



Policy for Verification of Occupational, Trades and Part Qualifications

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List of Acronyms

AQP	Assessment Quality Partner
DIRCO	Department of International Relations and Cooperation's
NAMB	National Artisan Moderation Body
NLRD	National Learners' Records Database
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SLA	Service Level Agreement

Glossary of terms

In this document, any word or expression to which a meaning has been assigned in the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (Act No 67 of 2008, as amended) and the Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act No 97 of 1998), has the same meaning unless the context otherwise indicates.

Appeal	The formal petitioning by a certificate holder against the decision made by the QCTO regarding the authenticity of a qualification, after the verification process.
Assessment Quality Partner (AQP)	A body delegated by the QCTO to develop assessment instruments and manage external integrated summative assessments for occupational qualifications and part qualifications registered on the OQSF.
Certificate	A document issued by the QCTO indicating attainment of an occupational qualification or part qualification registered on the OQSF.
Department of Higher Education and Training	Means the National Department responsible for further education and training in colleges, higher education and adult education and training.
Learner	An individual who is participating in a learning programme with the purpose of achieving an occupational qualification or part qualification.
Minister	Means the Minister of Higher Education and Training.
National Artisan Moderation Body (NAMB)	In terms of the OQFS, the body appointed by the QCTO as an AQP for all listed trades.
National Learners' Records Database (NLRD)	The electronic management information system of the NQF, which contains records of qualifications, learner achievements, recognised professional bodies, professional designations and all related information such as registration and accreditations.
National Qualifications Framework (NQF)	The comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications and part qualifications. The NQF is a single integrated system comprising three coordinated Qualifications Sub-Frameworks namely for: General and Further Education and Training, Higher Education and Trades and Occupations.
NQF Act	Means the National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (Act No 67 of 2008).
NQF Level	One of the series of levels of learning achievement arranged in ascending order from one to ten according to which the NQF is organised and to which qualification types are pegged.

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 knowledge, practical skills and work experience standards and requires an external summative assessment.
Part qualification	An assessed unit of learning with a clearly defined purpose that is, or will be registered as part of a qualification on the NQF.
Qualification	Means a registered national qualification, in the context of the NQF Act, 2008 (Act No 67 of 2008).
Sector Education and Training Authority (SETA)	A body established in terms of the Skills Development Act to develop and implement sector skills plans and promote learning programmes, including workplace learning. The QCTO has delegated quality assurance powers to the SETAs.
Verification	The process followed by the QCTO to establish the authenticity of an occupational or trade qualification. Verification includes authenticating of the qualification document and verifying that the qualification was awarded to the individual in question.

Policy for Verification of Occupational, Trades and Part Qualifications

1. Preamble

1.1 Verification in the context of quality assuring standards for qualifications on the sub-framework

The Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) was established in 2010 in terms of section 26 (G) of the Skills Development Act of 1998 as a juristic person. It was listed as a public entity in Government Gazette No 33900 of 31 December 2010 effective from 1 April 2010 to establish the Sub-Framework for Trades and Occupations.

The QCTO is responsible for the development, maintenance and quality assurance of qualifications on the OQSF.

Although the QCTO was established in 2010, the function for the issuing of trade certificates was only taken over by the QCTO in October 2013. This function was previously the responsibility of the then Department of Manpower, thereafter the Department of Labour and most recently, the Department of Higher Education and Training.

The QCTO, SAQA and the other two quality councils as contemplated in section 5(3) of the NQF Act, 2008, must seek to achieve the objectives of the NQF by:

- a. developing, fostering and maintaining an integrated and transparent national framework for the recognition of learning achievements;
- b. ensuring that South African Qualifications meet appropriate criteria, determined by the Minister and are internationally comparable; and
- c. ensure that South African qualifications are of an acceptable quality.

In terms of the Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act No 97 of 1998), the QCTO has the responsibility for issuing of trade certificates and for the quality assurance of occupational qualifications, which includes the certification of these qualifications registered on the OQSF.

The certification process is intricately linked to the assessment and quality assurance processes of the QCTO.

In its role as a quality assurer, the QCTO is committed to issuing learners with valid and credible certificates. Such a commitment consequently requires that the QCTO ensures that the certified data is valid and reliable and that learner achievements are verifiable. It is therefore also the responsibility of the QCTO to ensure continued credibility of these certificates through its verification processes.

The QCTO might experience more challenges with regard to the verification of historical issued trade certificates by different entities. Certification data with regard to historical issued trade certificates was not always captured in such a way that a verification decision can be easily reached and will require more in-depth investigation to verify against source documents that confirmed the issuing of a trade certificate. In some instances where historical data has not been made available to the QCTO, a final decision on the verification of the authenticity of a trade certificate will not be possible.

This policy provides the approach of the QCTO and its quality assurance partners, QCTO verification staff, its auditors, as well as its verification clients in respect of the responsibilities associated with the verification of certified learner records for qualifications registered on the OQSF as stipulated in related legislation and policies.

2. Purpose

- 2.1 The purpose of this policy is to promote consistency and transparency in the verification of qualifications and to make the information publicly available.
- 2.2 The policy outlines the approach of QCTO to the responsibilities associated with verification of certified learner records trades, occupational qualifications and part qualifications on the OQSF.
- 2.3 This policy also forms the basis for developing a co-operative relationship with the QCTO quality partners, the South African Qualifications Authority, its verification clients and other stakeholders with a commitment to the occupational qualifications offered under the OQSF.

3. Legislative and regulatory framework

- 3.1 This policy is based on the QCTO policies and relevant legislation listed below:
 - Skills Development Act, 1998 (Act No 97 of 1998);
 - National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act; and
 - OQSF policy as published in Government Gazette No 37879 of 31 July 2014.
- 3.2 This policy must be read in conjunction with the following QCTO policies:
 - Policy for the certification of learner achievements for trades and occupational qualifications on the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF); and
 - Directives for certification issued by the QCTO.

4. Applicability

- 4.1 The verification service is provided in accordance with:
- a. the guidance and oversight provided by the QCTO governance structures, as well as QCTO policies, codes and service standards; and
 - b. the principles of fairness, transparency, confidentiality and consistency.
- 4.2 Verification will be conducted where a request is submitted through a registered verification client of the QCTO.
- 4.3 QCTO issues the following categories of certificates:
- Trade Certificates for:
 - ✓ existing trades without associated occupational and part qualifications; and
 - ✓ occupational certificates for listed trades with associated occupational and part qualifications.
 - Occupational Certificates for occupational and part qualifications with the minimum specified credits; and
 - Occupational part qualifications that may form part of an occupational qualification, and are registered as such on the NQF.
- 4.4 The QCTO verifies historical trade certificates issued by:
- Department of Manpower / Labour;
 - Department of Higher Education and Training; and
 - Homelands trade certificates:
 - ✓ Transkei
 - ✓ Bophuthatswana
 - ✓ Venda
 - ✓ Ciskei

5. Objectives of this Policy

The objectives of this policy document are to determine standards for the verification of certified candidate records for trades, occupational qualifications and part qualifications on the QQSF.

The standards for verification have been established

To ensure that the standard of verification has been established through rigorous quality assurance processes which include:

- qualifications are registered on the QQSF;
- certified learner records are stored on a secure database and in hard copy where applicable; and
- verification of certified qualifications as registered on the QQSF is undertaken by the QCTO.

Determine the norms and standards for verification through its policies and outline the verification process

To guide verification clients on the submission of data for verification as required by the QCTO.

Clarify the verification process

- Inform clients of the nature of the verification service the QCTO provides;
- inform clients of their responsibilities;
- provide information on feedback for the verifications processed;
- enable the QCTO verification staff to undertake the verification of qualifications in an agreed-upon manner; and
- provides general principals on the QCTO verification process.

Develop and manage the verification of certified candidate records through an appropriate verification process

To ensure that requests submitted for the verification of certified records are in the appropriate format and comply with requirements as determined by the QCTO.

6. Managing the verification of trades, occupational qualifications and part qualifications through the QCTO verification process

6.1 For the QCTO to verify the achievement of a learner who has completed a trade, occupational qualification or part-qualification, the QCTO maintains a secure database of all certified data and where appropriate, make use of hard copies of contractual and certified information for legacy trades.

Through the SDA, the QCTO is now responsible for all certified trades data from the Department of Manpower/Labour and the Department of Higher Education and Training, and therefore also has the responsibility to verify certificates issued under these dispensations.

The QCTO has delegated the certification of sector based and historically registered occupational qualifications registered on the OQSF to the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and Professional Bodies. This is a transitional arrangement and will be phased out as the QCTO expands its quality assurance functions to cover the historically registered qualifications and once all data has been transferred to the QCTO.

The QCTO issues a replacement trade certificate in lieu of a lost certificate for trades certified previously by the SETAs and Training Boards and therefore also has the responsibility to verify such replacement trade certificates.

6.2 The QCTO values quality information submitted by a verification client as a cornerstone in an effective and reliable verification process and therefore in

verifying a certificate, the QCTO ensures that the certificate presented for verification corresponds in all aspects with the data stored in the database and in hard copies where appropriate.

The QCTO ensures that the certified learner achievement data is securely stored and can only be accessed in order to verify the authenticity of the data presented for verification.

Only trained and authorised persons have access to the data. The verification personnel are aware that the credibility of the qualification and verification rests on their ethical behaviour in respect to the information they work with.

- 6.3 The verification of qualifications are managed through the following processes:
- ensuring learner certification;
 - managing a verification system;
 - developing and managing suitable system processes and procedures for verification;
 - maintaining trade related data in hard copy;
 - maintaining an updated database of all certificates issued and an audit trail of transactions executed by users on the system;
 - maintaining a record system for verifications;
 - ensuring proper back-ups of the certification database; and
 - verifying certified qualifications as registered on the OQSF on request.
- 6.4 The QCTO verifies a certificate and qualification by confirming that:
- the information as printed on the certificate corresponds with the data captured on the QCTO certification database and hard copies of certification data as appropriate;
 - the certificate was issued in terms of the legislative requirements;
 - the certificate is valid;
 - the covert and overt security features adopted by the QCTO in the issuing of certificates is valid; and
 - the qualification was achieved.
- 6.5 In accordance with the rules of administrative justice, a qualification holder has the right to be informed of the rationale underlying the verification decision and may exercise the right to appeal in accordance with the QCTO appeal policies.
- 6.6 Tariffs for verification are reviewed and set by the Council and reviewed on an annual basis. New tariffs are implemented on 1 April annually.

7. Security in the verification process

- 7.1 A credible certification and verification environment requires quality and security to be constantly foregrounded. The principles for ensuring security include:
- users with controlled access to the system perform verification functions;
 - all activities on the system log an audit trail;
 - user access to the system is maintained;

- the storage and printing of certificates takes place in a secure environment;
- a record of all certificates issued are maintained;
- credible certification forms are used which have security features that are regularly enhanced; and
- backup and storage of data are maintained.

7.2 The QCTO has a zero tolerance approach to fraudulent and corrupt practices and therefore urges members of the public to:

- report any suspected irregular activities to the South African Police;
- refrain from irregular behaviour with the intention to compromise QCTO staff; and
- report any irregular behaviour by QCTO staff to the Chief Executive Officer.

7.3 It is illegal to misrepresent a qualification issued by an awarding body. Employers and learning institutions are encouraged to verify the authenticity of an occupational and trade certificate with the QCTO.

8. QCTO Verification Responsibilities

8.1 The QCTO undertakes to:

- provide an accurate and reliable verification response, as agreed with the client in the SLA, upon request from the client;
- adhere to SLA requirements. Notify the client when unforeseen circumstances affect the QCTO's ability to verify and/or meet the SLA requirements;
- keep records of the number of verification requests made by a client during an invoicing period;
- invoice the client monthly where applicable;
- if an unforced incorrect verification outcome was submitted to a client, submit a letter of apology to the client provided that proof is supplied that the QCTO was at fault during the verification process;
- provide a sworn affidavit regarding a verification, which may have resulted in a disciplinary hearing and/or a court case; and
- testify at a hearing or a court-case when a subpoena is issued if required.

8.2 The QCTO shall comply with the requirements as set out by SAQA with regard to reporting cases of misrepresentation of qualifications.

9. Verification client responsibilities

9.1 The client will:

- sign an SLA with the QCTO before the verification service can commence;
- request the verification in terms of the requirements stipulated by the QCTO and as further outlined in the policy;
- ensure that the information provided by the QCTO is secure, and used only for the purposes intended;

- maintain accurate records of the number of verification requests made, as well as of the verifications completed by the QCTO;
- comply with the requirements for submitting verification records as specified by the QCTO;
- pay for verification services as per the SLA.

9.2 A QCTO verification client must also take responsibility for reporting cases, where misrepresentation of the qualification is claimed, to the SAPS for further investigation and possible action.

9.3 The QCTO verification client must submit a report, as required, in a format determined by the QCTO in this regard.

9.4 **Client requests**

9.4.1 The QCTO undertakes verifications for clients who have signed a SLA and Verification Payment Terms and Fee Agreement with the QCTO in which the requirements are clearly outlined.

Requests for verifications must be submitted via e-mail to the QCTO verification e-mail address (verification@qcto.org.za) with a copy of the certificate issued by the QCTO, DHET or DOL/Department of Manpower attached.

9.4.2 Under no circumstances, is verification done telephonically.

9.5 **Information required to do a verification**

9.5.1 The QCTO requires the following information which appears on the certificate, when a request is submitted for verification:

- ID number /Date of Birth/Passport number
- Surname as printed on the certificate
- Full names as printed on the certificate
- Certificate number if available
- Trade or Qualification Name
- Year issued
- Client reference number
- A unique file number as arranged with a client must be submitted with each request
- The client's contact details

10. Provision of feedback

- 10.1 Feedback with specific results will be forwarded to the client. When the client has requested a batch of verifications, all records are verified on a single spreadsheet with the result outcome.

The QCTO provides the following outcomes on verification:

Valid	certificate as attached is valid
Unconfirmed	certificate cannot be confirmed as valid – reason is provided

- 10.2 If more evidence and information is required, an affidavit can be issued by the QCTO on request from the client.

- 10.3 The QCTO staff are periodically requested and/or subpoenaed to provide expert testimony in court cases and/or disciplinary hearings.

Where it is possible to avoid having one of its staff appear in person, the QCTO makes use of an Affidavit in terms of Section 212(1) of the Criminal Procedure Act (Act No 51 of 1977) as amended.

When an appearance is unavoidable, the requesting body is obliged to make appropriate arrangements and cover travel and subsistence for the QCTO staff member, as pre-arranged for the staff member who is required to testify.

11. Turnaround time

- 11.1 The QCTO undertakes to provide feedback within 5 working days of receipt of the request, in accordance with the SLA.

Should circumstances affect the turnaround time, the QCTO undertakes to advise clients of the delay and to give an indication of when normal services will resume.

12. Verification Type and feedback

- 12.1 The QCTO does only one type of verification for a Trade Certificate i.e. full verification, which requires that the certificate should be presented for verification.

Once the QCTO issues Occupational Certificates, full verifications, i.e. the certificate is presented for verification as well as e-verifications will be done. The policy will be updated in this regard when the function is fully implemented.

The following feedback will be supplied for verification:

12.1.1 Valid

The judgement 'Positive' is accorded to a verification if there is a complete match: the certificate number and trade, name and surname, date of birth and/or identity number and/or passport number, date tested and date of issue all correspond exactly with the QCTO certification data.

12.1.2 Unconfirmed

There are a number of grounds for which the judgement 'Unconfirmed' can be accorded. These are identified in the section below:

12.1.2.1 Certificate with the number indicated was issued to somebody else

Certificate with the number as reflected was used in a certificate to another person. Each certificate is issued with a unique number, which is not duplicated. Certificates issued by the Departments and QCTO have serial numbers.

When verification is undertaken according to a certificate number, and the database reveals that the said certificate was issued to another party, such a certificate will be listed on the database of possible fraudulent certificates.

12.1.2.2 Trade differs

When a verification evaluation reveals that the certificate presented for verification exists in the person's name, but has been altered to reflect a different trade the judgement 'Unconfirmed: Trade Differs' is accorded. This means that the certificate is indeed made out in the name provided in the verification inquiry, but that the certificate has been altered to reflect a different trade. Such a certificate will be listed on the database of possible fraudulent certificates.

12.1.2.3 Change of Act and Section referred to on trade certificate

When a verification evaluation reveals that the certificate presented for verification exists in the person's name, but has had the Act and/or Section issued under altered, for example from a Section 28 to a Section 13 under the Manpower Training Act, the judgement 'Unconfirmed: Act and/or Section altered' is accorded. This means that the certificate is indeed made out in the name provided in the verification inquiry, but that the certificate has been altered to reflect a different Act and/or Section. Such a certificate will be listed on the database of possible fraudulent certificates.

12.1.2.4 Surname Differs

When a certificate is verified and it indicates that the surname has been altered, the judgement 'Unconfirmed: Surname differs' is accorded.

12.1.2.5 Name differs

When a certificate is verified and it indicates that the name has been altered, the judgement 'Unconfirmed: Name differs' is accorded.

- 12.1.2.6 **ID/Passport number or Date of Birth differs**
When the information on the request corresponds in all aspects with the information on the QCTO certification database, but there is a discrepancy in the ID/Passport number or Date of Birth, the judgment 'Unconfirmed: ID/Passport number or Date of Birth differs' will be accorded to the request.
- 12.1.2.7 **A difference in the issue date**
When the information on the QCTO certification database agrees in all respects with the request, but there is a discrepancy on the date on which the certificate was issued, the judgment 'Unconfirmed: Issue date differs' will be accorded to the request.
- 12.1.2.8 **Certificate number differs**
When the information supplied in the request agrees in all aspects with the information on the QCTO certification database, but the certificate number does not correspond, the judgment 'Unconfirmed: Certificate number differs' will be accorded to the request.
- 12.1.2.9 **Possible fraudulent certificate number/certificate number does not exist**
Should a certificate be submitted for verification and no record can be found on the QCTO certification database for said certificate number, the judgment 'Unconfirmed: Certificate does not exist' will be accorded to the request. This might further mean that the number does not correspond to certificate numbers used in the issuing of trade certificates. Such a certificate will be listed on the possible fraudulent certificates database.
- 12.1.2.10 **Certificate not issued by Department of Labour/Department of Education and Training or QCTO**
The data does not correspond or does not exist on the QCTO certification database. This will indicate that no record of a certificate issued exists on the database. Such a certificate will be listed on the possible fraudulent certificates database.
- 12.1.2.11 **Certificate issued by a SETA/Training Board and cannot be verified by QCTO**
The QCTO cannot verify the certificate and the client should contact the issuing body. The client will be guided by the logo and name of the issuing body on the certificate.
- 12.1.3 **No record found**
No record can be found for a certificate presented for verification on the QCTO electronic system or hard copies (verified against certificate information).
- This does not imply that it is a possible fraudulent document. Additional information to support the issuing of the certificate can be presented for further investigation.

12.2 **Authentication of Qualification – Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO)**

12.2.1 Some embassies require that a certificate must be authenticated and then legalised by DIRCO. Certificates issued by the QCTO are authenticated after certification, on request by a certificate holder and then submitted to the Department of International Relations and Cooperation (DIRCO) – Legislation section for legalisation (Apostille/Certificate of Authentication) purposes.

12.2.2 The QCTO provides specimen signatures of officials that are authorised to sign the letter of authentication to DIRCO in order to ensure validation of such letters; prior to DIRCO making a submission to the respective embassy.

12.2.3 Applicants are required to submit the request to the Certification Unit directly after payment has been made to the QCTO. The QCTO records the application and provide feedback to the applicant within 3 working days. The applicant is responsible to deliver the letter of authentication to DIRCO.

13. Reporting and invoices to clients

Invoices to clients are prepared on the last day of each month on the basis of reconciliation reports and submitted to the finance department in the QCTO.

In order to avoid over- or under-payments, the report on verifications done during the period is attached as evidence to allow a client to reconcile the number of verifications done with the number of requests submitted.

Each pro-forma invoice is thoroughly checked and signed off by the Director: Certification before being submitted to the finance unit for invoicing.

14. Complaints

The QCTO will investigate complaints about misrepresentation of qualifications and fraudulent certificates and complaints against Service Level Agreement targets.

15. Quality assurance and monitoring of policy implementation

The QCTO will monitor the verification process in terms of this policy.