

The QCTO deadline explained - what employers need to know and do



The South African skills development landscape is undergoing a significant transformation with the enrolment end-date of “legacy” qualifications “scheduled for 30 June 2024. Employers will no longer be able to registers learners on legacy qualifications not yet aligned to the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF). As the deadline approaches, employers find themselves at a crossroads, needing to make informed decisions on their next steps regarding legacy qualifications and the future of their skills development programmes. To assist in this critical period, employers currently running training programmes need to have a clear understanding of the three key options available to ensure the continued development of their workforce.

Bridging the awareness gap

After 30 June 2024, enrolment in SETA-accredited qualifications will cease. It will then be necessary to register all learners for occupationally directed qualifications through the QCTO starting July 1, 2024. Despite this imminent deadline, a considerable number of employers seem unaware of the impending changes, while others have more questions than answers. The QCTO’s focus on providing occupationally relevant qualifications necessitates a shift in how organisations approach skills development. With the departure from generic qualifications, employers must now carefully plan their initiatives, aligning them with internal needs and identifying specific scarce skills within their businesses. In short, planning has just become a vital component in crafting effective skills development strategies that meet the needs of South Africa’s evolving workforce.

What are the next steps for employers now?

Instead of panicking ahead of the deadline, it is important for employers to remain calm, and assess their next moves considering the three options available to them.

1. Make provisional registration to take advantage of the teach-out period

Employers can choose to provisionally register learners on legacy qualifications before the deadline. This allows them to take advantage of the three-year teach-out period ending June 30th, 2027. This option offers some risk mitigation and allows for a smoother transition. Provisional registration involves uploading learners related to legacy qualifications before the deadline to secure a position within the teach-out period. The application process involves providing essential documents such as certified copies of IDs and the highest school leaving certificate.

2. Await ministerial determination for an extension

Employers can also wait for a potential ministerial decision extending the lifespan of existing skills programmes and legacy qualifications. However, this approach carries significant risk as there is no guarantee of extension. Employers are strongly cautioned against relying solely on this option due to its uncertainty. Many employers, professional bodies and providers have already submitted applications for such extensions but at this point, the outcome is still unclear.

3. Align with existing QCTO-Accredited Qualifications and Skills Programmes

The third, and most viable option, is for organisations to work with their Skills Development Provider (SDP) to identify relevant existing qualifications or skills programmes on the OQSF. In cases where there is not a direct match, employers can collaborate with SDPs to align a unit standard-based programme to the requirements of a skills programme which can then be accredited by the QCTO. Such alignment allows for the creation of customised programmes, ensuring a tailored approach to the employer's needs.

Collaboration and communication are key

Here, employers and providers are strongly advised to consult with the QCTO and relevant SETA for the development, accreditation, and registration of skills programmes, given that the alignment process requires a comprehensive application. The SDP will need to apply for accreditation of the new programme with the QCTO.

Additional consultation is also recommended to ensure that employers and SDPs gain a clear understanding of the SETA's plans for future qualification registration in each specific industry to avoid duplication of effort or missing the mark entirely.

In terms of the final assessment of occupational programmes, it is also essential to understand the differences between the EISA (External Integrated Summative Assessment) and FISA (Final Integrated Supervised Assessment). EISA applies to QCTO qualifications and part qualifications, whereas FISA applies to QCTO-accredited skills programmes.

Employers must weigh options carefully

Although the time frame is tight, employers have strategic avenues available to them to manage the upcoming deadline. Panic can be averted by taking a proactive approach, and choosing the best option based on the organisation's specific requirements. Moving forward, it is advisable for companies to work closely with their SDP to meet the deadline, navigate the transition and ensure the continued development of their workforce through occupationally- directed programmes