

New Skills Development Act Amendment Bill impacts on Learning and Development Professionals

By Gizelle Mc Intyre

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The new Skills Development Act Amendment Bill introduces Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) to coordinate learning towards occupational competence within our national learning system. The bill facilitates the development of demand driven occupational learning systems that will provide relevant occupational skills. The QCTO will ensure that learning programmes can be developed to address specific scarce and critical skills needed. The legislation also allows for different kinds of learnerships so that apprenticeships and internships can be accommodated and different learning routes can be selected. The plan is for QCTOs to take over quality control.

Another change in the legislation is that the workplace will now also be certified and will be audited and monitored, not just the facilitators. The focus of occupational qualifications will be the development of occupational competence which, in turn, contributes to increased employment rates and productivity. The establishment of the QCTO will significantly increase the efficiency of the current ETQA system, merging twenty three SETA ETQAs into one. This means that quality assurance activities can be better coordinated and managed. All occupational unit standards will be quality assured by the QCTO.

A common misconception in the market is that the QCTO will replace the SETAs, but SETAs are here to stay and will be responsible for fund management of skills development levies as well as the control of learning going into each specific sector. What will change is that the Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQA) will no longer be responsible for monitoring and auditing the provision and achievement of NQF registered standards and qualifications as was stipulated in the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act of 1995. ETQAs were accredited by SAQA to monitor compliance with SAQA requirements and were responsible for the accreditation of constituent education and training providers. This role will now move to the QCTOs.

It is promised that without the quality aspect the fund management process will be more effective, streamlined and user friendly. It is necessary to collect information on labour market needs in terms of occupations and skills required and train employable workers to grow business and the economy. In such the QCTO has been tasked to ensure that there are fit for

purpose occupational qualifications to respond to the labour market needs. The QCTO will manage and coordinate the qualifications in the occupational framework in terms of their development, provision, assessment and impact; its scope will be the development and quality assurance of the fit for purpose occupational qualifications and unit standards as required by the labour market for work and employment purposes. Such fit for purpose occupational qualifications will be certified as national occupational awards or national skills certificates. The awards will name the relevant occupation that the learner is now competent to practice.

Both employers and trade unions need competent L&D professionals. Such professionals can now specialize and qualify up to NQF level 10, which is doctorate level, starting with assessment practitioner. The QCTO will need verifiers and is therefore pushing for the qualification. There will be two types of qualifications; a National Occupational Award certifying the achievement of an occupation listed on the Organising Framework for Occupations and a National Skills Certificate certifying competence in a specialisation related to an occupation or group of related occupation.

With regards to the management function of Assessment Quality Partners (AQP) the new legislation stipulates that AQPs should provide input to develop assessment strategy, assist in fund development of nationally standardised assessment instruments and manage assessment processes. This means that the AQP role will be responsible for developing exemplars, specifying requirements for accreditation of assessment centres, recommending assessment centres, registering assessors, moderators and invigilators, reporting on assessment results and analysing assessment results in terms of quality.

Knowledge, practical skills and work experience will be assessed by accredited skills development providers in accordance with the criteria outlined in the various curriculum components. This assessment is referred to as internal assessment or assessment against curriculum components and culminates in statements of results by accredited skills development providers. For work experience statements of work experience will be issued by approved workplaces. The same assessment criteria linked to each curriculum component will be applied when conducting assessments for the purpose of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) already completed in some prior site and for identifying learning gaps.

In order to qualify for an external assessment, learners must provide proof of completion of all required components by means of statements of results and work experience. The QCTO requires that all learners undertaking occupational programmes registered on NQF levels 3-4 are assessed against the Foundational Learning part qualifications and if found “not yet competent” must complete the specified communication and mathematical literacy courses.

There is no entry requirement but must be completed prior to the external summative assessment. The same assessment criteria aligned to each curriculum component will be applied when conducting assessments for the purpose of RPL.

Taking the changes brought about by the new Amendment Bill into consideration, Learning and Development (L&D) institutions such as the Institute for People Development (IPD) should ensure that work related resources are not taken for granted and create a scenario where a workforce will happily attend effective and productive training, providing true ROI and improved learning evaluations, positively impacting on performance and productivity. Training should stimulate new ideas and lead to Continuous Professional Development (CPD).

In response to this requirement the IPD created the ReCr8 programme that will follow the process of expanding knowledge, understanding and skill followed by continuous assessment and application of skills and assessment thereof in the workplace. The process is completed by an External Final Integrated Summative Assessment (AQP) resulting in return on investment and much needed skill in the workplace.

Whether these new changes and the response of industry thereto will address the skills shortage experienced in South Africa remains to be seen, but it seems as if the processes and quality standards imposed will be to the benefit of L&D professionals and learners. With the SETA freed up to manage funds, the process of claiming back on L&D spend will be much easier, hopefully stimulating the funds available for up-skilling our nation.

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Boilerplate:

Founded in 1999, Workplace Skills Solutions t/a The Institute of People Development (IPD) strives to innovate, equip, prepare and certify practitioners in order to serve South Africa's skills development strategy as well as facilitating the transformation of education and training. Over the years, IPD has become the preferred people development partner to most state owned and private enterprises in Southern Africa. For more information, please contact IPD at gizellem@peopledev.co.za on (011) 315 2913 or visit www.peopledevelopment.co.za.