

Extension of legacy qualification enrolments - implications and future direction



The initial directive from the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) indicating a deadline of 30 June 2024 for enrolments in legacy qualifications sent shockwaves through the education and training sector. With legacy qualifications expiring and no clear path forward within the QCTO Sub-Framework, both learners and providers found themselves in a state of panic. Fortunately, a two to three-year extension for learner enrolments for certain specified qualifications was eventually granted, providing some relief but also introducing new complexities.

Unintended consequences

The original plan was for all “legacy” qualifications (those not aligned with the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework - OQSF) to cease enrolment after 30 June 2024. This meant that employers could no longer register learners for qualifications that were not aligned with the Occupational framework. Training providers would need to have transitioned their offerings to QCTO-aligned qualifications to continue operating and learners would have to enrol in QCTO-accredited programmes to continue their studies.

Essentially, the goal was to fully implement the QCTO system and ensure that all qualifications and training programmes are aligned to the new framework, which aims to better meet the needs of the labour market.

However, due to various challenges and complexities, this enrolment deadline was extended for some qualifications, and the transition process is ongoing. While the extension of the deadline is welcomed, it

is apparent that not all legacy qualifications are included. Vital programmes such as Call Centre Management and Coaching and Mentoring were initially overlooked, leading to further industry outcry. Although these qualifications have since been added to the extension list, new challenges have emerged. A significant obstacle has been the imposition of strict cut-off dates by certain Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA) organisations for enrolling learners in extended legacy qualifications. This has created a situation where qualifications exist but cannot be accessed due to administrative barriers. The absence of an exemption or appeals process has compounded the problem, leaving training providers and learners in a state of uncertainty.

The impact of misalignment

The core issue lies in the discrepancy between the qualifications listed as valid on the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) database and those recognised by the SETAs. Essentially, while SAQA may indicate that a qualification is still valid, the reality is that there are still administrative obstacles that are delaying provider execution.

This misalignment has far-reaching implications. Training providers find themselves unable to offer essential programmes due to this inconsistency, leading to a disruption in skills development. Industry shortages are looming, as sectors reliant on specific qualifications, such as mining, will soon experience shortages of qualified personnel.

For instance, if a mining company requires engineers to have a specific mentoring qualification that is valid on SAQA but not recognised by the relevant SETA, they cannot train new employees in this critical area. On an individual level, this misalignment will result in delayed career progression, which will in turn reduce industry competitiveness as the availability of skilled labour is restricted.

In short, this has created a bureaucratic bottleneck that hinders the effective delivery of training and development, affecting both individuals and industries. This administrative challenge underscores the need for improved coordination and communication between these two key entities in South Africa's education and training arena.

A call to action for the affected

To address these issues, stakeholders and impacted organisations must actively engage with their respective SETAs. By clearly communicating the industry and learner needs for specific qualifications, providers can exert pressure on SETAs to expedite the alignment process. Industry associations and professional bodies must also play an indispensable role in advocating for the timely inclusion of essential qualifications within the OQ framework.

While the journey towards a fully aligned and comprehensive QCTO system is ongoing, the immediate focus must be on resolving the current challenges. By working collaboratively and exerting pressure where necessary, the industry can navigate this transitional period and ensure that learners and organisations have access to the qualifications they need to succeed.

This is entirely possible if we keep in mind the fact that the overarching goal is to create a QCTO system that is responsive to industry demands and supports learner progression. This is essential if the QCTO is to effectively contribute to the overall growth and development of the South African economy, ultimately fostering a skilled and competitive workforce