

## *The New Training Skills Act:*

### *ASSESSING THE SITUATION*



The whole purpose of the new Skills Development Act is to **standardize qualifications** across the country, and to **give formal recognition** to individuals for any skills that they have acquired – either through on-the-job experience over a period of time, or via training courses/programmes they have attended.

In the past this counted for little, as the value of experiential learning, or even a course certificate, was met with some skepticism by the would-be employer. And rightly so, for “experience” could often have consisted of the employee performing at the same (low) level for however long, and as we all know, many of those fancy course certificates and even fancier diplomas were not worth the paper they were so boldly written on.

This is not to say that there were no “good” qualifications or certificates to be had; but rather that there was no consistency – and little one could do to distinguish objectively between the “good” and the “bad”. We can all be extremely grateful, therefore, that the NQF (National Qualifications Framework) has finally come to the rescue, and that **all future qualifications will carry formal recognition for the level of competence attained by the learner, in clearly defined areas of expertise.**

Many readers will be aware of the innumerable “unit standards” which have been so painstakingly written up over the past few years and which, once registered with SAQA (South African Qualifications Authority), will define the exact content – and level of competence – of every qualification. And so (finally) we get to the point of this short article.....

In order for the new system to work, it is imperative that **assessment is conducted against the unit standards** – that learners are rated as either “competent” or “not yet competent” to perform the particular skill as defined by the unit standard/s. This assessment must obviously be conducted in such

a way that the learner is not compromised or discriminated against in any way – it should be fair, reliable, valid, and practicable.

This leads us to the inevitable question: just who is going to do all this assessment? When one considers all the training that takes place in our industry – plus the periodic re-training required for corporate and legal compliance – one begins to see the extent of the challenge ahead. At a rough guess, 10-15 thousand assessments will need to be conducted on an annual basis across the forestry regions ; yet currently just a handful of assessors have been trained.

**The training of assessors should clearly be considered an industry priority**, if there is to be any hope of success. It has been suggested that **all** foresters should probably undergo assessor training (after all, assessors are supposed to be “subject-experts”, and have a level of competence in the skills they are assessing). At a recent meeting of FIETA’s Forestry Chamber, it was said that what is required is “a total system for Forestry, rather than a haphazard approach” – and to my mind, the sooner the better! At the same meeting, it was revealed that R350.000-00 has been allocated by FIETA for assessor (and moderator) training for the current financial year – of which R250,000-00 remains unspent.

In view of the urgency of this situation, I believe it is incumbent on **every forester/manager/contractor/employer in the industry to seriously consider stepping forward to attend the (three days) training necessary to become an assessor**. Application can be made to FIETA for the necessary funding, and the benefit to be gained from being able to assess the competency of your own employees surely goes without saying?

FIETA Article.

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