

Accreditation is essential for quality assurance

 By [Mark Orpen](#)

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The South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) is responsible for the quality control of education and training quality throughout South Africa, within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). This task is executed by Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies (ETQAs), which require providers to be registered in terms of certain legislation, and maintain a quality management system that includes policies, procedures and review mechanisms.

According to SAQA definitions, accreditation describes the processes and criteria by which an ETQA will give formal recognition that an institution, body or person is competent to serve a specific purpose, such as assessments, moderations or providing education and training services. An accredited provider is a person or body that has met the SAQA quality assurance criteria and has been formally recognised by SAQA through the relevant ETQA.

Initially, occupationally directed provider accreditation took on somewhat of a developmental approach in South Africa, depending on the risks associated with the assessment results. Resultantly, a higher scale of quality assurance, including moderation and verification, was imposed. However, both providers and their accrediting bodies were actually working out how the system would be optimised. As such, initial standards and qualifications were often clumsy and only represented the outcomes agreed to by stakeholders, while good facilitators or assessors of outcomes-based learning were rare.

Thankfully, after a decade of systemic evolution, accreditation standards generally now better represent workflow processes. Most accrediting bodies have developed 'light-touch' quality assurance practices; the market place is overtraded with facilitators and assessors and many training providers have made substantial investments and reinvestments into physical, technological, educational and human resources as well as the systems for managing these.

According to SAQA, ETQAs play a pivotal role on the quality management system of the NQF system. This level of management is essential if the standards for learning are to be maintained across South Africa. By fostering a culture of quality, SAQA and ETQAs encourage training providers to undertake quality assurance activities, bolstering their assessment performance.

Despite that large strides have been made in creating better accreditation systems, the process can be daunting - especially with the knowledge that accreditation is not a once off requirement. Application for re-accreditation is usually required six months before the previous accreditation lapses and, while SAQA sets out clear accreditation and re-accreditation conditions, these are often misunderstood.

Through the appointment of experienced L&D professionals, that offer quality assurance training and have created and published accreditation guidelines, public and private training providers can take the guesswork out of the accreditation

process, allowing them to achieve or maintain accreditation.

Continuous improvement is the name of the game; and customer satisfaction is the measure of success. The faster the systems are streamlined to deliver this, the more effective and sustainable the training provider will be.

ABOUT MARK ORPEN

With an undying entrepreneurial spirit, Mark Orpen founded IPD in 2000. His main area of operation is currently governance, while his primary responsibilities include governance, finance, strategy and marketing. Having completed a National Diploma in Marketing and Sales, another in Learning and Development and a National Higher Certificate in Occupationally-Directed Education, Training and Development Practices, Orpen has all the skills necessary to execute his duties as CEO of IPD.

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