

OVERVIEW

ASSOCIATION OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS PRACTITIONERS (ACRP)

1. HISTORY

ACRP was formed through a merger between two related organisations, namely the *Association for Ministry Training Practitioners* and the *Southern African Association for Pastoral Work*.

The *Association for Ministry Training Practitioners (AMTP)* was established in 2014 by a representative group of ministry practitioners, representing churches and church networks, other ministry institutions, faculties of theology, seminaries and other training institutions, and chaplaincies. The initiative to bring the parties together went out from the Centre for Contextual Ministry at the University of Pretoria and Bible Media in Wellington.

The creation of ACRP was done on the suggestion of officials of the SA Qualifications Authority (SAQA), who indicated that there was a need to establish a professional body for religious professionals in terms of the National Qualifications Act (Act No. 67 of 2008). The establishment of the organisation was in response to challenges related to ministry standards and ministry training, as experienced by many Christian churches and ministries in South and sub-Saharan Africa. The needs experienced by churches and ministries in the “independent” or “informal” church environment received special attention. The reality is that a very low percentage, even less than 10%, of Christian ministry leaders in South and sub-Saharan Africa have access to formal ministry training. There are currently more than an estimated 200,000 pastors in South Africa, and more than a million in sub-Saharan Africa, who did not have access to formal training for the work they do. Many informal (non-accredited) training institutions and programmes exist, but the work of these training centres are not strategically aligned, not comprehensive in nature and in some cases not of appropriate standard.

Southern African Association for Pastoral Work (SAAP) was founded in 1991 to attend to the professionalisation of, and quality assurance in, pastoral counselling in Southern Africa. SAAP developed a registration and accreditation system which included the setting of counselling standards and the application of a code of ethics and a disciplinary code for counselling practitioners. The counselling practitioners it represents range from lay pastoral workers and counsellors, to pastors, chaplains and specialist counsellors. Specialist counsellors include private practitioners, family and marriage counsellors, trauma counsellors and mediators. Areas of work include congregations, hospitals, counselling centres and help lines, and uniformed services (the military, police service and correctional services). ACRP will in future also be a vehicle for the functions formerly performed by SAAP.

Upon the suggestion of the *South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)*, AMTP and SAAP were merged early in 2016 into one organisation, with different “ministry councils” dealing with the different professional groups represented in the organisation. Currently there are three Councils within ACRP, namely the *Council for General Ministry Practitioners (CGMP)*, the *Council for Pastoral and Spiritual Counselling (CPSC)*, and the *Council for Ministry Training Practitioners (CMTP)*.

Another addition to the ACRP group is now also in process: the 2016 AGM of the *Association of Christian Counselling (ACC)* expressed the request to be merged with SAAP/CPSC and through this to become part of ACRP. ACC comprises of professional, pastoral and lay counsellors. They represent diversity in practice and training, but share a commitment to Biblical truth and

psychological excellence. Their goals and ethos fits in well with that of ACRP/CPSC, and the inclusion of ACC into the ACRP will strengthen the process of professionalisation.

2. MISSION

ACRP's mission and strategic focuses are:

- To pursue the establishment of a professional body for “religious professionals” in terms of the NQF Act 2008 and recognised by SAQA;
- Through the professional body's processes to support the professionalisation of religious (church, ministry) practice within the Christian tradition, with a particular focus on the needs of the independent / informal church environment;
- As a special case, through the professional body to pursue to the professionalisation of pastoral counselling within the South African regulatory framework;
- Through the professional body to develop a training dispensation that will guarantee access to affordable, formal ministry training to current and prospective ministry leaders across the continent, irrespective of challenges implied by their levels of prior learning, financial status, geographic location, etc;
- To pursue the coordination (development of a joint vision and strategy) among a wide range of ministry training institutions in South, Southern and sub-Saharan Africa, and through this to strengthen the role churches and Christian ministries can play in the healing of communities in Africa; and
- To support efforts of other institutions related to the above, over the continent and internationally.

3. THE NATURE OF PROFESSIONAL BODY FUNCTIONS TO BE FULFILLED BY ACRP

In terms of the NQF Act of 2008, SAQA's Professional body policies and the ACRP rules, the functions to be fulfilled by ACRP as professional body are as follows:

- Defining generic "*professional designations*" on various levels of the ministry and pastoring professions, in accordance with the SAQA professionalisation guidelines.
- Setting and applying *training standards and requirements* for the different designations.
- Registering persons in ministry on the professional database (referred to as “affiliation”) and awarding designations to the qualifying practitioners / professionals.
- Setting ethical standards and standards of professional conduct; and applying the related disciplinary practices in respect of the affiliates (registered persons).
- Identifying and listing the *existing, SAQA accredited ministry qualifications* that are recognised as the required learning for the respective designations.
- Where accredited qualifications for categories of practitioners or professionals do not exist, the role of the professional body is to *facilitate and support the development of new SAQA accredited ministry qualifications* on the appropriate levels. ACRP does this with a particular focus on the development of the qualifications that are geared to overcome the former situation where appropriate training was not accessible and/or affordable to many pastors and ministry leaders.
- Developing a formalised *Continued Professional Development (CPD)* process, which includes setting CPD standards and requirements, accrediting CPD providers and CPD programmes, providing a system to record CPD points earned by practitioners, and monitoring the achievement of CPD points by practitioners.
- Developing a SAQA recognised *Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)* process, with related bridging courses and structured CPD programmes, to formally recognise learning and skills

development achieved through work experience, former informal and non-formal learning of pastors - towards the awarding of professional designations.

4. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURE

To fulfill its role as professional body, ACRP is structured as shown in the *attached organisation chart*. The main components are as follows:

- ACRP is managed by a **Board of Directors**, with a central **Executive Committee**.
- The professional body functions of ACRP are taken care of by three professional Councils, namely the **Council for General Ministry Practitioners (CGMP)**, the **Council for Ministry Training Practitioners (CMTP)**, and the **Council for Pastoral and Spiritual Counsellors (CPSC)**.
- Policies and standards are developed, and the execution of professional body functions are overseen, by three committees of the Board, namely the **Registration Committee**, the **Ethical and Disciplinary Committee**, and the **Training Quality Committee**.
- ACRP was appointed by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) as their partner to manage aspects of the implementation of the new QCTO based ministry qualifications. In this role ACRP is referred to as QCTO's **Assessment Quality Partner (AQP)**.
- An important requirement for the fulfilling of the Professional Body function is an accessible administrative office. The administrative office function is situated in Pretoria, with Mss Doreen Sibiya and Anita Snyders as administrative officers.
- A new database function to provide the relevant information management functions ACRP has to take care of is being developed in conjunction with the Shepherd Centre at the University of the Free State in Bloemfontein.

5. CURRENT PARTICIPATION AND REPRESENTATION

As far as church networks are concerned, the following were represented in ACRP's processes to date: SA Council of Churches, the Evangelical Alliance of South Africa (TEASA), the Council for African Independent Churches with the AIC Development Programme, and the United African Federation of Churches. ACRP is being structured to provide a professionalisation service to churches and ministries who express the need to use such services.

Around 130 ministry training institutions are currently on the ACRP database, a significant proportion of whom are actively participating on various levels of involvement in the ACRP process. This includes universities, private tertiary training institutions, Bible schools and other ministry training institutions, church networks, and individual churches and ministries.

Several links into sub-Saharan Africa are being developed, including the development of a link with training institutions over the continent via the Network for African Congregational Theology (NetACT) and the Association for Christian Theological Education in Africa (ACTEA).

ACRP's Council for Pastoral and Spiritual and Counselling (CPSC) has around 600 affiliated pastoral workers and professional counsellors. It is also linked to various national and international institutions.

6. PROGRESS AND CURRENT PROCESSES

Progress made in recent times include:

6.1 ACRP's Appointment as Professional Body to SAQA

ACRP's application to be recognised by SAQA as *Professional Body for Religious Professionals* in terms of the NQF Act (67 of 2008) was approved by SAQA on 27 September 2017. The application to be recognised as professional body was submitted during October 2016 after a lengthy process to become aligned with SAQA's requirements. Since then the application successfully went through all of SAQA's steps towards approval of the application. These included: evaluation of the application by SAQA's Directorate Registration and Recognition (DRR); the publication of the ACRP application for public comment in the Government Gazette on 19 May 2017; and the consideration of the application by the SAQA Quality and Standards Committee on 29 August 2017. The final step of approval was when that application was considered and approved by the Executive Committee of SAQA's Board.

6.2 Progress towards the commissioning of ACRP's professional body function

ACRP is now in the process of commissioning the ACRP as Professional Body functions. While awaiting the final approval of the appointment by SAQA, good progress was made over the last couple of months. This includes:

- As continuation of SAAP, and now also of ACC, ACRP's *Council for Pastoral and Spiritual Counselling (CPSC)* is already providing a professional body service to the Christian counselling professions in South Africa. This includes providing peer networking opportunities; setting and applying professional and ethical standards through its scope of practice, ethical code, disciplinary code and code of good practice; sharing of expertise through conferences, publications, the newsletter, etc. (More about CPSC will be dealt with in the CPSC presentation).
- As continuation of AMTP, ACRP's *Council for Ministry Training Practitioners (CMTP)* and the Assessment Quality Partner (AQP) function made significant progress towards the ideal to provide formal, SAQA accredited training to pastors who in the past did not have effective opportunities for accredited training.
 - An *NQF Level 2 Christian Ministry qualification* was developed during 2015/6 by a widely representative ACRP work group in conjunction with the QCTO and the Health and Welfare Sector Education and Training Authority (HWSETA). This qualification was designed for pastors and ministry leaders who want to be trained on a less intensive level, and with lower expectations in terms of a reading and writing proficiency. The qualification was approved by the QCTO in November 2016, and has been submitted to SAQA for formal registration. The opportunity to present this qualification is expected to be open soon for training providers.
 - An *NQF Level 5 Christian Ministry qualification* was similarly developed by ACRP in conjunction with QCTO and HWSETA. It was approved in July 2017 by the QCTO and submitted to SAQA for formal registration. This qualification presents an opportunity for intensive ministry training. It was *inter alia* designed to accommodate the situation of current or prospective pastors who for whatever reason cannot or do not want to enroll at a university or tertiary seminary.

- Both the NQF Level 2 and 5 qualifications fall within the category of “occupational qualifications” as determined in South African educational policy. Both are expected soon to be published on the SAQA sub-framework for occupational qualifications. A delay in the final registration of these two qualification by SAQA is however noted.
- ACRP's application to be recognised as QCTO’s *Assessment Quality Partner (AQP)* for these two qualifications was approved on 28 February 2017. The formal AQP function involves managing the assessment processes of the qualifications (setting internal assessment standards, developing the external assessment infrastructure and processes, etc). With the support of Bible Media the AQP office was established with Dr Danie van Zyl managing operations. The office will become fully operational once the NQF Level 2 and 5 qualifications have been published by SAQA for implementation.
- ACRP also started to provide guidance and support to training institutions who want to apply for accreditation by QCTO as training providers (so called "Skills Development Providers" or SDPs) for the NQF Level 2 and/or 5 ministry qualifications. Around 20 different training institutions already expressed interest in presenting the NQF Level 2 and 5 and are participating in ACRP’s the guidance and mentoring process. Training providers not yet involved are invited to become part of this process.

6.3 A new development is that ACRP is starting to provide a “general practitioner” professional body service to churches, ministries and individual religious practitioners. This is the responsibility of the newly established Council for General Ministry Practitioners (CGMP). The service includes providing professional peer networking opportunities to pastors and other ministry leaders; setting and applying professional and ethical standards through its scope of practice, ethical code, disciplinary code and code of good practice; sharing of expertise through conferences, publications, the newsletter, etc. This service is in the first place meant for churches, ministries and pastors and other religious leaders who do not have access to formal professionalisation networks or processes. The service is however also available to formal churches who want to make use of the available functions.

7. CONCLUSION

ACRP treasures its relationships with the broad spectrum of individuals and institutions who supports the endeavour to make good training, formal qualifications, and focussed, quality assured ministry available within the church and Christian ministry environment in its widest sense.

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