

QCTO

Frequently asked questions

The legal framework for the establishment of the QCTO

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The Occupational Qualifications Framework

DRAFT DOCUMENT

JULY 2008

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Frequently Asked Questions

Why is the QCTO being established?

The Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) is being established in terms of a revised implementation of the National Qualifications Framework. The QCTO will focus on those aspects of learning which are required for occupational competence. Those occupations include trades (artisan) and relevant professions.

The Ministers of Education and Labour – in carrying the political responsibility for NQF implementation - issued a Joint Policy Statement on the Review of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) during August 2007; which provides for the establishment of the QCTO in conjunction with the other Quality Councils (QCs) for General and Further, and Higher Education.

The Joint Policy Statement is the product of an exhaustive review process that was initiated in 2001. It forms the basis for the development of a new act, the National Qualifications Framework Act which will govern the revised implementation. In accordance with these changes there is a simultaneous revision of a number of related existing acts of parliament including the Skills Development Act

What was wrong with the initial implementation of the NQF?

Initially South Africa's NQF was designed to be fully inclusive of all learning in learning in General, Further and Higher Education and in both institutional and workplace-based qualifications at all levels of the framework (par 19).

How was the NQF implementation reviewed?

A Study Team was appointed in 2001 to assess and review the implementation of the NQF, and consider amongst others concerns regarding:

- the proliferation of NQF bodies and structures (especially for standards generation and quality assurance) leading to confusion and duplication of effort and responsibility
- Insufficient recognition of the diversity of approaches and practices within the education, training and skills development system (resulting in the design of an NQF architecture with a “one size fits all” approach.

The study team report then formed the basis of discussions between the Ministers of Education and Labour and resulted in a Consultative Document released by the Ministers of Education and Labour in July 2003 for public comments. The Joint Policy Statement is the final response of the Ministers of Education and Labour to the recommendations and comments to the Consultative Document.

What informed the changed policy?

The Ministers emphasise in the Joint Policy Statement that the enhancement of higher learning (to follow general and formative learning) in the sciences, technology, arts, humanities and social sciences is essential for our national well being.

The Ministers further recognise that our education, training and skills development system must continue to value, support and develop all fields and forms of learning, particularly those that have relevance for the country's scientific and technological competitiveness, for work and employment and for meeting the nation's social challenges.

The Ministers also recognise that an integrated approach to education and training should thus not blur the important distinctions between different forms of learning and their specific contributions to the entire spectrum of education, training and skills development needs.

How will the policy changes result in an improved response to skills shortages?

In order to achieve the above, the Ministers of Education and Training have agreed that the executive authority for standards generation and the quality assurance of qualifications, provision and learning achievements combined "under one roof", and will be undertaken by three Qualifications and Quality Assurance Councils (QCs) (par 60).

The QC for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) will be responsible for standards generation and quality assurance for all work based competency standards up to NQF level 10 (par 63), and will deal with work based learning across all NQF Levels (par 73).

The QCTO will rationalise the work of the sector ETQA bodies, which currently fall under SETAs (par 64) and will co-ordinate and streamline the ETQA functions of SETAs including the non statutory professional bodies accredited as ETQAs. It will also take over responsibility for identified shared services relating to trades, occupations and skills which cut across economic and social sectors (par 73).

This latter arrangement will help resolve many the cross-sectoral issues encountered in the current dispensation and will end the need for Memorandums of Understanding which currently add a layer of additional complexity.

What is the purpose of establishing the QCTO?

The QCTO will be established to enable the Minister of Labour to carry out his political responsibility for NQF implementation. The QCTO will be established in terms of a revised Skills Development Bill.

What is the scope of the QCTO

The scope of the QCTO will be the development and quality assurance of fit-for- purpose occupational unit standards and qualifications required by the labour market for work and employment purposes.

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Fit-for-purpose occupational qualifications will be issued as occupational awards or occupational skills certificates directed to address specific occupations, occupational specializations or occupational tasks.

The focus of occupational qualifications will be the development of occupational competence directed at specific occupations¹, specific occupational specialisations or occupational tasks to ensure immediate employability and productivity.

How does the QCTO fit in with the Department of Labour, SETAs and other role players in the skills development landscape?

The Skills Development Bill enables a fully integrated demand driven occupational learning system to meet the needs of industry. The Organising Framework for Occupations is a skills classification system which lists all the occupations in the South African economy. The importance of the OFO is that it sets a base for linking these occupations to skills development. In this way the OFO can be viewed as the golden thread that links all elements in the system.

The SETAs reflect labour market needs using the OFO. The Department of Labour uses the OFO as the basis for the ESSA system to, amongst other uses, develop the National Scarce Skills List.

The QCTO uses the OFO as basis for developing occupational qualifications through the National Occupational Pathways Framework (NOPF) in order to address industry needs.

How does the QCTO concept relate to international trends?"

The revised skills development strategy, which includes the QCTO as a component of an overall system is very much in line with international trends and best practices. The Committee on Skills at the International Labour Conference, 2008 concluded that "Governments have overall responsibility for creating, in consultation with the social partners, the *enabling framework* to meet current and future skills needs. International experience shows that countries that have succeeded in linking skills to productivity, employment, development and decent work, have targeted skills development policy towards three main objectives:

- (a) matching supply to current demand for skills;
- (b) helping workers and enterprises adjust to change; and
- (c) building and sustaining competencies for future labour market needs."

It noted furthermore, that such a framework needed to address transitions between stages of learning. "In many countries higher secondary and tertiary education rates have not resulted in higher employment in work of higher productivity for a substantial portion of young people, because they may lack competencies relevant to labour market needs." Measures to addresses these and other transitions should be part of the national skills development agenda.

¹ Occupations are listed on the OFO and include Trades and Professions

What is the NOPF and why do we need another framework

The purpose of the NOPF is to ensure that duplication and overlaps are reduced and that progression and articulation of qualifications and learning programmes become clear.

Individual occupations or groups of occupations will be linked to professional bodies, influential employers etc to ensure that the relevant players in industry can play their pivotal role in the development of the curricula, assessment specifications and qualifications. Involving practitioners and industry in the development of the curricula etc will ensure that the qualifications are relevant and respond to changing skills and knowledge needs in each occupation.

Why would professional bodies and occupational associations want to participate within the QCTO? Won't they lose their identity?

The NOPF is designed to act as a framework for labour market actors, including professional bodies to manage their qualification development and assessment processes to suit their context. In the first implementation of the NQF and the SDA such bodies were often not able to manage and control their affairs in an efficient and effective way.

How do we ensure that the QCTO act in complementarity rather than duplication of the other QCs? Will the QCTO also develop PhDs, Masters and degrees?

In terms of the NQF Bill each QC will develop its own fit-for-purpose qualifications sub-framework. SAQA is tasked with the responsibility of overseeing and harmonising the three sub-frameworks.

The QCTO will develop its own framework based on the logic of the labour market, ie based on occupational titles and designations and relevant skills sets needed to for purposes of licensing and other forms of recognition.

In essence occupational qualifications qualify a person to practice and occupation or perform a particular occupational task.

The Department of Education has already promulgated the Higher Education Qualifications Framework.

Occupational qualifications are not compatible with the type of qualifications in the HEQF. Occupational qualifications will, however, link to higher and further education and training qualifications, where they meet the needs of the occupation. Holders of such qualifications will be exempt from certain components within the occupational qualifications.

How will the new landscape affect those professions or occupations that operate within universities?

Professions and occupations which currently use university qualifications as part of the registration and licensing process will continue as they are. They will not be required to change unless they have a specific reason for wishing to do so.

How will the new landscape affect statutory professions or occupations?

The new landscape makes it possible for these professions to formally align to any of the QC’s outlined in the NQF Bill. For example, statutory councils wishing to operate within the QCTO framework will derive recognition for their learning in the country’s National Qualifications Framework.

How do we know that the QCTO will not just add another layer of bureaucracy?

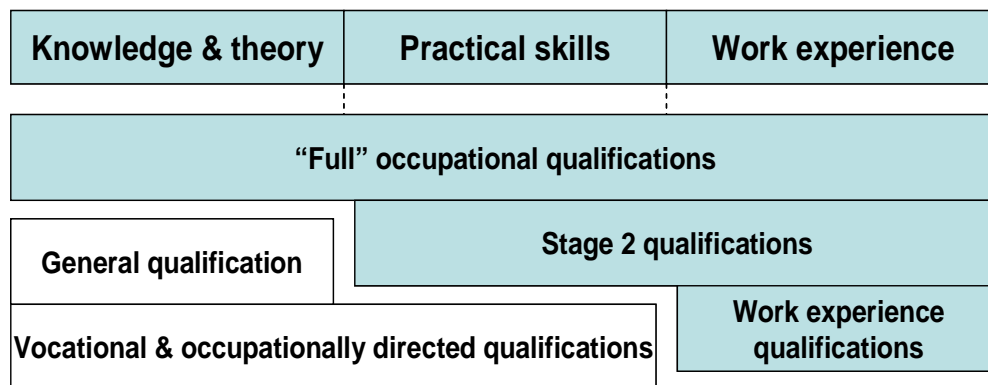
One of the reasons behind the establishment of the QCTO is to reduce the bureaucracy in the current NQF by streamlining the 23 ETQAs into one body with clear responsibility for occupational qualifications. QCTO standards and qualifications will not be allocated to any sector. This will obviate the need for multiple MoUs between ETQAs and simplify the accreditation landscape from the point of view of learners and providers. Overlapping quality assurance requirements currently causing major delays and frustrations and escalating costs, especially for small providers, will not longer apply. The QCTO intends to provide a framework within which existing role-players can carry out their roles with fewer barriers and less bureaucracy

How will occupational qualifications registered through the QCTO be different from other qualifications?

The QCTO’s qualifications will always include a work experience component to ensure that learners are competent to do something that is required and recognised in the labour market.

The QCTO’s qualifications will also link, where appropriate, to other qualifications obtained at schools, colleges or universities. While QCTO qualifications will specify all the learning requirements, they will also provide exemption for certain of the learning components where the learner has obtained a related qualification.

Figure 1: Some occupational qualifications may contain all three learning components while others will exempt learners from portions of the qualification if they have acquired a relevant qualification elsewhere.



What will QCTO qualifications consist of?

QCTO qualifications will consist of three components:

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- A general and a specialised knowledge and theory component
- A practical skills component
- A work experience component

In addition QCTO qualifications will also be linked to:

- A curriculum which guides the implementation of the learning process
- Assessment specifications which standardise the external assessment process

How will QCTO qualifications differ from qualifications currently registered on the NQF?

There will be two kinds of qualification:

- National occupational awards which certify the competence required to practice an occupation, eg hair dresser, ship's master or medical laboratory technician
- National skills Certificates which certify a distinct but occupationally relevant skills set.
- An occupational award can be constructed using a series of skills sets, but a final external assessment will be required for the final award. But skills certificates can also represent particular specialisations or registration requirements linked to one or more occupations.

On what NQF levels will occupational awards be pitched?

Elementary occupations, generally requiring only on-the-job training, will be registered at NQF level 1 and will be registered as skills certificates.

Semi-skills and skilled occupations such as artisan will be registered from levels 2 to 5 on the NQF.

Technical, professional and other higher level occupations will be registered from level 6 to 9 on the NQF.

We anticipate; based on existing examples of professional qualifications, which, because of the range of knowledge and the extensive experience required will be considered at level 10 of the NQF.

Skills certificates can be registered at all ten levels of the NQF. Skills certificates could be linked to any other education or university qualification on the NQF for the purposes of registration or occupational recognition.

If there is an occupational award registered on the NQF at level 6 or 7, for example, will it be called a diploma or a degree?

No. The three linked frameworks all have their own specified nomenclature. The OQF only certifies National Occupational Awards and National Occupational Skills Certificates. So, although the OQF spans all 10 levels, there can be no confusion between its qualification and, for example, a National Senior Certificate or a Degree.

Will occupational qualifications compete with other qualifications registered on the NQF?

Occupational qualifications have a distinct purpose – in that sense they do not compete with traditional qualifications. Where universities or universities of technology award qualifications recognised by professional bodies no change is anticipated and this practice will continue. Where professional bodies and occupational associations require learning in addition to traditional qualifications and a final external assessment they can develop a register qualification through the QCTO to allow for the award of the occupational title or professional designation.

Also, to date no occupation has been identified which needs a doctorate as an entry requirement been found. (A professor requires a PhD but internationally a professor is considered to be a specialisation of occupational called university lecturer).

How will occupational qualifications be developed?

Occupational qualifications will be developed by communities of expert practice. Such communities comprise practitioners active in a particular occupation. A few members of the community will become actively involved in the development of the qualification, while broader community will comment on or make further proposals on the work.

Committees of Expert Practitioners (CEPs) may also play a role in the assessment of the qualifications, either as registered assessors or, where they are organised as associations etc, act as moderating bodies to monitor and evaluate the credibility and consistency of the assessment process.

What is the purpose of curriculum?

Its purpose is to simplify and strengthen the development and implementation of the qualification development and implementation. It specifies the inputs required in relation to the occupational profile, will be used as the basis for accreditation of providers and approval of workplaces for the work experience.

It will also ensure that commonalities across qualifications are recognized and so providers will no longer have to be accredited for every single unit standards in each qualification they contribute to.

The curriculum will also provide guidance to the various role players on:

- Access requirements
- Linkages to other related occupations
- Articulation with other learning pathways such as vocational qualifications obtained in education institutions
- Content (scope and depth)
- Learning activities
- Development of learning materials and lesson plans
- Assessment requirements

Will the curriculum become another rod for the back of providers?

The curriculum is developed at a fairly high level with the emphasis on guidance and not on conformance. This will allow some flexibility, leaving space for contextualisation and specialisation and providing opportunities for provider initiative and development of best practice.

How does the establishment of the QCTO address the identified problem of low or diminishing credibility of South Africa's occupational qualifications?

Industry complains that individuals often do not have the competence that they should have at the point of being awarded a qualification. In addition, some South African artisan qualifications are no longer recognised internationally, and some of the qualifications have titles that are so divorced from the occupational designation that they are not even understood in other countries. These calls into question current assessment and quality assurance practices. This issue poses an enormous challenge for the system as it not only devalues the education and training that individuals receive, but in some cases the certification of individuals that lack the requisite competence has implications not only for the productivity of the workforce, but more importantly for health and safety. There is an urgent need to address both the problems of quality as well as the perception that there is a varied quality across the system.

The QCTO is addressing the credibility gap both through design and quality assurance.

How does the design process for occupational qualifications assist in their credibility?

The starting point for the design of occupational qualifications is the unpacking of the occupational profile from the OFO. The process is driven by expert practitioners from the relevant community of practice. The result is a qualification which matches the profile required by the industry concerned. This makes the qualification relevant and credible, assuming that learners are assessed in a fair, reliable and valid manner.

What will the QCTO do to raise the quality of assessment?

The QCTO will introduce an external nationally standardised assessment for each of its occupational awards as a prerequisite to certification. This will ensure that learners who have achieved the required levels of competence in each of the curriculum components are required to integrate their learning and display applied occupational competence across a range of variable contexts. This will put an end to the current variations in the interpretation of standards across sectors and sites.

How will the QCTO quality assure learner achievements?

The QCTO will seek quality partners (statutory and non-statutory professional bodies, occupational associations, legislated boards, SETAs, etc) appropriate to each group of related occupational qualifications. It will appoint national moderating bodies in this context, which will be delegated certain quality assurance responsibilities. The national moderating body for trade tests is one example, and the relationship between some

SETAs and the related professional bodies provides another example which can be built upon.

In what ways will the establishment of the QCTO address the identified problem of burdensome and unnecessary quality assurance demands for workplaces?

Some ETQAs have insisted on workplaces undergoing the full accreditation process as providers. This discourages employers from offering to place learners to gain work experience. International trends show that such requirements are increasingly being dropped. The QCTO will only require an approval process for workplaces providing the work experience curriculum component as part of a learning programme. The range, scope and duration of experience will be clearly stipulated, and workplaces which have the specified human and physical resources and health and safety practices will be approved.

The requirement for ‘fundamental’ unit standards within all qualifications at NQF levels 1-4 has proved to be a barrier to learner progress in some occupational contexts. How will the QCTO address this issue?

There will be three kinds of unit standards: theory/knowledge, practical and work experience standards. All of these will be the core of the qualification, and compulsory for all learners. In addition there will be specialisations. There will be no common requirement across all qualifications for fundamental unit standards.

All learners will have to achieve a foundational learning requirement in language and mathematical literacy, which represents the minimum proficiency required to engage with occupational learning materials.

The Committees of Expert Practitioners (CEPs) designing the qualification will add as part of the core any additional fundamental requirements that are necessary in the context of the specific qualification. Thus requirements for each qualification are fit-for-purpose.