

MEMORANDUM

TO: The SAQA Board

FROM: David Adler, John Aitchison, Edward French

12 October 2016

THE 2016 SAQA REPORT ON THE MODERATION AND VERIFICATION OF KHA RI GUDE: SOME CLOSING OBSERVATIONS

We are writing above all to express our pride in our decade of work with SAQA on the moderation and verification of the Kha ri Gude (KRG) literacy campaign, and to record our belief that this work has been close to the heart of the mission of the NQF. We also wish to summarise some positive pointers to the future; we hope that SAQA and its Board may take some of our suggestions forward.

In the past month Kha ri Gude has received a top Unesco award for its contribution to adult literacy, but has also been castigated in the press following a critical audit report regarding its finances in the last year. We have consistently distanced ourselves from the role of evaluators in our work, being focused on judging the validity of the results of the campaign each year, with a view to their recording on SAQA's NLRD. Inevitably, our experience – especially in running site visits to a sample of sites across the country – has given us critical insights into the programme. These are touched on in the reports, but are not their main focus. It is relevant to note, however, that the SAQA moderation and verification processes have contributed to the Unesco valuing of the campaign, and have been used as evidence of due performance in the DBE's annual reporting to Parliament.

At the start of SAQA's involvement – personally requested by the then Minister of Education – there was opposition from various sectors to the role. Technically, the moderation and verification fell in the domain of the Quality Councils, but they declined to undertake the work because they lacked the capacity, or did not believe it was appropriate for their roles. Umalusi, particularly, argued that the work was inappropriate within the NQF and that they disapproved of formal assessment of adult literacy work. We are glad to note that the courageous stand taken by SAQA leadership to support the project against opposition has led to the project being held up increasingly as a key achievement of SAQA.

As professionals with long records in adult education and assessment, we have several reasons of our own for our belief in the importance of SAQA's involvement with KRG:

- 1) The NQF was originally designed to satisfy key concerns for equity and redress. To fulfil this, the earliest model of the NQF to be tabled had its first level at ABET 1. In the successful model of 1996, ABET Levels 1-3

preceded NQF Level 1: these were rather unfortunately termed the Sub-levels. Nonetheless, because of intensive early development, ABET Unit Standards (for learners and for educators) were the first to be properly registered on the NQF, and served as models of professional thoughtfulness in the design of standards. Yet it soon emerged that the NQF, including related aspects like the development of Learnerships, was in reality prioritised around higher skills. The request to help ensure the credibility of KRG offered a notable opportunity to forward redress in favour of the most marginalised learners in our society and to make a contribution to the genuine quality of what they were offered.

- 2) Our many years in adult literacy research had made us aware that literacy campaigns could be strikingly barren of cognitive effects, and seldom provided adequate evidence of results outside of political mobilisation and grandstanding. The design of the KRG curriculum and materials offered serious promise that this would not be the case. The programme was written to match (and slightly excel) ABET Level 1 unit standards for literacy and numeracy. It required the completion of a learner achievement portfolio (LAP), and was supported by an initially superb logistics and data management system to track and collect the LAPs.
- 3) We were eager to activate the developmental role of public assessment in KRG. The very fact that the results were taken seriously enough to be moderated on a significant scale, and to lead to recording on the NLRD, meant that the programme was taken seriously. Although the moderation workshops involved fairly simple procedures, the 200 KRG coordinators taking part in the first 6 years of our work experienced the disciplined processing as a revelation, and undoubtedly took the discipline back to guide the management and the supervision of the voluntary educators. In the early years the SAQA work had a marked impact on the quality of data and marking, although this flattened out over time. The site visits introduced in the last 4 years provided critical insights into KRG's achievements, and powerful affirmations of the worth of the programme.

The past two or three years have shown increasing signs of the aging of the programme, which has run beyond its original proposed time frame. There appears to be an increasing recruitment of people who are already literate in order to keep the local provision and income source alive. The materials have never been updated or improved in spite of our recommendations (but were very good to start with). In some provinces the finely constructed management hierarchy has broken down, with reports of political interference in appointments. As can be seen in the latest report, the excellent logistics and data management have been outsourced to an organisation that has been far inferior to the original organisation. This has led to our inability to report fully on the adequacy of our sample for 2016. (SAB&T appears to have been the subject of critiques in the press coverage of the latest audit reports, but we have found them meticulous and helpful, though hampered by the logistics organisation.) In addition, delayed starts in the past 3 years, and very late letters of appointment for SAQA, have created difficulties and compromised various processes.

We have throughout been mindful of the low-stakes of the KRG programme in national and qualifications terms. This has led us to adopt a developmental spirit in the moderation of the results of KRG. We have used a far lighter hand than we would for the qualification of an airline pilot or a surgeon. Two credits at ABET level 1 constitute about one twentieth of a NQF qualification, but in terms of actual hours and the growth from illiteracy to significant knowledge these tiny credits represent huge investments of time, care and pride on the part of the learners. We have also been conscious of how important properly recognised adult learning can be in families. However, in spite of this light touch, our first concern as consultant SAQA officials has been for the integrity of the NQF.

The points below have been made, sometimes repeatedly from year to year, but bear repeating:

- 1) Many aspects of the KRG approach offer models for the provision of community education. These aspects include especially the use of a management hierarchy in support of voluntary educators, backed by central training, resources, quality assurance and an efficient logistics and data management system. The structures and experience should be built on in future. At the same time, the model in its present form is not a universally appropriate approach, and needs re-thinking for each new context.
- 2) The experience of KRG cries out for more time, and for further curriculum development. Year after year learners and educators have indicated that 6 months is too short for a move from initial literacy through to the substantial content and skills in the full ABET level 1. For all but the most exceptional learners, a year would be more appropriate for this growth. Such provision is considered to be beyond the DBE's budget, but it might then be proposed that the outcomes be limited, for example, to the first stages of ABET level 1.
- 3) The use of a portfolio of evidence has great pedagogical benefits, but tends to limited reliability for summative assessment. Future developments of the KRG model should build in some form of independent, general public test to complement the portfolio.

The future of KRG and SAQA's moderation and verification is not clear. Should the programme continue in 2017 as some plans seem to suggest, we will take a positive interest in its further unfolding.