

## **THE IMPACT OF THE ROLE OF THE QUALITY COUNCIL FOR TRADES AND OCCUPATIONS ON TRAINING PROVIDERS AND EMPLOYERS**

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*The vision of the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) is to provide an occupational qualifications system that is responsive to labour market skills needs and results in a skilled, productive and employable workforce. But is this vision being achieved?*

The QCTO is one of three quality councils that ensure the quality and standards of education and training in South Africa - Umalusi is responsible for institutions reporting to the Department of Basic Education and the Council for Higher Education is responsible for quality at institutions of higher learning. QCTO is responsible for defining the labour related needs into qualifications and the quality assurance of occupational qualifications, including workplace training. Training providers will have to show that training is registered, quality-assured and offered with clear quality assurance to show that they are a reputable service provider.

Getting to a new qualification starts with a pre-scoping meeting held with mostly employers and a few Learning & Development (L&D) specialists to ensure that the qualification is needed in the industry. A scoping session is facilitated by the QCTO and the relevant SETA or SETAs involve as many relevant stakeholders as possible. It is a prerequisite that the entire industry is represented at the meeting and the object of the pre-scoping meeting is to determine whether the proposed vocational/occupational qualification is one that employers are in need of. Once consensus has been reached, a scoping meeting with stakeholders and potential development quality partners will be held. The full process then commences.

One can apply to be a workplace provider or a training provider, or both. When a training provider decides on what it wants to provide, it has to apply to the appointed Assessment Quality Partner (AQP) for that particular qualification. The AQP is the quality control arm appointed by the QCTO and will provide most of the functions currently handled by the SETAs. The true effectiveness of this will only be visible once the QCTO processes are well under way. It is however necessary to acknowledge that the baby has not been thrown out with the bathwater. Skills Development providers and Assessment Centres will be accredited through the QCTO.

Qualifications that are currently accredited have been re-registered and will be maintained until the last achievement date on the qualification, unless there is a radical need to treat these qualifications in a different manner. SETAs have been mandated by the QCTO to quality assure this. An employer will have the option of going the current route, or to make use of a provider using of the QCTO system with the quality assurance operational leg as the AQP.

The AQP will conduct the summative integrated assessments while training providers will handle formative assessments. Workplace providers will do the workplace assessments which must be done formally and this has an effect on the coaching, mentoring and

workplace assessments currently being undertaken in the workplace. It is critical to understand that middle management, or supervisors, must start using clever assessment tools that incorporate the everyday functions in line with performance assessment. This is a specialised job performed by assessment designers. The workplace assessments component is a make-or-break situation with regards to achieving access to the final summative assessment and is thus imperative that a workplace provider designs and implements this component effectively.

Professional Bodies and Associations (at times in collaboration with SETAs) are being encouraged to become part of the AQPs for the various designations they have registered, provided they have a national footprint, a good track record and implementation ability.

The relationship between the SETAs and QCTO will continue, with QCTO handling quality control up to level eight vocational qualifications. Level nine and 10 will solely be the responsibility of the Council for Higher Education as these are considered purely academic in nature. QCTO qualifications and Skills Programmes (Vocational Awards) have to be demand led, in other words the market must be able to employ those with the qualification. Other principles are responsiveness, qualifications being fit for purpose, relevant, expert driven and show involvement of practitioners and professional bodies. Occupational competence must include work experience, standardised summative assessments, be externally moderated and be developed by practitioners.

The revised policy of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) recognises that there are different forms of learning and that each requires a different delivery and assessment approach. Each employer will have an AQP incorporating knowledge and practical skills. The workplace provider is mandated to assess whether learners are gaining workplace experience and can implement Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). This will hopefully also increase the trust employers place in the system and allow for more successful recruitment in the future.

There is a national call for sector cooperation and for private organisations to get involved in the L&D processes and Quality Assurance, especially in ensuring that all learning offered is fit for purpose. As assessment procedures will intensify, L&D professionals will have to focus on continuous improvement and stay abreast of changes in assessment requirements. This also means that this profession should be seen as a critical skill within each and every company.

Although many may believe this is just more of the same, it is critical to acknowledge that we have come a long way since 2000, and that although the system may not be perfect, if we keep working on it we get closer to that elusive goal all the time.

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