

# **THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR THE QUANTITY SURVEYING PROFESSION**

## **COUNCIL EXAMINATIONS - POLICY DOCUMENT PROPOSALS**

### **Preamble**

The Quantity Surveying Profession Act (Act No. 49 of 2000) grants powers to the South African Council for the Quantity Surveying Profession (SACQSP), enabling it to test the competency of candidates applying for registration at a variety of levels. Clause 19 (2) is the relevant clause in this document. The wording of this clause in the Act is such that the SACQSP has great flexibility in determining methods of ascertaining competency of candidates for this purpose.

The primary educational / training features which the SACQSP currently utilizes in this quality management system are:

1. Accreditation of tertiary education providers in the field of quantity surveying and related programmes
2. Reciprocity agreements with other professional organizations
3. SACQSP 'Council' examinations Parts 1 and 2
4. An Assessment of Professional Competence (APC)
5. A 'Continuing Professional Development' (CPD) programme

The Education Standards and Research Committee (ESR) of the SACQSP was tasked in 2006 with reviewing all of the above mechanisms, with the exception of Item 2. The review of Item 5 has largely been completed, although recent staffing changes at senior administration level may result in further modifications to this programme becoming necessary. Item 4 is due for review in 2007. Item 1 has been approved in principle by the ESR and will shortly be submitted to the full Council for ratification. An implementation plan giving effect to Council Exams is the focus of this document.

The SACQSP makes available to applicants a brief document entitled "Council Examinations Parts 1 and 2 : General Guide to Candidates". In addition, links are available from the Council's website to associated electronic files entitled "Registration Routes for Candidate Quantity Surveyors", and to "Guides and Rules to the Assessment of Professional Competence". There does not appear to exist any documentation (at least not to prospective quantity surveyors or others who may consult the web page) which clearly sets out the detailed inter-relationship between the various stages describing levels of registration competencies (Registered QS Assistant Registered QS Technician, Registered QS Technologist (via the Candidate Registered QS Technologist route)), through to the Pr Quantity Surveyor registration level (via the Candidate PrQS route). This proposal describes a possible framework which can underpin the process, taking into account recent significant events in the development of new tiers of registration, as well as quality management of tertiary education providers.

### **Fundamental Principles relating to Council Examinations.**

At present there is no clearly stated objective relating to the use of Council Examinations as presently adopted. The clearest indicator of intended purpose would appear to be the document indicating a number of registration routes, the most recent version of which was compiled in February 2006. The pertinent issue in this particular document is that

only candidates that have successfully completed a 480-credit University degree in quantity surveying subjects, and those that have RICS membership with an accredited qualification are exempted from writing both of the Council examinations. This clearly implies that the Council exams are meant to be a substitute for these academic qualifications. Further, it is reasonable to infer that ‘professional training and experience’ logged by candidates under the supervision of a qualified professional is intended to cover basic technical competencies (e.g cost advice and cost planning, preparation of contract documentation, tendering and contractual arrangements, etc). These outcomes are, in turn, checked via the mechanism of scrutiny of documents submitted, and the APC itself (at a broader investigatory level at present).

At present the documentation covering Council Exams initiatives is incomplete, sometimes contradictory, and does not relate (in terms of the ‘scope of examinations’) to any published document which can conceivably be used as a benchmark for assessment of competency. There are, however, documents that can perform this function. Firstly, the SACQSP2 document compiled some years back as a product of a QS Education Workshop in Port Elizabeth attempts to describe a core syllabus which should be covered by accredited QS education providers. This document has, to a large extent, been superseded by the deliberations of the Standards Generating Body (SGB) (QS). This body has compiled ‘unit standard’-based documentation (which describes the detailed content / outcomes that graduates are required to demonstrate for each of the qualifications linked to the newly adopted-tiers of registration), for National Qualification Framework (NQF) levels 4 to 7 inclusive. In addition, ‘whole qualification’ descriptors are available for levels 6 and 7 registration purposes. Council examinations are intended to represent the competencies associated with the level 7 (Honours Degree) grade which is the product of a 480-credit university degree.

### **Proposals for change**

The existing Council Examinations have, for many years, been problematic for the SACQSP for a number of reasons. It is proposed that the current system be discontinued at the earliest possible date, and that the following system replace it:

1. Graduates from fulltime 480-credit accredited university programmes in quantity surveying (and candidates with RICS membership with an accredited qualification) continue to be exempted from writing Council Exams. Rules determining a period of ‘in training’ as practiced at present remain unaltered. The status of being accredited ensures satisfaction of the competencies designated by the QS SGB
2. All other candidates, be required to successfully complete study units equivalent to graduates from accredited 480-credit programmes, in lieu of the existing Council Exams. Once all equivalent unit standards have been passed, a period of ‘in training’ of the same duration as for graduates in (1) above would be required. A minimum period before which professional registration could not be conferred could be established within the APC rules review about to be undertaken. This will introduce equivalency into a process which at present does not exist. This would also obviate the need for the SACQSP to administer a complicated, cumbersome set of ‘registration route’ applications and appeals for ‘special consideration’.
3. Where candidates are applying for registration at a level below that of ‘Candidate PrQS’, proof of successful completion of the appropriate unit standards offered by providers accredited at those levels, plus any practical experience required, would be sufficient.

## **Practical considerations**

An essential feature of the above proposal is to considerably reduce the burden of the SACQSP in administering the Council Exams, whilst still maintaining overall responsibility for the maintenance of professional competency standards. It is therefore proposed that accredited tertiary institutions (as applicable for the various levels of tiered registration) be invited to provide candidates with the opportunity to study for, and be examined on the appropriate unit standards. In addition to the normal academic benefits applying to the provision of such courses, this could also provide willing programme providers with opportunities for income generation – a vital consideration in the context of the current staffing crisis being experienced in South African tertiary education institutions.

Alternatively, were structural / staffing changes in the SACQSP to change in future, they could elect to register as an accredited education service provider and themselves offer courses preparing candidates for such exams. Quality control of examinations could easily be achieved by the appointment by the SACQSP of external examiners, who ideally would be experienced CHE / HEQC accreditation evaluators drawn from service providers providing accredited programmes at the appropriate level. These external examiners would benchmark such examinations against those in the institutions that they would be responsible for, in terms of the new accreditation policy being adopted by the SACQSP. Under this system, the SACQSP would merely be responsible for the appointment of external examiners, and for checking that candidates' claims regarding completion of unit standards was substantiated by the necessary documentation. Other considerations, such as the provision of study material (which is a very real problem with adverse financial and administrative implications in the current system), and problems related to the potential 'movement' of tertiary education providers between different levels of 'accreditation' over a period of time, would fall away.

## **Conclusion**

It should be recognized that the current Council Exam system is flawed in several ways, and does not resonate with the other educational / training mechanisms exercised by the SACQSP. These facts are not lost on potential candidates who have become increasingly voluble and critical of the system in recent years. The system described above, whilst addressing the anomalies, further introduces a long-overdue process of scrapping 'routes to registration' which relies primarily on subjective time allowances for the accumulation of 'experience', and is founded upon candidates demonstrating foundational expertise through the medium of an examination process which is transparent and treats all candidates in an equal manner.

**October 16, 2007**