

How Certifications Work

Certifications work very similarly to programs (see [How programs work](#) to learn more), however the exceptions are:

1. There are two paths, the 'Original certification path' and the 'Recertification path'.
2. When first created, you will have the option to use the existing certification content, which will copy everything you enter into the original certification path into the recertification path.
Note that this copying only happens once; afterwards, if you make a change to one path, you will need to manually make the same change to the other path if you want to keep them the same.
3. You can only add a set of courses.

If the same courses were used in both the original certification path and the recertification path, then the learner's grades and completion details are recorded and archived. Activity-level completion criteria will be reset for commonly used activities, such as face-to-face, forums, quizzes, and SCORMs. The reset process will be slightly different for each activity. For example, a forum requiring three posts to fulfil completion requirements will clear the learner's completion, but will leave the forum posts visible so the learner has to post three more times to fulfil the completion requirements again.

When the learner has completed coursework required for completion, Totara will immediately check to see if the course completion rules have been met. Course and certification status will be updated in reports including the learner's Record of Learning and Required Learning pages. Learners are enrolled in courses in Certification when they first access the course(s), not when they are assigned to the Certification.

First access to courses is controlled by the *Program* enrolment plugin. When a learner first goes to their certification and attempts to launch a course, this checks whether the learner is assigned to the certification and whether the course is in a course set they actually have access to, and then enrolls them in the course. In Certifications once the learner has been enrolled into the course they remain enrolled.

Certifications may be a replacement for the program *Recurring course* functionality in some cases. A recurring course creates a new copy of the course each time the learners need to retake the course. Over time this leaves multiple archived copies of the course on the site. Rather than duplicating the course, certifications archive the learners work and grades in the course and then resets the activities so the learner can complete the same course over again.

Example

A new employee is hired and assigned to a certification based upon their position, organisation, audience membership, or management hierarchy.

They complete the original certification path which is a series of courses including 'Orientation' and 'Health and Safety Training'. After course completion conditions are met, the certification is marked as 'certified' with a certification completion record.

After one year the 'Health and Safety Training' course needs to be repeated. The same course from the original certification path is reused, the learner's completion data is archived, and their status is reset so they can redo the activities in the course.

As part of the archiving process, each activity included in a course will need to be reset. This will have a different effect on each activity so each will need to be treated separately. The table below outlines the core activities that will be reset and their effect on course completion.

| Activity Name | Action Taken |
|---------------|--|
| Certificates | Copy of previous certificates will be archived. |
| Face-to-face | Face-to-face activities have an option that allow learners to sign up for multiple sessions within the same activity. Previous attendance data will be archived rather than deleted. |
| Feedback | Previous attempts are archived so that the learner can submit a new response. |
| Forum | Previous posts are left in the forum so that the discussion is left intact. The learner has to repost to meet the completion rules. |
| Quiz | Previous attempts are deleted to ensure learners have all allowed attempts available each time the course is retaken. |
| SCORM | Previous attempts are deleted to ensure learners have to meet completion requirements each time the course is retaken. |

Important

When the certification window opens, all learning (courses) for *both* certification paths will be reset, even though only recertification path courses will be required for recertification. The reason is to ensure that the primary certification path courses are prepared in case the user's certification expires. In that case the learning for the original certification path will *not* be reset at the time of expiry, as some of it may have been partially completed while trying to recertify and might contribute to the original certification path. For example, when the two paths contain the same content, when a user's certification expires they will not lose any progress towards becoming certified again.

Assignment due dates

With a chosen assignment, you can set a due date. There are two options available when setting a due date:

- *Complete by* - This allows you to choose a specific date.
- *Complete within* - This allows you to choose a relative date. Relative dates may not be calculable for some users immediately (e.g. 'first login', for users who have never logged in). An actual due date will be given to the users as soon as they meet the criteria.

There are some important things to be aware of in the way assignment due dates work:

1. If a user belongs to more than one assignment (e.g. as an individual and as part of an audience), and the assignments have different due dates, then the user's due date will be the more distant of the two.

2. Due dates for assigned users can only be increased. If an earlier assignment due date is applied to a user who already has a due date set, then the earlier date will not be applied to the user. The reasoning for this is to prevent learners from being given a due date, allowing them to allocate time when they plan to complete the learning, then reducing the due date, causing them to have insufficient time to complete it. However the new due date will apply to learners who become included in the certification in the future due to this assignment (such as if a learner is added to an audience after the due date was reduced).
3. Removing the due date from an assignment does *not* remove the due dates of applicable learners who have already been given one. However this change will be applicable to users who become included in the certification in the future due to this assignment.

Users' actual due dates may differ from the assignment due date for various reasons, including:

- If another assignment type includes the same user, the other assignment due date may override this one.
- If this assignment has a relative due date, which is not yet applicable to the user.
- A user may have been granted an extension by a manager.
- If an exception occurred and the *Set realistic time allowance* action was used to resolve it.
- This assignment due date may have changed, but the user still has the due date that was originally given to them.
- The due date has automatically been set to the expiration date.

Note

Assignment due dates are recorded when you press the **Save changes** button, but are not applied until the user assignments are updated. If you see a message indicating that user assignments have been deferred then any user due date changes will not yet be applied and will be processed when the `assignments_deferred_task` scheduled task is run.

Sometimes accidents happen and a completion date is set incorrectly, or a user's due date needs changing for whatever reason. If changes are required then they can be done using the [certification completion editor](#).

Reassignments

It is not uncommon that users may be unassigned from a certification then reassigned. For example, a user could be a member of an audience assigned to a certification, no longer meet the audience membership criteria and is therefore removed from the audience and unassigned from the certification. The user is then reassigned to the certification via the same (or different) assignment method.

When a user is reassigned to a certification they will be returned to their previous status. This works by the system locating the latest unassigned certification completion history record and restoring the user to their previous state. Any events that need to occur (such as the window opening for recertification) will take place when the relevant cron task runs.

Important - Applicable to Totara LMS 2.9.4 and below

A user who is unassigned and reassigned to a certification will be placed back onto their primary certification path. Depending on their current course completion(s), their status may be reaggregated when the relevant cron task runs.

Recertification details

When a learner completes a certification path, a new expiry date is calculated based on the recertification date method and the active period. As a result a new window opens date - or recertification window - is calculated from that. The recertification settings on the *Certification* tab lets you control how the those dates are calculated.

The most important choice to make is the recertification date method. There are three options:

1. **Use certification completion date:** When a learner completes one of the certification paths (original or recertification), the expiry date will be calculated based on the date that the completion occurred. This is as simple as it sounds. A drawback is that the earlier a learner completes their certification, the earlier they will be required to complete the next one.

Example

If the active period was one year, and one learner always completed it two months before it was due, then they would effectively be doing it once every ten months, while a learner who waited until a week before it was due would effectively be doing it close to once every year.

2. **Use certification expiry date:** Calculate the new expiry date based on the previous one. If there was no previous expiry date (for new assignments, and no due date set in the assignments tab) or the certification has expired, then the completion date is used. If the active period is set to one year then this method can be used to require recertification to occur by the same date every year. It avoids the drawback of the previous method, by not disadvantaging learners for completing early. However, if a learner's certification expires, their expiry date will shift. A consequence is that a user who is overdue frequently will end up (over several recertification cycles) completing the recertification less often than others.

Example

If the active period was one year, all users who complete on time will be averaging one recertification per year, whereas a user who is habitually overdue by two months will only be recertifying once every 14 months.

3. **Use fixed expiry date:** Calculate the new expiry date based on the previous one, even when expired. Choosing this method enables the additional setting "Minimum active period". If there was no previous expiry date (for new assignments, and no due date set in the assignments tab) then the completion date is used. If adding the active period to the previous expiry date results in a date which is not at least "Minimum active period" into the future, then an additional active period is added (and may be added several times, if needed). This guarantees that the active period is adhered to.

The active period is 1 year, window open period is 3 months, minimum active period is 6 months, and a user's due date is set to 1 January 2016. The following shows some possible results:

- They complete in December 2015 - their next expiry date is 1 January 2017.
- They complete in February 2016 (further than the minimum active period) - their next expiry date is 1 January 2017.
- They complete in February 2015 (11 months early, perhaps this was a new assignment) - their next expiry date is 1 January 2016 (yes, the same year and date, but the window will not reopen until October, and their certification would be valid for 11 months total, which is more than the minimum active period).
- They complete in July 2016 (7 months late, within the minimum active period) - their next expiry date is 1 January 2018.

The following settings on this page are used when making the calculations described above:

1. **Active Period:** Determines how long a certification will be active before it expires.
2. **Minimum active period:** When set to 'Use fixed expiry date' method, determine the minimum time that a certification must be valid - if the calculated expiry date is sooner than this then extend it by one more active period. This must be set to a duration at least as large as the window open period and no more than the active period.
3. **Recertification Window:** How long before the certification expires the recertification window opens, giving learners time to complete the recertification path.

Important

Changing the details on this page will *not* automatically update the window open and expiry dates of users who are currently certified. The new settings will apply to users when they complete a certification path after the change is made. For example, if the active period was set to 1 year, then changed to 1 month, then a user who was due to expire in 8 months time will still not be required to recertify until that time, but when they do, they will be given a new expiry date of 1 month later.

Note about repeating periods

Consider the following scenario. The 'expiry date' or 'fixed date' method is used and the active period is one month. A user has a due date of 31 January. They complete before 31 January. Their next expiry date cannot be calculated as 31 February, because the date does not exist. The actual date calculated will be different and it could be anything from 28 February to March 3, but whichever it ends up being, that's the date that will repeat from that point onwards. This same problem can occur with different active periods - such as one year - if you choose February 29.

Managing Face-to-face activities as part of a Certification

This example is to help you manage and configure Certifications that include a courses with a Face-to-face activity modules.

*The example is based on a simple Certification which contains one course. This course includes a Face-to-face activity which is the only requirement for completion of the course. The face-to-face settings **Allow multiple sessions signup per user** and activity completion requirement is set to **Fully attended**.*

Original Certification Path

1. Learner is assigned to the Certification.
2. Original certification path opens.
3. Learner accesses course & signs up to a Face-to-face session.
4. *Time elapses so that Face-to-face session date is now past.*
5. Manager/Admin marks learner's attendance of session as **Fully Attended**.
6. Activity and course are marked as complete and user is becomes Certified.

At this stage, there will be a set period of time between the user completing the original certification path and the window re-opening where the learner's status is **Certified** (this period of time is dependent on the configuration of the Certification). During the period when a learner *is* certified but the window *is not* open a learner can still signup to and attend sessions but these sessions *will not* count towards the completion of the recertification. If a learner wants their session attendances to contribute toward certification/recertification, they will need to sign-up to sessions with session end dates during the period that the window is open.

Recertification Path

1. The window opens (recertification path now available).
2. As part of the window opening process, the original course completion and face-to-face sign-up/s are archived*.
3. Learners can now attend any future sessions which fall within the window and these will contribute towards the completion of the recertification.

*When a completion is archived the original completion is reset and is stored as a past (or historic) completion in the database. The archiving of completions is triggered by a Certification window re-opening and allows a user to re-complete a course and it's activity modules multiple times. When using the mark attendance option as the requirement for Face-to-face completion please note that the completion date is based on the time and date that the session ends and not the time that the session is marked 'Fully attended'/'Partially Attended'.

Changing or removing courses in an active certification

If the initial certification path is changed for an active certification, this will not remove the certification completions for users who have already completed it.

Once a user is marked as 'certified' any changes you make to the path will not affect their certification and it will remain as 'complete'. Once the user reaches the re-certification window open point, the completion will be archived and the user will need to complete the re-certification path.

Only newly assigned users or users with a status of 'in progress' will be affected by these changes and these users will need to complete the certification based on the changes to the content.