



Assessment Quality Partners (AQPs) Criteria and Guidelines

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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 of terms

Accreditation	The certification, usually for a particular period, of a person, a body or an institution as having the capacity to fulfil a particular function in the quality assurance system set up by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO).
Assessment	The process of collecting evidence of learner's work to measure and make judgements about the competence or non-competence of specified National Qualifications Framework (NQF) occupational standards or 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	A body delegated by the QCTO to develop assessment instruments and manage the external integrated summative assessments of specific NQF registered occupational qualifications and part qualifications.
Occupational qualification	A qualification associated with a trade, occupation or profession, resulting from work-based learning and consisting of the knowledge, practical skills and work experience standards as defined in the Skills Development Act (Act No. 97 of 1998).
Recognition of Prior Learning	The comparison of the previous learning and experience howsoever obtained, against the learning outcomes required for a specified qualification, and the acceptance for the purposes 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 for an integrated externally conducted assessment.
Verification	The process managed by the relevant AQP for externally checking moderation processes and confirming or overturning moderation 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 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 labour market skills needs. 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. Objectives and criteria for assessment

This criteria and guidelines document is part of a series of QCTO policies and guidelines for managing provisioning of QCTO occupational qualifications and 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 criteria and guidelines advise 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 Assessment Quality Partners (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 this criteria and guidelines for becoming an AQP:

External Assessment systems 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 are:
 - 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 the Qualification Assessment Specifications (QASs):

The AQP will set the national standards to ensure validity and consistency of the external summative assessment. The QASs 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 assessors, and
- 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 procedures and guidelines: 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 the Assessment Quality Partner (AQP)

- 6.1. The Assessment Quality Partner must, in respect of the qualifications and part qualifications specified in the Service Level Agreement –
 - (a) recommend the external assessment specifications document for approval by the QCTO,
 - (b) develop and maintain a national data-bank of instruments for external assessments,
 - (c) publish exemplars of external assessments,
 - (d) develop guidelines for the accreditation of assessment centres or the approval of assessment sites for external assessments,
 - (e) recommend to the QCTO the accreditation and withdrawal of accreditation of assessment centres, and
 - (f) recommend to the QCTO the 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. Ensure that there is a reliable and secure electronic database to record learner registration, assessment centres, external assessment applications and assessment data in a format prescribed by 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 Appeals Criteria and Guidelines as guided by the QCTO 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 might 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 none of these exists 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 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: The AQP must:

- 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; Signed 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: cover letter indicating relevant experience; 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: Organisational chart, sample CVs of subject matter experts used;

- v. Have access to a reliable management information system in the format required by the QCTO.

Possible evidence: Reference to reliable data management information system; examples from computerized database used, or proof of this function being 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; latest audited financial statements;

- 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.

Possible evidence: Completed estimated Fee Structure Funding Model

- viii. Be willing to sign the QCTO Code of Conduct (Schedule 4) if delegation is approved.

Possible evidence: Signed Code of Conduct;

- 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. Submit proof that the organisation is a juristic person.

Possible evidence: company registration documents; 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 to become an AQP

Steps to be followed in signing a Service Level Agreement (SLA) 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:
 - discuss the scope of the qualifications to be assessed by the AQP
 - discuss the project timelines to be developed
 - 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
- 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 the signing of the SLA

10. Termination of appointment of Assessment Quality Partner

10.1 The QCTO may on reasonable grounds 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 In the case of withdrawal, the following applies:

- (a) In the case of voluntary withdrawal, the relevant AQP must provide three (3) months' notice and a proposal of how learners in the system will be catered for, so as not to disadvantage the learners;
- (b) In the case of enforced withdrawal, where it is found that the AQP is not fulfilling its functions in terms of the SLA, the QCTO will also require a proposal within three (3) months of how learners in the system will be catered for so as not to disadvantage the learners.

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. Number of accredited Skills Development Providers (SDPs)
- 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 Upon approval, the Assessment Quality Partner signs a Service Level Agreement 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: Code of Conduct for AQPs

The QCTO Code of Conduct for Assessment Quality Partners

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 includes:

- 1.1. Promoting the objectives of the NQF;
- 1.2. Dealing fairly, professionally and equitably with stakeholders whilst accelerating the redress of past unfair discrimination;
- 1.3. Consulting with all relevant stakeholders that have an interest in the development and assessment of occupational qualifications and sharing of best practice;
- 1.4. Executing our responsibilities and accountabilities timeously and with due regard to the accountability to our constituents that we are committed to serve;
- 1.5. 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;
- 1.6. Declaring any conflict of interest that may infringe on the execution of our delegated responsibilities;
- 1.7. Recusing ourselves from any decision-making process which may result in improper personal gain that will impact negatively on the following values cherished by the QCTO:
 - Innovation and Excellence
 - Empowerment and Recognition
 - Respect and Dignity
 - Ethics and Integrity
 - Ownership and Accountability
 - Authenticity
- 1.8. Recognising the public's rights of access to information, excluding information that is specifically protected by the law;
- 1.9. Acting in a manner that will respect, promote and protect the goodwill and reputation of the occupational qualification family;
- 1.10. Reporting all relevant information about best practices and irregularities in the development and assessment process of which we become aware.

Annexure B: AQP project timelines

	Activities	Due Date
1.	<i>Cooperate with the DQP in the development of the assessment specifications document and sign off submission to the QCTO</i>	<i>Coincide with submission of Assessment Specifications document to QCTO</i>
	<i>Develop and maintain a national data-bank of standardised assessment instruments appropriate to assessment strategy</i>	<i>Commence within one month after registration of qualification with SAQA and completed within six months</i>
3	<i>Establish criteria and procedures for the monitoring and evaluation of accredited assessment centres or approved assessment sites</i>	<i>Within three months of registration of qualification with SAQA</i>
4	<p><i>Develop a website and publish:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>links to QCTO website in terms of:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>accredited assessment centres</i> ✓ <i>accredited skills development providers</i> • <i>for each qualification:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>approved assessment sites (if applicable)</i> ✓ <i>registered assessment practitioners</i> ✓ <i>assessment exemplars</i> ✓ <i>language/s of assessment</i> ✓ <i>assessment fee</i> ✓ <i>concessions related to special assessment</i> ✓ <i>qualifying requirements</i> • <i>procedures and templates for:</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>applying for external assessment</i> ✓ <i>reporting irregularities and lodging complaints or appeals</i> • <i>criteria for the accreditation of assessment centres or approval of assessment sites (depending on the relevant strategy)</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ✓ <i>applying for external assessment</i> 	<i>Commence within one month after registration of qualification with SAQA and completed within six months</i>
5	<i>Develop a candidate record system in line with QCTO requirements including candidate information, entries, results, and certification details</i>	<i>Commence within one month after registration of qualification with SAQA and completed within three months</i>

	Activities	Due Date
6	<i>Report to the QCTO on progress related to the development of the website</i>	<i>Annually</i>
7	<i>Secure system to manage scheduled assessments</i>	<i>Commence within one month after registration of qualification with SAQA and completed within three months</i>
8	<i>Submit validated Learner Achievements to the QCTO certification in the manner prescribed by the QCTO.</i>	<i>Within 21 working days after external summative assessment</i>
9	<p><i>Report qualitatively to the QCTO on:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>The performance of skills development providers recommended to QCTO for accreditation</i> • <i>The performance of assessment centres recommended to the QCTO for accreditation</i> • <i>The moderation of external assessment</i> • <i>Learner tracer studies (employment possibilities pending outcome of assessment)</i> • <i>Employer satisfaction surveys</i> 	<i>Annually</i>