



**Summary of Guidelines on E-Learning and
E-Assessment on the Occupational
Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF)
Applicable during the National COVID-19
Lockdown**

NOTE: These guidelines are applicable during the National State of Disaster called around the COVID-19 Pandemic. They are subject to revision or removal once the national lockdown has been lifted.

1. Introduction

This document provides a summary of guidelines issued by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations that deal with E-Learning and E-Assessment. These guidelines provide an outline of the standards required when administering and assessing e-learning programmes. It must be stressed at the outset that, given the integrated nature of the skills assessed on the OQSF, ***the External Integrated Summative Assessment (EISA) is not amenable to e-assessment and CANNOT be assessed via electronic/remote assessment alone at this stage. The QCTO is rapidly moving to open up avenues for e-assessment for the EISA and will provide updates to the sector as soon as possible.***

While the EISA final assessments require specialised equipment and venues, e-learning and formative e-assessments can be rapidly deployed and integrated into the training of learners enrolled for OQSF qualifications. The summary below outlines the QCTO standards in this regard, with comprehensive documents available on the QCTO website (www.qcto.org.za) that provide the detail on these areas.

2. Consolidated quality guidelines for OQSF eLearning programmes

eLearning Standard 1: *The Skills Development Provider (SDP) has a clear vision and mission that reflects its academic commitments, the needs of the learners and of society.*

This standard entails that the SDP integrates the notions of e- and distance-learning into the core of their organisation. Such programmes are not developed as an afterthought or reactively, but are treated as core features of the everyday work of the SDP.

eLearning Standard 2: *Sufficient planning of technology supported courses takes place before learners are registered. The planning process takes into account the technology available and the profile of the course target group.*

This standard speaks again to the need for e-learning to become fundamental to an SDP, and requires that e-learning options and programmes are planned for learners at the point of registration. This also allows learners to plan to have appropriate IT infrastructure available to them in line with the requirements of the course.

eLearning Standard 3: *The Institution has a clear process of internal programme management to ensure programme quality.*

This standard applies not only to e-learning programmes, and indeed an e-learning programme must be quality assured in very much the same manner as those planned for face-to-face administration.

eLearning Standard 4: *Programmes are designed and developed to meet the needs of learners and stakeholders, and to encourage access to quality education; assessment methods, effectively assess and measure learners' achievement of the stated learning outcomes of the programme.*

The key to this standard is that in an e-learning environment, and SDP must plan at the programme design phase to give learners *more documentary assistance* than in a face-to-face environment. Since learners in exclusively e-learning environments have reduced access to lecturers and SDP infrastructure, they must be provided with enough documentation to be able to navigate the course *in the absence of constant lecturer input/guidance*.

eLearning Standard 5: *The human resource provision is appropriate for the education and training services provided. The Skills Development Provider (SDP) offers appropriate staff development support that equips the personnel to perform their tasks effectively.*

Staff training is *extremely* important in an e-learning environment. Lecturers and support staff must be expertly trained in the e-learning modalities and procedures used by the SDP, and should be provided with significant opportunities to practice these skills before they apply them in live tuition of learners.

eLearning Standard 6: *Learners are supported by the provision of a wide range of opportunities for tutoring at a distance through the use of various forms of technology. Contact tutoring, e-tutoring, assignment tutoring, mentoring, counselling, and the stimulation of peer support structures are employed to facilitate their holistic progression.*

This standard emphasises that the result of the planning and programme design undertaken as part of Standard 4, now translates into the resources and documentation being available to guide learners through this new form of learning. Orientation of learners is paramount, and an SDP that concentrates only on infrastructure for e-learning will not meet the standard unless they ensure that their learners are *equipped* to access the e-learning resources available at the SDP.

eLearning Standard 7: *Effective systems are put in place to ensure that (a) cases of plagiarism are detected and (b) the right learners are rewarded.*

Where possible, systems must be put in place to detect plagiarism or other illegitimate practices in learner assessment. In OQSF qualifications, portfolios of evidence are preferred to examination-style assessments, and such portfolios are more difficult for learners to plagiarise or copy. It must be stressed that, given the integrated nature of OQSF qualifications, *only low-stakes assessments can be*

carried out via e-assessment, and assessments such as the EISA still require in-person assessment.

eLearning Standard 8: *Assessment and evaluation are essential features of the teaching learning process that are properly managed, and reflect institutional, and national standards. Assessment and Evaluation are based on the stated programme objectives.*

This standard relates to Standard 7, and requires SDPs engaging in e-assessment to ensure that the e-assessment *authentically* meets the objectives of the programme. Simply this means that if a learner must demonstrate their ability to build a product or perform a task, the only valid way to assess such skills is to assess the learner *actually performing* the tasks. A theoretical understanding of making a boiler or wiring a fuse box by itself does *not* constitute competence in Occupational Qualifications. Due to these constraints, e-assessment may be useful for formative assessments in the OQSF space, but final summative determination of competence (as represented by the EISA) is not yet amenable to e-assessment.

eLearning Standard 9: *The Skills Development Provider (SDP) tracks learners in order to identify at-risk learners and provide support before they drop out or fail.*

In traditional face-to-face tuition, it is far simpler for SDPs and lecturers to identify at-risk learners that they interact with day by day. In an e-learning environment, specific efforts must be made to ensure that learners are on-track and keeping pace with the learning requirements. It is in this sphere that e-assessment will be most useful for SDPs, as they can monitor their learners progress via short summative e-assessments, and intervene rapidly if the results indicate that any learners are falling behind.

eLearning Standard 10: *A high degree of professionalism and ethics is exercised in the advertising of programmes by the Skills Development Provider. Information provided to potential learners is true and not misleading.*

Although this is a given for all providers, the e-learning space is in its infancy and an even higher standard than normal is required for providers working in this space. Clarity, consistency, and honesty of communication with learners is paramount here, with clear and simple documentation available on the provider's website that provides certainty to learners.

eLearning Standard 11: *Institutional Partnerships and Collaborative relationships for mutual benefits are in place. (Not mandatory but encouraged, where possible)*

Not every provider will have the infrastructure and experience to immediately transition their offerings into e-learning courses. Wherever possible, providers should negotiate with one another to share resources and expertise amongst one another both to benefit the learners in the system, but also to create a community of practice

among e-learning providers that increases the quality and consistency of their offerings while enhancing the commercial viability of each participating SDP.

eLearning Standard 12: *Continuous development of educational programmes and services is influenced by research.*

E-learning is an evolving space. Every provider should be alive to new developments in this rapidly changing field, and should be agile enough to alter or enhance their offering as new practices are developed or uncovered.

3. Consolidated quality guidelines for Low Stakes e-Assessment

This section provides an outline of the concerns that must be borne in mind when designing and administering e-assessments in the OQSF space. Again it must be emphasised that **these guidelines refer to formative assessments or low-stakes summative assessments**. Completion of an OQSF qualification requires an EISA which currently is not designed as an e-assessment.

3.1 Validity and reliability of e-assessment

Assessment Quality Partners must ensure that e-assessment is fit for purpose and does not compromise the assessment methodology and the integrity of what is being assessed.

3.2 Security

Security arrangements for e-assessments and the assessment data must comply, where relevant, with current legislation and industry standards.

3.3 Data integrity – input/output

Assessment Quality Partners must be confident that there is sufficient capacity to hold all necessary data and that systems operate successfully. Assessment Quality Partners must ensure that effective testing of system capacity has taken place, and where applicable, that such data can be provided to the QCTO for quality assurance purposes.

3.4 Operation of e-assessment systems

E-assessment systems must be stable and work reliably to generate valid and reliable assessments and/or results. They must be demonstrably consistent with relevant recognised standards of good practice and be easy to navigate.

3.5 Integrity of e-assessment systems

Systems must allow for flexibility in the light of technological development. System testing must be thorough, and be reviewed at regular intervals once the system is operational. Assessment Quality Partners must ensure that suitable support facilities are in place for

centres and that there is a comprehensive contingency plan should any part of the system fail.

3.6 Access to e-assessment

All enrolled learners must have similar access to e-assessment. Learners with disabilities must be considered in the design of the e-assessments, and all learners enrolled must have equal opportunities to demonstrate their ability in an e-environment.

3.7 Avoidance of barriers to new technology for learners

Assessment Quality Partners must ensure that the use of technology does not create barriers for learners by providing user-friendly interfaces for centres and learners and by enabling familiarisation and/or training sessions appropriate to the mode of delivery. This also requires significant documentation freely available to e-learners so that their questions are answered up-front and in black-and-white, given their more limited access to lecturers and other support structures at the SDP.

3.8 Business continuity / disaster recovery

Suitable measures must be in place to ensure the effective management of business continuity to address business interruption and the need for disaster recovery for their e-assessment services and systems, in the event of a system's failure.

3.9 System familiarisation for assessors and system administrators

Assessors, lecturers, and system administrators must attain a *high level of familiarity and expertise* with the e-assessment platforms and procedures. No learners should approach such staff with technical queries about the e-assessment system that the staff member is unable to assist with.

3.10 Use of e-portfolios for assessment

E-portfolio systems must have the capabilities to store and maintain a variety of forms of performance evidence or coursework for secure access by the learner, assessors, verifiers and moderators based on a robust authentication process.

4. Conclusion

The above highly summarised guidelines provide SDPs with an outline of the standards and procedures that are required in an e-learning and e-assessment environment within the OQSF. While the above guidelines highlight the key areas that SDPs must focus on in an e-learning environment, a significant portion of detail around such guidelines has been stripped in this summary document. Providers that are already working in, or are entering, the e-learning space should access the full documents^{1,2} available on the QCTO website.

¹ [General Principles and Minimum Requirements on E-Assessment of Qualifications and Part Qualifications on the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework \(OQSF\)](#)

² Guidelines for the standards of eLearning for Registered Qualifications on the OQSF