

3. What is learning programme approval, and how does it relate to accreditation of providers?

Programmes are evaluated to check that they meet certain quality criteria. They are then approved (or not) by the relevant agency as part of quality assurance and accreditation processes within the NQF.

Relevant agencies are those with a statutory obligation to ensure quality in education and training. Currently these quality assurance bodies are Umalusi, the HEQC, SETA ETQAs, and some professional bodies. In the near future the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) will also be established as a quality assurance agency.

Quality assurance checks that an institution or a provider can deliver education and training of the required standard and quality. There are various mechanisms for carrying out quality assurance. In the NQF the accreditation approach has been key: accreditation refers to the process whereby if an institution or provider meets the quality requirements laid down by the responsible body, it is therefore approved to carry out its functions and deliver what it says it can deliver. In the NQF, SAQA accredits the quality assurance bodies, who then accredit providers within their sphere of competence.

It is important to note that accreditation and learning programme approval are not the same thing: in some contexts, learning programme approval may be a condition for accreditation (among other criteria), while in other contexts accreditation may not involve learning programme approval. In other instances there may be providers who are accredited by one body, but may need to submit programmes for learning programme approval to a different body, depending on who has responsibility for the standards in question.

The application of accreditation and learning programme approval processes differs across sectors of education and training. Public colleges and schools are 'deemed to be accredited' by law. This is because the provincial departments have a constitutional obligation to provide education through these institutions, so they cannot be closed down, for example, by an ETQA. The provincial departments of education are seen as the providers of education and training, and the colleges and schools are seen as sites of learning. Umalusi works with the provincial departments of education to carry out quality assurance of schools and colleges in various ways.

Learning programme approval is, then, a process that is undertaken mainly by SETA ETQAs, the HEQC, and by Umalusi in relation to private providers. A public FET college may also have to submit programmes for approval if these programmes are linked to occupational standards and qualifications which are quality assured by a SETA. Learning programme approval may form part of the accreditation process for a provider.

Most learning programme approval processes put criteria in place for the following elements of learning programmes:

- A motivation for the purpose of the programme (e.g. based on a needs analysis; in response to Sector Skills Plans or Workplace Skills Plans).
- The link to NQF-registered outcomes, unit standards, or qualifications. This may include a plan for delivery of both a theoretical and a practical/ workplace-based component.

- A clear statement of the access requirements, and articulation and progression possibilities.
- A delivery and implementation plan, including time frames, management of different sites of delivery if applicable, and an indication of the human resources to be used.
- A description of the learning materials, methodology, resources and equipment to be used.
- An assessment plan, including any pre-assessment, internal or external assessment requirements, and RPL opportunities.
- Provision of learner support.
- A plan for monitoring, evaluation and review of the learning programme.

You need to apply to the appropriate quality and assurance body for their specific programme approval requirements. More detailed information and examples are given in the Useful Guidelines section.

[Answer to FAQ 3, The NQF and Learning Programme, the NQF Gateway]