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## REQUEST FOR INTERVENTION TO ENSURE JOB SECURITY WITH THE FIRE SERVICES OF THE LOCAL GOVERNMENT SECTOR

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## Background

The South African Constitution of 1996 as amended positions fire-fighting services as a local government function in paragraph B of Schedule 4.

The Fire Brigade Services Act, *Act No. 99 of 1987*, provides for the establishment, maintenance, employment, coordination and standardization of fire brigade services, which empowers in section 2 (1) The Fire Brigade Board and confers a mandate to SAESI in section 2(2),(b) to delegate four persons to perform the functions assigned in terms of this Act.

The National Skills Development Strategy 111 (NSDS111) encourages and supports the better use of workplace based skills development and increasing access to occupationally directed programs.

The Cabinet has approved on the 3<sup>rd</sup> November 2016 publication of the draft White Paper on Fire Services for public comments.

It outlines key policy proposals and options that form the basis for a reviewed fire services legislation that will replace the outdated Fire Brigades Services Act, 1987 (Act No. 99 of 1987).

The White Paper repositions the fire services from response orientated fire services towards a fire risk reduction based approach. This contributes to effectively integrated disaster management and fire services, by placing fire safety and prevention, particularly community-based fire risk reduction, at the centre of fire services delivery which will significantly contribute to the creation of safer communities as highlighted in the National Development Plan.

## Introduction

The Fire industry includes sectors other than local government which spans over the military, aviation, marine, industry, petrochemical who voluntarily adopted the global National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) proficiency programs as the standard for Fire- Fighting.

The International Fire Services Accreditation Congress (IFSAC) certified SAESI as an empowered Quality Assurance Body since its membership in 1995. SAESI in turn quality assures twenty six (26) municipal and private training centres by implementing assessment of service providers, moderation of delivered programs and issuing of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) certification against seventy (70) fire and emergency services proficiency programs in South Africa that supports the White Paper on Fire Services.

The NQF Act puts in place an integrated framework capable of recognising and linking distinct forms of learning in South Africa. At the same time, it differentiates between three broad sectors of learning served by three Quality Councils (QCs):

- basic education and training (served by Umalusi);
- higher education and training (served by the Council on Higher Education - CHE); and
- Trades and occupation (served by the QCTO).

These quality councils are each guided by their own sub-frameworks and are coordinated by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which is responsible for various functions, and especially for fostering communication and articulation (linkages and mobility) within the system.

The National Qualifications Framework Act 67 OF 2008 in section 28 mandates that a professional body must co-operate with the relevant QCs in respect of qualifications and quality assurance in its occupational field.

## **Problem Statement**

The lobby from an association calling itself “ The Fire Professions Council of Southern Africa (FPCSA)” supposedly empowered by the legislature of South Africa which emanates from within the academic realm of Tshwane University of Technology (TUT) is advocating within the social media platforms, political and trade union structures to diminish the public trust in the capacity and ability of the fire services through misdirection about the propriety of the SAESI qualifications against that of the NQF and the ineligibility of qualification holders to occupy senior and mid management posts within the fire services.

## **Impacts**

The attacks on emergency services personnel and damages to emergency service resources by the public across the country has now transitioned to political resolutions within local councils to remove fire chiefs and senior managers from office.

## **Implications**

All senior, mid-level managers and supervisors across the country must be sent to TUT to undergo their three year full-time study of either the Post-Graduate Diploma or B-Tech Higher Diploma in Fire Technology.

The costs associated with this course of study , accommodation and travel would be onerous on local government who in fact employ and demanded the legacy Qualifications as the entry and promotional standards that predates SAQA and resides with decisions of the then Fire Brigade Board against the Human Science Research Council (HSRC) assessments.

The return on investment will bring back into local government chemists equipped with 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> year Chemistry, Physics and Hydraulics skill sets if they exit successfully.

These graduates who entered as firefighters and return as chemists will still be deficient requiring further interventions to satisfy the Municipal Regulations on Minimum Competency Levels as gazetted (R493) in 2007.

## **Discussion**

The juristic authorities for the fire industry regards administration of the FBSA and the Municipal Systems Act (MSA) resides with the Department of Cooperative Governance (DCOG), the development of education and training needs for the local government sector resides with the LG Seta and the further development of the occupational sub-framework resides with the QCTO.

SAESI is a professional body of SAQA and is authorized to implement Assessment and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) against SAQA policies to regulate the “right to practice” in awarding the registered designation “Fire Fighter Practitioner South Africa; FFP (SA).

This designation is linked to the LG Seta first entry level qualification registered on the 28-09-2016 titled Occupational level 4 Certificate Firefighter . It is important to note that the rationale and need for this qualification complies with the South African National Standards, particularly Community Protection against Fire (SANS 10090:2003) which gives normative reference to NFPA standards 1001 and 472.

SAESI has further engaged the QCTO to re-align a 2015 National Certificate Emergency Services Supervision Level 5 to accommodate the career path of firefighters reflected in

the MSR which is internationally comparable and also integrates with the private sector needs.

SAESI has also engaged the Fire Directorate to gazette the prescribed qualifications referenced in the FBSA.

## Recommendations

1. It is recommended that SALGA advises local government not to react impulsively and dismiss employees holding SAESI qualifications.
2. It is recommended that a joint communique be issued by juristic parties to firstly recognise the existence of the legacy qualifications as evaluated by the HSRC and secondly to provide confidence and recognition of the NFPA courses provided within local government training facilities as fit for purpose and relevant.
3. It is recommended that the LG Seta make commitment to further develop the occupational sub-framework.
4. It is recommended that the NDMC lobby the minister to gazette the prescribed qualification as required by the fire brigade services act or as required by the Municipal Systems Act.

## Consequences

The revenue streams of local government fire training centres will diminish as the private sector will find other solutions.

The training costs of fire services employees will increase per person from an average of R 5000.00 from the SAESI distance learning route to ± R 60 000.00 per person entering the TUT route on the academic sub-framework that excludes costs associated with accommodation and travel for 3 years.

The undetermined available infrastructure of TUT to accommodate all fire chiefs, deputies, managers and supervisors from across the country may not admit and cater for all.

The associated failure rate within the fields of Physics and Chemistry at 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Year will extend beyond 3 years.

The litigation of local government fire services when they fail to prevent fires and fire spread, to extinguish fires and to save life and property from fire and other emergencies as specified in the FBSA.

Yours Sincerely



Mr. Melvin Ramlall

President: Southern African Emergency Services Institute