



# **QCTO Assessment Quality Partner (AQP) Criteria and Guidelines**

**Approved**

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## List of Acronyms

AQP	Assessment Quality Partner
CEP	Community of Expert Practitioner
DQP	Development Quality Partner
FLC	Foundational Learning Competence
MIS	Management Information System
NAMB	National Artisan Moderation Body
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SLA	Service Level Agreement

## Glossary

Accreditation	The certification, usually for a particular period, of a person, a body or an institution having the capacity to fulfil a particular function in the quality assurance system.
Assessment	The process of collecting evidence of learners' work to measure and make judgements about the competence or non-competence of specified NQF registered occupational qualifications and part qualifications.
Assessment centre	A centre accredited by the QCTO for the purpose of conducting external integrated summative assessments for specified NQF registered occupational qualifications and part qualifications.
Assessment Quality Partner (AQP)	A body delegated by the QCTO to manage and coordinate the external integrated summative assessments of specified NQF registered occupational qualifications and part qualifications.
Occupational qualification	A qualification associated with a trade, occupation or profession, resulting from work-based learning, developed and quality assured under the auspices of the QCTO and consisting of the knowledge, practical skills and work experience standards and requires an external summative assessment.
Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)	The comparison of the previous learning and experience, howsoever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification and the acceptance for the purpose of qualification of that which meets the requirements.
Summative assessment	A component of the assessment process and refers to the culmination of the summative process when learners are subjected to a final sitting at the end of the learning cycle.
Verification	The process managed by the relevant body for externally verifying (checking) the authenticity of processes to confirm or overturn the findings.

## **1. Preamble**

The Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) is established in terms of the Skills Development Act, Act No. 97 of 1998 as amended. In terms of section 26H(3) of this Act, the QCTO is responsible for the development, maintenance and quality assurance of occupational qualifications within its sub-framework.

The QCTO uses Development Quality Partners (DQPs) to manage and fund the development of occupational qualifications where the QCTO is an active participant in the process of monitoring, overseeing and ensuring that there are appropriate reports.

Each DQP, on recommendation of the Community of Expert Practitioners, must recommend to the QCTO an Assessment Quality Partner (AQP) that will develop qualification assessment specifications during the qualification development process and manage external summative assessments thereafter, in addition to performing an array of administrative functions as described in Section 6 below. The QCTO qualification development model requires that the AQPs should sign Service Level Agreements (SLAs) with the QCTO during the qualification development process.

The QCTO wants to establish a streamlined, cost-efficient and effective skills development system that responds to the needs of the labour market. It will focus quality assurance on the final integrated summative assessment specified in the curriculum. This will determine whether learners have developed the required occupational competence to be awarded the qualification. Therefore, the QCTO will concentrate its resources on the quality assurance of the design and assessment of occupational qualifications, research and data analysis to pinpoint emerging problems. In short, an AQP is an entity appointed by the QCTO and delegated to manage, on behalf of the QCTO, the assessment process in order to achieve the above objective.

## **2. Purpose**

This criteria and guidelines document is part of a series of QCTO policies and guidelines for managing provisioning of QCTO occupational qualifications and the assessment thereof. The purpose of this document is to define the legal framework underpinning the establishment of Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs); their responsibilities and obligations; criteria for becoming an AQP and how the QCTO will manage the partnership with the AQPs. It also provides information on technical and administration competency requirements whilst considering certain principles and QCTO values.

### **3. Audience and applicability**

The *AQP Criteria and Guidelines* advises people and organisations on how to sign a Service Level Agreement (SLA) with the QCTO in order to perform the AQP delegated functions. It focuses on these issues as it assumes that these will be the main concerns of bodies and organisations aspiring to become AQPs. This document also serves as a guideline to AQPs and interested entities about the application process.

### **4. Underlying principles and values**

The following principles and values have been taken into consideration during the development of these criteria and guidelines for becoming an AQP:

External Assessment systems and processes must:

- 4.1 be fair, reliable, valid, ethical and transparent;
- 4.2 be consistent across time, place, role players and respond to a non-sectoral demand-led model;
- 4.3 use methodologies that are fit-for-purpose and reflect a consistent level of higher cognitive challenge;
- 4.4 avoid tendencies of exclusivity;
- 4.5 adhere to the QCTO values which show:
  - i. innovation and excellence
  - ii. empowerment and recognition
  - iii. respect and dignity
  - iv. ethics and integrity
  - v. ownership and accountability
  - vi. authenticity

### **5 What are Qualification Assessment Specifications (QAS)?:**

The AQP will set the national standards to ensure validity and consistency of the external summative assessment. The QAS form an integral part of every occupational qualification and are developed for each occupational qualification and outline and record the following information:

- i. Title of occupational qualification;
- ii. Curriculum reference number;
- iii. Name and details of the AQP;
- iv. External assessment strategy;
- v. Key occupational outcomes;

- vi. The point(s) at which the qualification must be assessed (allowing for production cycle if required);
- vii. Critical identified elements of 'internal assessment' to be externally moderated (if any);
- viii. Eligibility requirements for candidates for external assessment;
- ix. Exemptions;
- x. Minimum requirements for the registration of assessors;
- xi. Provide links to the AQP website for information on:
  - Criteria for accreditation of assessment centres
  - Exemplars of external assessment instruments
  - Relevant sections of AQP assessment policy and procedures: those required for public information, including language(s) of assessment and RPL;

The Qualification Assessment Specifications are developed during the qualification development process and it is expected that a minimum of 50% of the working group members should be experts in that particular occupational qualification.

## **6. The functions of an Assessment Quality Partner (AQP)**

- 6.1 An Assessment Quality Partner must, in respect of the qualifications and part qualifications specified in the Service Level Agreement;
  - i. recommend the external assessment specifications document for approval by the QCTO;
  - ii. develop and maintain a national data-bank of instruments for external assessments;
  - iii. publish exemplars of external assessments;
  - iv. recommend to the QCTO the accreditation and withdrawal of accreditation of skills development providers for the knowledge and/or practical skills component using criteria and guidelines provided by the QCTO;
  - v. register assessors and moderators for the external assessments;
  - vi. develop criteria for the accreditation of assessment centres or the approval of assessment sites for external assessments;
  - vii. recommend to the QCTO the accreditation and withdrawal of accreditation of assessment centres; and
  - viii. recommend to the QCTO the accreditation and withdrawal of accreditation of skills development providers for the knowledge and/or practical skills component using criteria and guidelines provided by the QCTO.
- 6.2 Coordinate and manage external assessment processes;
- 6.3 Record and upload learner external assessment applications and achievements to the QCTO;
- 6.4 Moderate at least 10% of learner external assessments;

- 6.5 Recommend the certification of learners to the QCTO;
- 6.6 Implement an appeals policy as guided by an assessment policy;
- 6.7 Conduct learner tracer studies;
- 6.8 Promote continuous professional development of AQP associated practitioners;
- 6.9 Report to the QCTO on the performance of its functions in the form and manner required by the QCTO; and
- 6.10 Provide a mechanism for RPL.

## **7. Which bodies could become national Assessment Quality Partners?**

The need to establish an AQP arises from the development of an occupational qualification. A body that has the necessary credibility in the relevant constituency (industry/sector/profession) must be identified to manage External Integrated Summative Assessment by conducting the AQP functions listed above. Depending on their current functions and areas of expertise any of the following existing bodies may be appointed as Assessment Quality Partners for specific occupations or groups of occupations:

- i. Moderating Bodies
- ii. Examining Bodies
- iii. Professional Bodies
- iv. Legislated Boards
- v. Occupational Associations

Note: If there are no such bodies with a specific interest in the relevant occupation, a SETA or industry body may also fulfil this role, but not a provider.

## **8. Criteria for the approval of an Assessment Quality Partner**

8.1 The QCTO will appoint an entity as an assessment quality partner only if it is satisfied that the entity has:

- i. The necessary expertise, experience and standing in relation to the occupational qualifications or foundational learning for which the assessment quality partner is appointed; and
- ii. the resources necessary to perform its functions

8.2 In terms of clause 6.1 of the QCTO Delegation Policy, 22 June 2011 the criteria have been defined in detail as follows:

- i. be recommended to the QCTO by the relevant DQP during the occupational development process at a point when they submit an



- occupational profile. **Possible evidence:** letter of recommendation from the DQP; Attendance register; DQP progress report with endorsement of the selected body by constituency to ensure trust and acceptance; extracts from minutes of scoping meeting where the decision took place;
- ii. have access to communities of expert practitioners in the occupation/s concerned; **Possible evidence:** Attendance registers; reference to extracts from websites with links to CEPs or any other relevant information such as an indication as to where the AQP will source expertise to design assessments;
  - iii. have standing in the occupation or occupations concerned; **Possible evidence:** cross reference to websites, publications and any other relevant information;
  - iv. have access to assessors and other human resources necessary to perform the AQP functions using criteria and guidelines provided by the QCTO. **Possible evidence:** Database of assessors
  - v. have access to a reliable management information system in the format required by the QCTO; **Possible evidence:** Organogram or reference to an organisation to whom this function has been outsourced;
  - vi. have the financial resources necessary to establish the AQP function and implement effective, efficient and transparent financial management and internal control systems, verified by means of a written commitment by its relevant authority; **Possible evidence:** evidence that the functions have been catered for in the organisation budget; a letter from the AQP's relevant authority committing the necessary financial resources to fund the AQP;
  - vii. have a proposed fee structure funding model to maintain the delivery of AQP services for a minimum of five years aligned to the QCTO Fee Structure Policy;
  - viii. be willing to sign the QCTO Code of Conduct (Schedule 4) if delegation is approved;
  - ix. have research capacity even if through a third party arrangement; **Possible evidence:** cross reference to reports or process of how this criterion will be addressed; and
  - x. Proof that the organisation is a juristic person: **Possible evidence:** submit a valid tax clearance certificate where appropriate.

Proof must be submitted to demonstrate adherence with the criteria mentioned above.

## **9. Steps to be followed in signing a Service Level Agreement to become an AQP**

### **Step 1: Expression of the intention to become an AQP**

- i. The proposed (applicant) AQP will send a letter of intent to become the AQP;
- ii. The QCTO will acknowledge receipt, capture and record the submission details in the QCTO database;
- iii. QCTO or applicant may request for a meeting to:
  - a) discuss the scope of the qualifications to be assessed by the AQP;
  - b) discuss the project timelines to be developed;
  - c) discuss any questions the applicant may have in relation to the SLA that will be signed if compliant;
- iv. The details of the applicant will be captured and recorded in the QCTO database.

### **Step 2: Submission and the evaluation of the applicant's evidence**

The applicant:

- i. Will submit evidence of compliance with stipulated criteria;
- ii. Make sure that a QCTO official has signed for the delivery;

The QCTO will:

- i. Capture the details of the applicant in the relevant QCTO format;
- ii. Acknowledge receipt of the evidence;
- iii. Conduct the desktop evaluation of the evidence;
- iv. Will support the applicant to comply where necessary;
- v. Recommend for the signing of the SLA.

### **Step 3: Notification of the outcome and signing of the SLA**

The QCTO will:

- i. Notify the applicant of the outcome; and
- ii. Arrange a signing ceremony.

## **10. Termination of appointment of assessment quality partner**

10.1 The QCTO may, terminate the appointment of an assessment quality partner on the grounds that the AQP :

- i. No longer satisfies the criteria for accreditation;
- ii. Has failed or refused to fulfil its functions;

- iii. Has failed or refused to comply with the relevant policies, criteria and procedures of the QCTO

10.2 Before the QCTO withdraws the appointment of an AQP the QCTO will:

- i. Notify, in writing, the AQP of its intention to withdraw the accreditation, with reasons;
- ii. Grant the AQP a period of 20 working days from the date of notice to make representations on the matter; and
- iii. Consider any such representations received.

10.3 If the QCTO withdraws appointment of an AQP, the QCTO will notify the assessment partner of its decision in writing.

## **11. What will AQPs report on?**

The AQPs will report to the QCTO on the following:

- i. Assessment centre accreditation /de-accreditation and assessment site approval/de-approval;
- ii. Assessment instruments utilisation and performance analysis;
- iii. Skills Development Provider (SDP) accreditation and extension of scope recommendations ;
- iv. Learner Enrolments and Achievements;
- v. External Assessment moderation and management;
- vi. Learner Certification recommendations;
- vii. Assessment practitioner management practices;
- viii. Learner tracer studies and employer satisfaction surveys;

## **12. Quality assurance and monitoring the implementation of AQP functions**

12.1 On appointment the AQP signs a SLA with the QCTO. This provides a schedule for implementation of the QCTO model for external assessment, giving deadlines for each requirement during the first year of appointment. This schedule provides the basis for the QCTO to monitor, evaluate and review the initial activities of the AQP.

12.2 In addition, the QCTO has a standardised data reporting template which must be completed and submitted annually. This provides specified quantitative data to the QCTO. 12.3 The following information will be submitted quarterly to meet the QCTO internal auditor's requirements: number of skills development providers and assessment centres accredited; number of learners that sat for external integrated summative assessment; number of learner certificates recommended to the QCTO.

- 12.4 Each year after the first year of appointment the AQP must also complete and submit a qualitative report, which serves the dual purpose of a self-evaluation, assisting in strategic planning for the coming year, and of providing the QCTO with the basis for continued monitoring, evaluation and review.
- 12.5 During the fourth year an in-depth quality audit will be conducted in preparation for the decision whether or not to extend the appointment of the AQP after the five year term has been completed.

## ANNEXURE A

### The QCTO Code of Conduct for Development Quality Partners (DQP) and Assessment Quality Partners (AQP)

We, the undersigned, wish to be appointed by the QCTO as a DQP/AQP. We agree that, if the QCTO delegates such functions to us, we hereby commit ourselves to abide by the QCTO's Code of Conduct in relation to all our work. The Code of Conduct to which we agree is as follows:

- i. promoting the objectives of the NQF;
- ii. dealing fairly, professionally and equitably with stakeholders whilst accelerating the redress of past unfair discrimination;
- iii. consulting with all relevant stakeholders that have an interest in the development and assessment of occupational qualifications and sharing of best practice;
- iv. executing our responsibilities and accountabilities timeously and with due regard to the accountability to our constituents that we are committed to serve;
- v. seeking at all times to create a positive environment for the development and assessment process and respect the historical diversity of learners' cultural, linguistic and educational backgrounds;
- vi. declaring any *conflict of interest* that may infringe on the execution of our delegated responsibilities;
- vii. recuse ourselves from any decision-making process which may result in improper personal gain that will impact negatively on *the values cherished by the QCTO*;
- viii. recognising the public's rights of *access to information*, excluding information that is specifically protected by the law;
- ix. acting in a manner that will respect, promote and protect the goodwill and reputation of occupational qualification family;
- x. reporting all relevant information about best practices and irregularities in the development and assessment process of which we become aware.

## ANNEXURE B

### AQP Project time-lines:

	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Due date <sup>1</sup></b>
1.	Develop criteria for the accreditation of assessment centres / approval of assessment sites (depending on the relevant strategy)	<i>3 months after appointment</i>
2.	Establish criteria and procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of accredited assessment centres / approved assessment sites and post on the website	<i>4 months after appointment</i>
3	Develop and publish on website with link to QCTO website the following information related to external assessment: a. template, and procedure for application for assessment; b. procedures and template for reporting irregularities and lodging complaints or appeals; c. procedures for applications for concessions related to barriers to learning and assessment; d. language/s of assessment; and e. agreed cost structure.	<i>6 months after appointment</i>
3.	Develop a candidate record system in line with QCTO requirements including candidate information, entries, results, and certification details	<i>6 months after appointment date</i>
4.	Develop a website with links to QCTO website in terms of: a. accredited assessment centres or assessment sites; and b. registered assessment practitioners.	<i>At least 2 months before first assessments</i>
5.	Develop and validate nationally standardised assessment instruments appropriate to assessment strategy, and secure system to manage scheduled assessments	<i>At least 2 months before first assessments</i>