

QCTO: Big changes ahead for skills development

South Africa's education and training landscape is preparing for some major changes as the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) moves toward implementing a single national quality assurance system for accredited qualifications and skills programmes. Working behind the scenes, the QCTO has gradually been building capacity as a stand-alone institution to take over its mandated functions from SAQA.



Rajan Naidoo, the director of EduPower Skills Academy

Rajan Naidoo, the director of EduPower Skills Academy, says that this means skills development will become more effective as the system will streamline and simplify quality assurance functions for the benefit of all stakeholders. “Any skills development provider (SDP) that wants to offer occupational qualifications, part-qualifications or occupational skills programmes will need to be accredited by the QCTO to offer these qualifications. Hence, it will result in quality, standardised national qualifications.” He speaks from experience as many QCTO qualifications are already available due to their own organisation and various training providers preparing for the change over the past five years.

However, there has been some confusion about qualifications which have not yet been re-aligned and replaced with occupational qualifications and what it will mean for skills development. “According to the QCTO, the registration end date for all 'historical' qualifications is 30 June 2023, with a phase-out period of one year for learners to still enrol up to and including 30 June 2024,” explains Naidoo. To help companies prepare for the change that’s coming, he briefly outlines the main points about the QCTO and helps to make sense of all the acronyms:

1. The QCTO

The QCTO's vision is to qualify a skilled and capable workforce in South Africa and is responsible for the oversight of the accreditation, implementation, assessment and certification of occupational qualifications to meet industry needs. This gives the QCTO the ability to address skills shortages, placing vocational certification employing learnership, internship and apprenticeship programmes, at the centre of South Africa's skills creation system.

2. The QQSF

The QCTO manages the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (QQSF) by setting and developing standards

and assuring the quality of national occupational qualifications on the National Quality Framework (NQF). It will also govern the quality assurance processes for these qualifications by ensuring that all learners, professionals, workers, unemployed and those classified as NEET (Not in Employment, Education or Training) are equipped with relevant and transferable competencies to enhance lifelong employability.



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3. Occupational qualifications

The QCTO's qualifications are driven by occupations in various sectors and have three components namely knowledge, practical and workplace. All components are compulsory to obtain the occupational qualification.

4. The role of the Setas

All Sector and Training Authorities (Setas) report to the QCTO. Setas are licensed until 2030 and will continue with the annual WSP/ATR, allocation of grants and funding, learnerships and the phasing out of legacy qualifications. Under the QCTO, they will also have the additional responsibility as Degree Qualification Profile (DQP) and Assessment Quality Partners (AQP) for occupational qualifications.

5. Accreditation of skills development providers

Any skills development provider (SDP) offering training or intending to offer training in any occupational programmes and qualifications must be accredited by the QCTO and must comply with the organisation's minimum criteria. Setas do not quality assure or accredit providers for occupational qualifications.

Naidoo says that while this explains how occupational qualifications work as well as the management of the training, there has been very little information on how the OQSF will impact the Broad-Based Black Economic Empowerment (B-BBEE) scorecard in relation to skills development points.

“The only criteria that we know for certain is that for companies to achieve their skills development points, their training initiatives will need to be coordinated by SDPs that are accredited by the QCTO.”

He goes on to say that a transition of this magnitude is going to have gaps and possible glitches but overall the process is being well managed and the benefits of the QCTO framework will far outweigh any teething problems.

“In shifting the focus from generic skills training to inclusive learner development and facilitation through the QCTO framework, graduates will have enhanced employability which will make it much easier to impact South Africa’s youth unemployment rate effectively and sustainably,” concludes Naidoo.

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