SABPP FACT SHEET

QUALITY COUNCIL FOR TRADES AND OCCUPATIONS

1. Introduction

Far reaching changes to the skills development system were introduced in 2010 when the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) was set up. The QCTO is a Council established under the Skills Development Act for standards generation and quality assurance for all Occupational Qualifications. It stands alongside Umalusi (which quality assures basic education) and the Council for Higher Education (CHE). New qualifications in trades and occupations for registration on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) must be developed through the QCTO.

An occupational qualification is defined in the law as a qualification associated with a trade, occupation or profession resulting from work-based learning and consisting of three components, one for knowledge, one for practical skills and one for work experience. All occupational qualifications require a final test or what is called 'an external, summative assessment' which, when successfully passed, signals to the world that the person is able to fully perform the work of the occupation. A part qualification may also be registered (this is an assessed unit of learning which is registered on the NQF).

The focus in this system is an occupation which is defined as a "cluster or group of similar jobs that share many common occupational tasks of similar complexity and require similar performance across different processes and industries." All occupations are identified and classified on the Organizing Framework for Occupations (OFO) managed by the Department of Labour and which is used as the basis for statistical reporting. So in the field of HR for example, occupations include HR Advisor (code 242303) which includes typical job titles such as HR Officer, HR Consultant, Personnel Officer, Business Unit Advisor; and HR Clerk (code 441601) which includes job titles such as Personnel Record Clerk, HR Systems Administrator and Recruitment Clerk.

HR practitioners need to understand the system and its implications for their work.

> "The development of trade and occupational qualifications which are externally assessed and have currency in the labour market is a crucial priority. These should build on the existing trade test and apprenticeship system, as well as qualifications quality assured and certified by SETA's which have gained credibility and respect."
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> DHET White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, 2014

This Fact Sheet will cover key aspects of the QCTO and will highlight important implementation issues for HR practitioners.

2. Frequently Asked Questions

2.1. Why was the QCTO set up?

The QCTO was set up because there was a need for an institution which had a national capacity on quality assurance of trades and professional qualifications, rather than the system which placed quality assurance for these with the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETA's) which are, by definition, concerned with sectors. There were inconsistencies between SETAs and there were problems with demarcation where a qualification was not clearly within the scope of one SETA, or where a qualification spread across the scope of several SETAs.

In addition, the system of developing qualifications, which relied on the SETAs, suffered from similar problems.

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which had been registering and administering qualifications, has been re-focused more towards general development of the NQF and its relatively new functions involving professional bodies and career guidance. SAQA has therefore delegated the functions it had been performing in registering and administering qualifications in the trades and occupations sub-framework to the new QCTO.

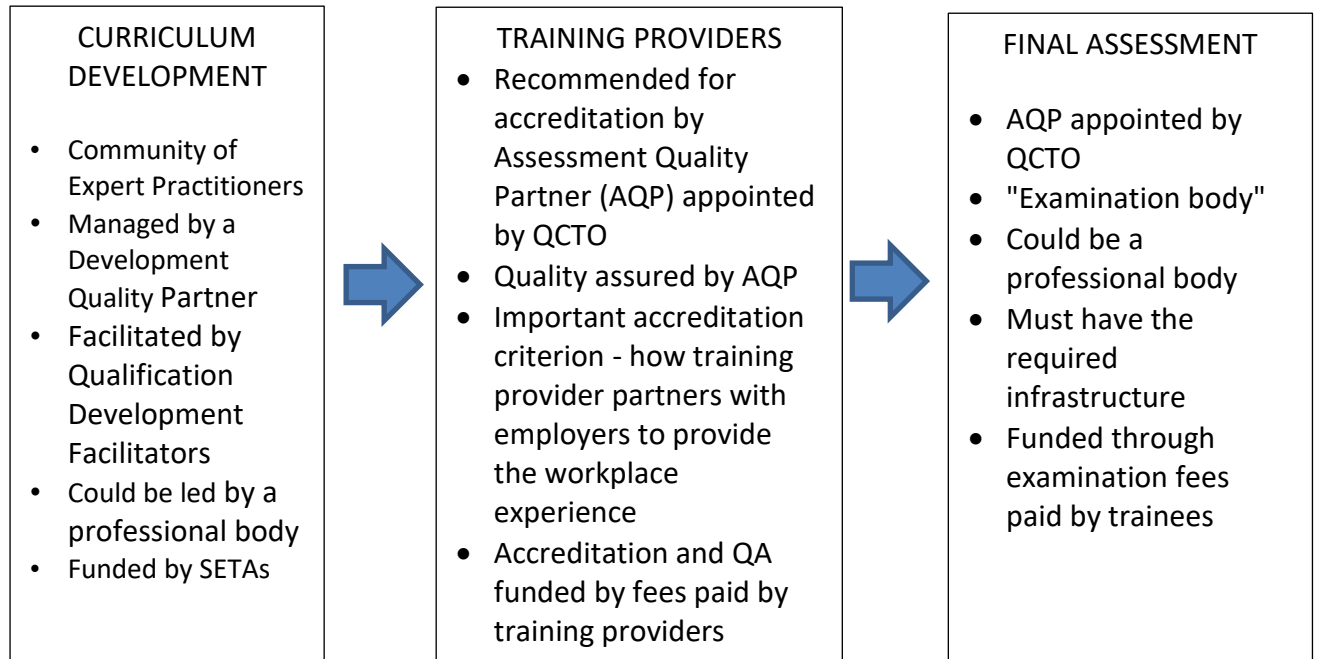### 2.2. What is the main objective of the QCTO?

QCTO will:

    a.   Register occupational qualifications and part qualifications on the NQF framework
    b.   Govern the quality assurance processes for these qualifications:
         i.   Appoint and evaluate Development Quality Partners
         ii.   Appoint Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs).
         iii.   Monitor and evaluate AQPs' performance.
    c.   Register (and deregister) training providers on recommendation of AQPs.
    d.   Issue the qualification certificates to trainees.

There is a transition period where SETAs continue to quality assure the "old" unit-standard based qualifications until their validity expires (latest 2017). QCTO will monitor and evaluate the quality assurance processes of SETAs and professional bodies with QA functions during this transition period.

2.3. How does the new system of Occupational Awards and Qualifications work?

The new system involves a greater separation of duties which should result in skills development becoming more effective.

The process flow is:

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT	TRAINING PROVIDERS	FINAL ASSESSMENT
• Community of Expert Practitioners • Managed by a Development Quality Partner • Facilitated by Qualification Development Facilitators • Could be led by a professional body • Funded by SETAs	• Recommended for accreditation by Assessment Quality Partner (AQP) appointed by QCTO • Quality assured by AQP • Important accreditation criterion - how training provider partners with employers to provide the workplace experience • Accreditation and QA funded by fees paid by training providers	• AQP appointed by QCTO • "Examination body" • Could be a professional body • Must have the required infrastructure • Funded through examination fees paid by trainees

Only the QCTO itself will issue

- Training provider accreditation certificates
- Qualification certificates, on receipt of the examination results from the AQP.

The QCTO may by law register occupational qualifications at any NQF level, although at present this is limited to a ceiling of NQF 8. This the QCTO straddles the divide and has a wider remit than Umalusi, which can only govern basic education levels (NQF 1 – 4) and the CHE which works from NQF levels 5 – 10.

2.4. How it is being implemented?

The QCTO is gradually taking its delegated functions from SAQA, as it builds capacity. As described above, there is a transition period during which SETA's retain their QA functions in respect of existing qualifications. Each existing qualification has an expiry date, which cannot be longer than 5 years from registration or renewal, so all existing qualifications will have expired by 2017. Any student enrolled before mid-2016 will have until mid-2019 to complete.

2.5. What results have been obtained so far?

The QCTO has taken on a remedial role for SETA's who have not been able to perform adequate ETQA functions.

Policies are in place to support the new occupational qualifications framework.

To date, 9 new occupational qualifications have been registered. These have already enabled a more meaningful approach to learning because they are occupationally driven. At the time of publication of this Fact Sheet, due to the high demand from SETA's for new occupational qualifications, there is a moratorium until September 2014 on any further qualification development requests.

The QCTO has taken over the role of issuing all trade certificates (in the apprenticeship system).

3. What are the short and medium term plans for the QCTO?

The QCTO needs to complete the capacity building to enable it to stand along as an institution (to date many functions have been carried out by SAQA). The White Paper insists that quality assurance work will be removed from SETA's.

The White Paper sets out a number of issues that must be addressed:

- To control the proliferation of qualifications, especially where they have not been used by providers and learners. The White Paper notes that as at mid-2013 there were 11 615 unit standards on the SAQA database, large numbers of which have never been used.

> "Providers should not feel compelled to develop programmes against unit standards or learning outcomes, nor should any quality assurer insist on their use."
>
> White Paper

- To put into place the policy set out by the White Paper that part qualifications which are well recognised, and which allow individuals to do specific work such as to work underground in mines, or to do certain work in tourism or banking, must be recognised.
- To provide bridges to achieve true articulation between different streams of the post-school education and training system so that "there are no dead ends for learners". Articulation should be both vertical and horizontal.
- To implement the White Paper policy statement that Quality Councils can issue qualifications across the NQF levels.
- To ensure that quality assurance systems are targeted and strategic, ensuring that systems do not stifle initiative, responsiveness and the ability of providers to provide education.
- To develop the capacity to develop curricula at a national level.
- To use Quality Councils to monitor provider performance through external assessment.
- To simplify, support and strengthen systems for Recognition of Prior Learning.

The White Paper specifically charges the QCTO to:

- Consolidate credible qualifications already offered by SETA's

- Eliminate ineffective qualifications
- Consolidate 1 year qualifications into more rational packages
- Develop new qualifications where necessary, especially for artisans, especially since no core occupational qualifications yet exist for the twelve basic artisan trades.

Due to the huge demand for conversion of unit-standard based qualifications to the new system, we believe it is likely that planned expiry dates of current qualifications will be extended.

4. Implications

4.1. For HR practitioners in employing organisations

The new system depends heavily on well-functioning partnerships between training providers and employers. Employers will be increasingly approached to provide work placements for students studying for occupational qualifications. Clear guidelines are needed for management of these work placements. Greater interaction with the TVETs will ensure that the pipeline of recruits is of an increasing quality and quantity.

The centralisation of the issuing of qualification certificates should ensure that certificates are understandable and clear as to what exactly has been achieved. The newly formulated curricula for the qualifications should also be easier to read to see what is covered in the qualification.

> "Non-formal educational provision.. including on-going professional development, need not always lead to formal qualifications or be provided through accredited providers."
>
> White Paper

At the same time, the Department of Higher Education and Training is at pains, in the White Paper to stress that "there is much learning that does not lead to a national qualification. Such education and training need not be rigorously quality assured, as long as it meets the needs of learners, the relevant government department, private employer, or community." The White Paper makes it clear that this statement includes on-going professional development.

This indicates that employers should always conduct a careful needs analysis and then proceed to source development solutions targeted at those needs, rather than simply looking for an accredited qualification or unit standard based training intervention.

4.2. For SETA's

A SETA may pay for training on any occupational qualification, not only those in its own sector. No Memorandum of Understanding for use of unit standards across SETAs is required any more.

4.3. For training providers

Training providers now do not have to have a primary SETA and can operate across as many sectors as they like without needing a Memorandum of Understanding from their primary SETA.

The biggest impact on all training providers, whether private or public, is that they cannot be accredited for an occupational qualification unless they have made provision for workplace learning with an employer. For students who are part-time because they are already employed, this means that the training provider must ensure that the workplace is adequately equipped. For unemployed students, the training provider must find employers who will offer work placements. No student will be able to graduate with an occupational qualification in future without having had the workplace experience specified in the curriculum.

The relationship on accreditation and quality assurance will now be with the AQPs rather than the SETAs.

4.3.1. For private training providers

The change in the funding mechanisms means that private training providers will have to pay to be accredited for all occupational qualifications whereas up until now SETAs have not charged for accreditation.

4.3.2. For public education and training providers

The newly renamed Technical and Vocational Education and Training Colleges (TVETs – the old FETs) will be able to be accredited as training providers, but they must meet the requirement for work based learning as explained above. The White Paper states that TVETs must support their students in finding work placements. So there will be a drive to forge partnerships with employers to provide such placements.

5. Conclusion

The revised occupational qualifications will lead to meaningful learning and workplace application of that learning, so HR practitioners should engage seriously with the new processes of curriculum development to ensure that all occupations have new qualifications in place. It can take up to 12 months to go through the entire process to get a qualification, together with its examination/assessment process, developed and submitted for registration.

Remaining questions include how will the OFO accommodate the creation of new occupations as they emerge, for example, solar panel installer and other occupations in the new "green" economy.

The SABPP, as both a quality assurance body and as a professional body, is fully engaged with this new system. So far, the SABPP is registered as an AQP for the Occupational Trainer qualification. This is a good example of cross-sectoral cooperation as this occupation is represented across all SETA's. The SABPP will also be acting as the examiner for the Mining Qualifications Authority on two of their Foundational Learning curricula (communication and mathematics).

THIS FACT SHEET HAS BEEN PREPARED BY NAREN VASSAN, HEAD OF LEARNING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE AT THE SABPP, AND PENNY ABBOTT, HEAD OF THE HR RESEARCH INITIATIVE AT THE SABPP.

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