# Verifiers test the master

During 2004, critical evaluation confirmed the low integrity of assessment practices and concerns around validity and significant inconsistencies of interpretation during assessments. The sector had apprehensions regarding the lack of external moderation practices and, given the need to increase the scale of quality assurance of assessment practices, the ETDQA decided to do something about it.

During that year, the Institute of People Development (IPD) was contracted to strategically train moderators already fulfilling a verifier function in the design of assessment instruments, tools and guides. Working groups reviewed existing curricular models in the sector and generated a set of generic models & assessment guides for qualifications that could be used more widely. During the training, case study materials were developed and were published in the IPD's online library as a useful research reference to the sector. This project contributed to raise the quality of verification practices in the ETDP sector.

The main purpose of the programme was to ensure that all participants were equipped with the competence to function effectively as Verifiers of NQF-aligned Education and Training programmes.

**Designing the programme**

In order to meet the competence described in the NQF Level 6 unit standard, "Design and Develop Assessment of Learning Outcomes", verifiers had to:
- Design an assessment strategy
- Conduct an analysis of source documentation and assemble contexts to establish evidence requirements and possible sources
- Design assessment activities
- Develop and assessment guide
- Evaluate assessment designs and guides

In addition, verifiers were required to demonstrate an understanding of the following essential embedded knowledge:
- Principles of assessment
- Principles and practices of RPL
- Methods of assessment
- Potential barriers to assessment
- Feedback models
- The principles and mechanisms of the NQF
- Assessment policies and ETQA requirements
- Moderation requirements

"The outcomes of the Level 5 - "Plan & conduct outcomes-based assessments" unit standard did not require assessors to be able to develop assessment strategies; develop assessment instruments; or formulate assessment guides. These outcomes were required for the unit standard "Design and Develop Outcomes-based Assessments", a Level 6 unit standard," explains Mark Orpen CEO of IPD. "However, the reality is that for most learning programmes out in the marketplace, assessment instruments and guides do not exist which the verifiers are required to

evaluate. It will most likely take a year or two to significantly improve consistency of interpretation. IPD therefore built a focus on these outcomes into the programme.

"In addition, the Level 5 assessor unit standard is based on the assumption that candidates will already be able to read and interpret unit standards. IPD therefore built a focus on the National Qualifications Framework, unit standards and qualifications into the programme.

"Many verifiers on the programme were experienced, but few (if any) held a formal qualification in Verification or in Assessment Design. Hence, the ETDQA requested IPD provide appropriate training, support and assessments to these learners and furthermore provide the ETDQA with a set of strategic issues and possible directions for decision-making by the governance structure.

"Since the ETDQA decided to train the verifiers in assessment design only, IPD conceptualised assessment design in relation to work that the verifiers did in the sector, through the training programme. Some of the verifiers presented research studies on various aspects of the programme with excellent outcomes."

**Research results prove competence**

*Thandi Meyiwa, in her research topic:* **Sustaining Quality in assessment amongst training providers: is it a myth or reality** *– wished to ascertain whether it would be possible for training providers to sustain quality in assessment or whether standards may be lowered as quantity rises.*

*She researched the topic of quality to understand what is meant by 'quality' and also by a 'quality culture' in assessment and concluded, after market research, that all assessment processes must be based within thoroughly researched Education Training and Development Quality Management Systems which include well researched policies, procedures and documentation. Training providers have to maintain quality in assessment and monitoring systems. ETQAs need to be well equipped and skilled in order to keep the provision of assessment up to standard.*

*Gail Cretchely researched the* **Costs of Quality Vs Non-Quality in Site-Based Assessment of Communications in English at NQF 1.** *She found that the term "quality" is used here as meaning "good enough" or "fit enough for purpose". It does not mean "high quality" or excellent. Ideally, "high quality" Site-Based Assessment should be valid and reliable as the most important considerations, as well as practical. It should have good credibility with all stakeholders, particularly teachers. It should also have good backwash effects on teaching.*

*Research on* **Assessments** *by Moses Thwala revealed that a broader concept of assessment may be more appropriate. Assessment includes paper and pencil-testing but may also include other procedures such as rating items and scales, observing student performance, critiquing student products, conducting interviews, and reviewing a student's previous performance.*

*The concept of assessment broadens the kind of information that is collected about students and the way that the information is used in the evaluation of student*

*learning. Assessment needs to tap into and build upon the strengths that diverse learners, bring to the learning situation.*

*Educators are often turning to alternative, performance-based assessments that are backed by <u>criterion-referenced</u> standards. Such assessments help educators gain a deeper understanding of student learning, and enable them to communicate evidence of that learning to employers. These new alternative assessments and standards have been heralded as the answer to a whole host of education ills, including the apparent or real gap of performance between students of different ethnic, socio-economic, and language backgrounds.*

*Lindiwe Zondi looked at **Level Descriptors** and how to design an instrument to measure the complexities of levels above Level 5, where knowledge is given and ideas and information are collected and categorized in a predictable and standard format.*

*She argued that designing instruments for different levels should look at what is emphasized in different levels as set out in the SAQA level descriptors table.*

**Quality measurement:**

"IPD had the privilege of observing the transfer of this competence when an ETDQA verifier (one of these past learners) conducted a verification visit at IPD after a recent RPL process toward a N.Dip in OD-ETD Practices was implemented," continues Orpen. "The level of understanding and the increased service delivery in respect of Quality Assurance services from the ETDQA has markedly improved and it was delightful for us to see the verifier in action at our premises, applying what they had learned and rigorously scrutinizing our QA system

Having been fully accredited in April 2002 and re-accredited till 2011, IPD has become a market leader in the provision of Education & Training Development learning programmes.  IPD has enabled thousands of Workplace Trainers and Vocational Educators and hundreds of ETD provider companies have gone through IPD's rigorous training and RPL programmes to render an invaluable service to the public and private sectors in South Africa and to further the goals of the NSDS.