considered (a question had been answered).

Thus the sample is not finite for an overall question. Rather, the data was extracted and evaluated per type and although time consuming, it allowed for participants who had partially completed or provided incomplete data to be considered and for the data in part to be used.

3.4. Coding and data analysis

The data was analysed using a thematic identifier looking at common trends and language used within the survey at a question level. These were grouped according to categories and data was collected from the questionnaires taking each questionnaire and dissecting it and classifying it according to the categories. Independent checks were put into place in which data was cross-referenced and audited to ensure that all findings produced were error free.

The findings are noted within each section by first noting the codes developed for that question. This helps to understand the rationale of the coding as well as provide a context for it.

3.5. Validity

Validity of the data design, collection and analysis were validated through ensuring peer debriefing. This was done both by the researchers as well as providing the research report in three draft phases, which allowed all focus group participants to provide input before the final report. Grounded theory formed the basis of ensuring validity and considered that the data provided the framework, which lead to useful concepts being considered and developed.

The summary of the focus groups has been collected considering each of the discussions and key concerns and noted within the recommendations section. These consider the discussions held with all stakeholders within the assessment process and therefore are a subjective discussion that should be acknowledged.

4. KEY FINDINGS

The findings include the coded statements of the respondents that have been grouped and analysed accordingly. The coded definitions are partly narrative in nature as they represent the perceptions and unique perspective of a specific sector rather than specialists in assessment.

What should also be noted is that the focus of the responses does not always reflect models of assessment. These responses however provide an opportunity to further understand perceptions and opinions of the research respondents and have been included in the findings.

After each finding there is a consideration of how this could best be implemented, considered or challenged as based on Model A and Model B. This could then be provided to respondents in the future, as this is not part of the current research scope, to see if it would alleviate their concerns or further explain their comments.

Respondents were provided with two models:

Model A considered a for profit or private solution, in which private business can register and go through accreditation to become assessment centres and who use this for purposes of making revenue. Those businesses that have national footprints could participate in addition to smaller providers in towns which would also support the model.

Model B considers using the current Training Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Colleges throughout the country as a base for all national

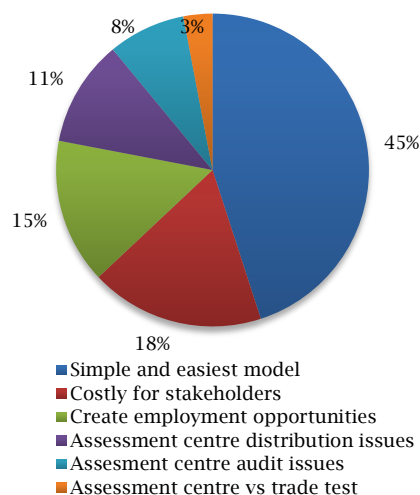
assessments, which would require learners to come to the venues even if these were not within the close proximity of the learner, as well as two other suggestions. In addition to this, it was noted by industry that they would consider it time consuming to let learners off for long periods of time and thus wanted the assessments to take place at their site. Thus, the assessment centre would effectively run the assessment on site. In the other model, it would consider a combination of both the TVET Colleges as well as in-house based on need as well as resources.

4.1. Selecting an industry specific assessment model

In terms of evaluating which model was more appropriate 91% of the respondents chose model B and thought that it was more suitable for both industry as well as assessment centre provision.

The opinions of the focus group respondents towards Model A are illustrated in Figure 1.

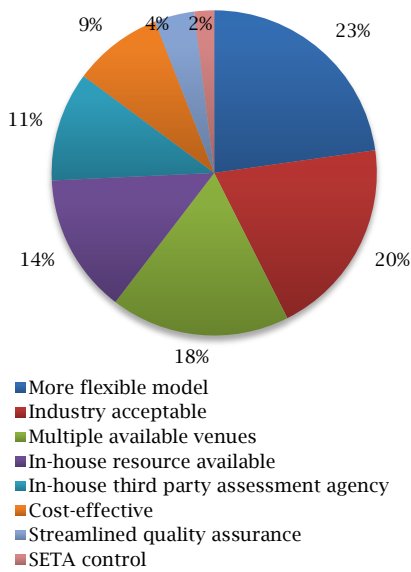
Figure 1. Opinions of focus group towards Model A



Almost half the respondents (45%) thought Model A was the simplest and easiest model to use as it was mostly outsourced by the AQP, while 18% thought it was costly to the learner and costly to run as an assessment centre if they were doing it for profit, but that it was business friendly and could create business opportunities. 15% thought it could create employment opportunities, but the same proportion thought there could be a problem with consistency across the various assessment centres, while 11% thought there could be issues with distribution of assessments to the various centres. 8% thought there would be limited opportunities to audit the assessment centres and that it was subjective. Only 3% thought it follows the trade test methodology, that there were limited people with expertise to run an assessment centre, that it was not QCTO friendly, that private providers were not able to get a fuel license but that there would be better integrity in terms of learning and assessment.

These findings were in contrast to the data and findings for Model B, which are illustrated in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Opinions of focus group towards Model B



About a quarter of respondents (23%) thought it was a more flexible model, 20% thought it was more acceptable for industry and 18% thought there would be more venues available. 14% thought that in-house would have their own technology and systems which the learners would be familiar with, while 11% thought that an outside assessment agency could assess in-house to ensure objectivity. 9% thought it was more cost-effective, 4% thought that quality assurance would be more streamlined and 2% thought that the W&RSETA would maintain better control.

4.2. Industry feedback on assessment and implementation of new assessment model

The following section identifies how those in the wholesale and retail sector consider the model as well as any challenges noted to date.

The input from the research participants considers some of the current challenges linked to Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies or more specifically to quality assurance bodies. Therefore, the subjectivity of this is noted within the responses. However, some of the key themes noted through coding is that the requirements of the AQP can be defined through these challenges.

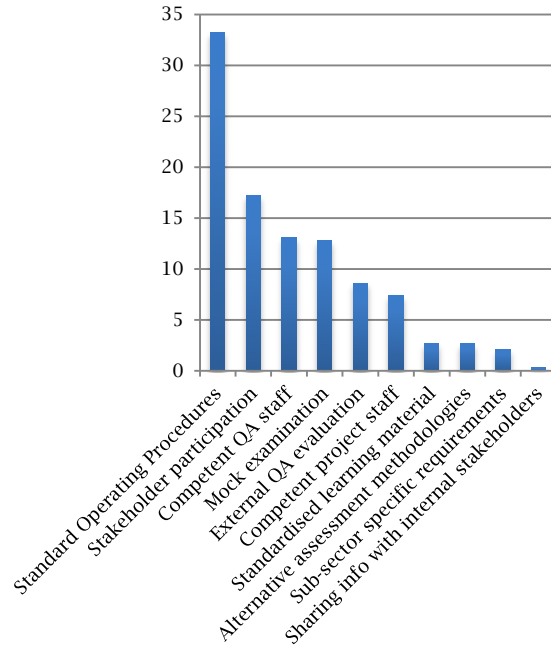
The opinions of the respondents on the implementation of the model are illustrated in Figure 3.

33% of respondents noted the need in developing and preparing standard operating procedures which allow the AQP to use project management principles in daily operations. They further highlighted the current challenges with lack of process and timelines which caused frustration across the organisation and with all stakeholders.

Specifically, there was a recommendation that standardised standard operating procedures be developed which were linked to a job title, had clear deliverables, indicated templates to be used, and which had published timelines. This document would then be circulated internally as well as externally to ensure accountability from all role-

players both internally and externally. The project management methodology would then allow the AQP to plan for the various examinations and ensure a standardised approach to each from the development of the sample examination to uploading the data to the National Learners Record Database after certification.

Figure 3. Opinions towards implementation and challenges of the model



4.2.1. Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs)

The fact that standard operating procedures are at the core of the industry feedback indicates that quality assurance bodies are potentially seen in a negative light and the realisation of the kinds of requirements of the new model with multiple outputs concerned them if there was not some kind of project management approach.

4.2.1.1. Standard Operating Procedures - Model A

In terms of the requirements of Model A, the standardised approach that assessment centres would follow would ensure their own management of the examinations. Therefore limited logistics would be required other than ensuring that the examination papers were delivered on time. If a practical assessment is required, then the assessment centre would notify the AQP of when this would be required and to ensure that an examiner would be present during the practical.

4.2.1.2. Standard Operating Procedures - Model B

In terms of the requirements of Model B, the AQP would require multiple staff to be involved in the examination. The team would have to consider all logistics as the TVET College would need to be managed including the staff at the TVET College to oversee the examination, the numbers of learners

registering for the examination would need to be managed by the AQP and this would then need to be shared with the TVET College. In addition to this, practical assessments would require partnership model workplaces so that the practical assessment could be done at the client site. This would require additional assessors to be made available for the assessment as these would need to be observed in real time and not as a group.

4.2.2. Stakeholder participation

17% noted the need to ensure stakeholder participation and information sharing considering a 360 degree input and dissemination. Research participants noted that in many cases they had not known about or had not been invited by the Qualifications Management Body (QMB) to participate in the development of the new occupational qualifications. In addition they noted that there was limited sharing of information by the current SETA and even less noting the QCTO and occupational certificates.

Research participants requested that the AQP fulfil the role of partner to all roleplayers within the assessment cycle, including the workplace (business), the skills development providers, professional bodies as well as learners. Agreeing how information is disseminated would ensure that even if people left jobs, there would be a continued sharing of information. There were also requests for information to be shared in a timeous manner so that sufficient planning could be done to meet requirements.

4.2.3. Competent quality assurance staff

13% of respondents noted the need to ensure competent quality assurance staff are employed in order to be able to audit the various role players involved in the assessment nationally. Research participants noted the lack of competent staff members linked to quality assurance. In addition they found that the quality assurance cycle was not understood by all roleplayers and this resulted in different standards being evaluated by different staff members/consultants who audited. As noted previously, a standard operating procedure and linked deliverables would help to ensure that this was mitigated.

4.2.4. Mock examination

13% of respondents noted the need to provide guidelines on how the examination would look, including a mock examination so that learners could familiarise themselves with requirements and the style of the AQP. Research participants noted that as a national summative assessment would be held, and that there was no previous assessment to consider as a benchmark, that the mock exam as well as instructions of how the assessment could be completed, what examiners would consider for evidence and how to interpret the external assessment specification were critical in terms of preparation. As there are practical components linked to some occupational certificates, the brief as well as observation checklists were requested to be

made available so that learners could understand how the assessment would be structured.

4.2.4.1. Mock examination - Model A

As part of Model A, noting that the practical assessments would be managed by the private assessment centre, the instructions linked to the practical component as well as equipment requirements would need to be specified so that learners could familiarise themselves with the software or equipment prior to the assessment. The AQP would need to consider this in the accreditation of assessment centres, as the assessment centre would need to demonstrate its ability to provide learners with equipment that was user friendly.

4.2.4.2. Mock examination - Model B

As Model B refers to a partnership model, the AQP would be required to ensure that partnerships are in place between the assessment centre (TVET College and private providers) and either an onsite practical assessment or one linked in-house to a workplace. This would require logistical arrangements which would also need to be published prior to the assessment so that learners could consider how the practical assessment would take place.

4.2.5. External quality assurance evaluation

9% of research respondents considered that an external quality assurance agency could be contracted to ensure the audit and validation function of the AQP. Included in the scope of work would be the registration of examiners, the coordination of the actual examinations and logistical arrangements of the examination, as well as reporting and managing the assessment and data processing of examination results.

4.2.6. Competent project oriented staff

Although competency has been noted as a theme prior to this, *Competent quality assurance staff* links specifically to the quality assurance function, whereas *Competent project oriented staff* specifically refers to management and support staff.

7 % of research respondents noted the need to have competent staff that would be employed to fulfil job and role requirements. Research participants noted that there was frustration with some staff members in the current model who were not able to demonstrate competency for the role in which they are employed. In the new model, linked to SOPs and using project methodology it is felt that if a staff member is not able to deliver according to the deliverables required there would be an indicator which could then be managed accordingly.

4.2.7. Standardised learning material

3% of research respondents indicated that the AQP should develop and provide learning material to skills development providers to ensure consistency, considering current challenges. One of the key issues noted was that learning material as well as assessments were not standardised and as a result there were discrepancies around the quality of

learning. The respondents wanted the standardised material developed which would in effect provide formative assessments and act as the exemplars which would prepare learners for the summative assessment and therefore set the standard as well as familiarise learners with the assessment methodology and instruments that would be used in the final examination. As there were many exit points for the learner it would be difficult to determine how to prepare learners when there was the possibility of multiple providers developing assessment instruments for formative purposes. The concern around cost was seen as one challenge as to develop material and assessments would require initial expenditure prior to the rollout.

4.2.8. Alternative assessment methodologies

3% of research respondents noted the combination of both theoretical and practical requirements in the various assessment specification documents. Currently there is the assumption that the final summative assessment would mostly require a knowledge questionnaire. However, there are constant references to practical assessment. As has been noted the ability for a learner to do a practical assessment at the assessment centre is not realistic. Therefore, the research respondents thought it best to consider alternative assessment methodologies including on-site or in-house assessments, as well as the preparation of a portfolio of evidence from the workplace which would be presented as access to the national summative assessment as well as consideration for recognition of prior learning.

4.2.9. Sub-sector specific requirements or limitations

2% of research respondents noted that the current model of requiring learners to go offsite to an assessment centre would not be feasible for sub-sectors like retail which required staff to be onsite to ensure productivity. Learners attending examinations offsite would effectively be absent for most of the day if travel is also considered. In addition service station attendants are required to be examined at the place of work, which would mean the knowledge component would not be able to be assessed there as well.

4.2.10. Sharing information with internal stakeholders

Less than 1% of research respondents noted that information was not easily disseminated internally within current SETA's and that the AQP should ensure an internal communication strategy to ensure that the systems enabled an efficient assessment management process.

4.3. Summary of industry perceptions and recommendations

Although no model has been recommended by the sector, three concepts can be summarized from the information supplied:

The first concept, a standard operating procedure should be the basis of engagement with

the AQP. In order to meet this requirement, the AQP must have clear guidelines and standard operating procedures itself, against which to benchmark its own development of policy. The current frustration noted is because the current system has guidelines, but these are not implemented consistently across current quality assurance bodies.

The second concept is that there is consultation with the industry to ensure amongst other things, that industry needs have been met, that sector or work requirements are understood, that planning includes the how and when assessments take place, in order to minimize the disruption of operations.

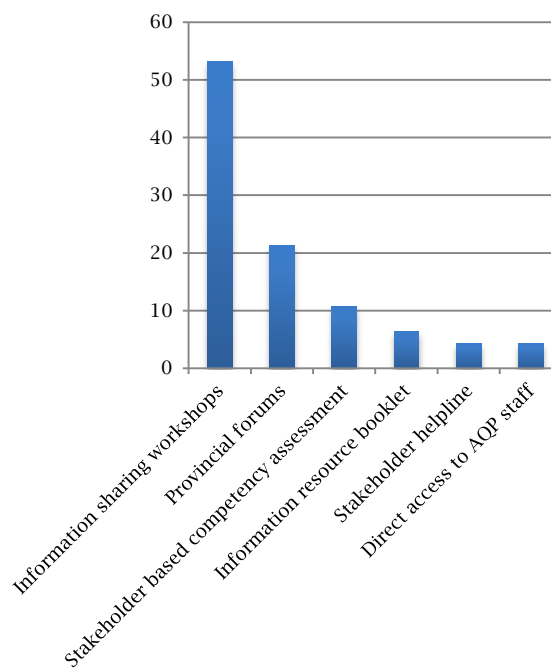
The third concept is that there needs to be a formalized process by which roles are linked to standard operating procedures and the ability to perform competently against them. The current challenges noted include frustration with high turnover of staff as well as interfacing with staff members who may not have the technical knowledge or sector experience.

In addition to only engaging with sector specific research participants, there was also a need to validate the capacity, for evaluating model development, of whether the assessment centres that have been identified are able to conduct the national summative assessments.

4.4. Capacity building and information sharing about the implementation of a new assessment model

In the second part of the research the perceptions of the research participants to evaluate how they could see capacity building around the new type of assessment provided an opportunity to understand how role-players viewed the sharing and dissemination of information.

Figure 4. Opinions on communication strategies



There are various stakeholders that interface with the W&RSETA (2013), the future AQP, and therefore each of the stakeholders needs and information preferences should be considered. In addition to this, as this is a new methodology of assessment, and the way in which assessments are administered will require a comprehensive communication strategy, the needs and preferences of stakeholders has to be met. The respondents' opinions with regard to communication strategies to meet their needs are illustrated in Figure 4.

4.4.1. Information sharing workshops

53% of research respondents noted the need to have workshops which could be run by the AQP to provide various stakeholders with information about specific standard operating procedures, staff and engagement opportunities, process of assessment including assessment instruments and cycles for assessment, process of implementing assessments, understanding the national summative assessment, certification and currency of information within the AQP functions. Although this would be the most appropriate information dissemination technique research respondents felt that it had not been done sufficiently to date.

4.4.2. Provincial forums

21% of research respondents noted that sector specific forums were held regionally. Due to the time constraints of attending multiple workshops it was felt that information could be disseminated through presentations at these forums rather than delivering specific workshops. Information could be disseminated in a structured manner in cycles, ensuring that information is shared but not in a process or information specific way.

4.4.3. Stakeholder based competency assessment

11% of research respondents noted that stakeholders should go through an assessment that allows them to participate within the new assessment system. Although autocratic in nature, the idea is that the onus lies on stakeholders to empower themselves and more importantly ensure that they understand the various information related to the AQP and its assessments.

4.4.4. Information resource booklet

6% of research respondents recommended the development of an information booklet which would supply information about the AQP, and would also list the various processes in it like assessment management, how practical assessments would be conducted, certification etc.

4.4.5. Stakeholder helpline

4% of research respondents noted the requirement of setting up a help line where any stakeholder with problems is able to connect to and have issues resolved through engaging with the call centre.

4.4.6. Direct access to AQP staff members

4% of research respondents referred to setting up a link to each of the AQP roleplayers and being able to liaise directly with them rather than following a bureaucratic process which is time consuming.

4.5. Summary of information sharing and capacity building of stakeholders

Considering the respondents as well as the needs of the sector, there is a current perception that information is not shared timeously, or specific to certain issues. It was noted that there is a tendency towards roadshows which are generic in nature but do not provide specific information for implementation or practical purposes.

Therefore the AQP within its strategy should consider dissemination of information and segment information sharing via the following:

1. Generic information, which can be shared at roadshows, where information is to provide an overview rather than specific requirements.

2. Workshops for stakeholders, which consider engaging and possibly training stakeholders on policy, procedures and processes. This would also consider things like understanding the Learning Management System (LMS), Planning for Examinations. Part of this dissemination is the consideration of developing online workshops which are the same as the workshops developed. The online workshops could be referred to as part of a communication strategy, so even though a workshop is not necessarily scheduled it could be accessed nationally.

3. An information booklet could then also be developed which would cover all the various processes, procedures and processes. This could be provided to stakeholders, as well as a CD with the recorded workshops.

Stakeholders shared their frustration with getting information from the current ETQA. Therefore, in the new framework there is a need for engagement which is tracked and which has clear turnaround times. For example, if e-mail is sent, that there be a tracking system which will ensure action within an agreed timeline. In addition to this a helpline which could be available to stakeholders could be set up, where they would be able to get information directly from the source.

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This research has attempted to understand how the decisions at a national level to implement a new occupational and vocational system and its associated assessment-specific requirements affects various stakeholders including the workplace, education providers and other associated organisations.

The focus of the research has not been on implementation concepts linked to policy but rather to stakeholders' understanding of what model would suit the wholesale and retail sector and what implementation considerations should be noted by AQP's.

As one of the first AQP's to implement assessments, it must now have the opportunity to perform against the various policies and templates

and criteria provided and develop its own industry specific model. In order to do this there needs to be a more formalized partnership which will ensure that the pilot programme is a success. The opportunity to provide a successful implementation which can be used as a model for other AQP's is the ultimate goal. However this requires an engagement with the stakeholders as well as quality assurance bodies.

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