
GENERAL NOTICES • ALGEMENE KENNISGEWINGS

DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING**NOTICE 3999 OF 2026****National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended)****Publication of the Revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, 2025**

1. The National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended) designates the Council on Higher Education (CHE), a statutory body established by section 4 of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended), as the Quality Council for Higher Education, with responsibilities to develop and manage the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), among others.
2. The Minister determined the HEQSF as per the policy on the determination of the three sub-frameworks that comprise the National Qualifications Framework. This policy was published in terms of section 8(2)(b) of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended), as Notice No. 1040, in Government Gazette No. 36006 of 14 December 2012, as amended by Notice No. 891, in Government Gazette No. 36803 of 30 August 2013.
3. The HEQSF as a policy was initially published by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) as Notice No. 549, in Government Gazette No. 36721 of 2 August 2013; and it was re-published by the CHE as Notice No. 819, in Government Gazette No. 38116 of 17 October 2014.
4. As part of its responsibilities to manage the HEQSF, to develop and implement policy for quality assurance in higher education, and to conduct or commission and publish research on issues of importance to the development and implementation of the HEQSF, as respectively mandated in sections 27(e), 27(i)(i), and 27(k)(i) of the National Qualification Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended), the CHE has reviewed and revised the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, 2013*.
5. The CHE hereby publishes the *Revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, 2025*, in terms of section 27(k)(iv) of National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended).

6. The Revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, 2025, will supersede the Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework, 2013, on the date of its publication as a notice in a Government Gazette.



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Chairperson: Council on Higher Education

Date:



Revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, 2025

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Acronyms

ACQF:	African Continental Qualifications Framework
AU:	African Union
CHE:	Council on Higher Education
DHET:	Department of Higher Education and Training
GFETQSF:	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework
HEMIS:	Higher Education Management Information System
HEQC:	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQCIS:	Higher Education Quality Committee Information System
HEQF:	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HEQSF:	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
NASCA:	National Senior Certificate for Adults
NQF:	National Qualifications Framework
NLRD:	National Learners' Records Database
NATED:	National Accredited Technical Education Diploma
OQSF:	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
QCTO:	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
SADC:	Southern African Development Community
SADCQF:	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
SAQA:	South African Qualifications Authority
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
WIL:	Work-Integrated Learning

Glossary of terms

Articulation is the process of forming systemic, specific, and individual possibilities of connection between qualifications and/or part-qualifications to allow for the horizontal (or lateral), vertical and diagonal movements of students through the formal education and training system, and its linkages with the world of work.

Credit is a measure of the unit volume of learning that counts towards the full volume of learning required for a specified qualification or part-qualification. It is quantified as a contributing number of notional hours of learning required to achieve the learning outcomes specified for a qualification or part-qualification. One credit is earned from ten notional hours of learning.

Credit accumulation is the practice of accumulating credits from one or more cognate learning programmes in one or more institutions.

Credit accumulation and transfer is the practice of accumulating credits from one or more cognate learning programmes in one or more institutions, and transferring those credits to be recognised towards a qualification or part-qualification in the same institution or in a different institution.

Credit transfer is the vertical, horizontal or diagonal relocation of credits towards a qualification or part-qualification on the same or different level, usually between different learning programmes, departments or institutions.

Designator is a generic field of study reflected as part of the name of a qualification. A designator meets the generic specifications laid down for the qualification type of which it is a variant. Only degrees have designators.

Early exit qualification is a qualification awarded to a student who exits a learning programme for reasons other than performance. The student can apply for the credits accumulated over years of study towards the initially intended qualification, to be recognised towards a cognate qualification that requires a fewer number of total credits than the one that the student enrolled for initially.

Generic qualification is a qualification with a designator but without a qualifier.

Learning programme is a structured and purposeful set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification or part-qualification.

Level descriptors are statements that describe the learning that is expected to be achieved at a particular level of the National Qualifications Framework, and provide a broad indication of

the types of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at a particular level. The level descriptors are the outermost layer of qualification specification.

Non-statutory professional body is a professional body that has not been established through statute, and its activities are not governed by statute.

Part-qualification is an assessed unit of learning with a clearly defined purpose, which is registered as part of a qualification on the National Qualifications Framework.

Professional body is an association, a council, a guild or a society that is recognised by the South African Qualifications Authority, according to a policy determined in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended, as a body of expert practitioners in an occupational field or profession.

Professional designation is a title or status conferred by a professional body in recognition of a person's expertise and/or the right to practice in an occupational field or profession.

Statutory professional body is a professional body established by statute and whose activities are also governed by statute which, among others, provide for the registration and licensing of professionals and other categories of professional designations.

Qualification is a formal designation that a higher education institution confers on a person who has, (a) completed a prescribed learning programme and, (b) attained a specified level of achievement in relation to the learning outcomes of the learning programme. The formal designation is certified by a document to represent the human qualities of knowledge, skills or competence and attributes that the person has acquired after successfully completing the prescribed learning programme.

Qualification descriptor is a unique descriptor of a qualification that states its purpose and characteristics and how it relates to other qualification types. It provides specifications such as the NQF exit level, purpose and credit rating. It enables comparisons between qualifications.

Recognition of prior learning is a set of principles and processes through which a person's prior knowledge and skills are made visible, mediated and assessed for alternative access and admission to formal learning programmes leading to qualifications or part-qualifications.

Work-integrated learning is a curricular practice characteristic of vocational and professionally oriented qualifications, which focuses on integrating academic learning with experiential learning in a structured manner. There are many different work-integrated learning practices. Examples include simulated learning, problem-based learning, and workplace-based learning.

1. Introduction

1.1 The architecture of the National Qualifications Framework

- 1.1.1 The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a comprehensive structure for the classification, registration, publication, and articulation of quality-assured formal qualifications offered within the national education and training system. The objectives of the NQF are to (a) create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements, (b) facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths, (c) enhance the quality of education and training, and (d) accelerate the redress of the past unfair discrimination in education and training.
- 1.1.2 The NQF is structured as a series of levels of achievements of learning, arranged in ascending order from one (1) to ten (10). It comprises three coordinated qualifications sub-frameworks. These are the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF), and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF).
- 1.1.3 The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is responsible for the development of the NQF and the coordination of the three qualifications sub-frameworks. Each of the three qualifications sub-frameworks, is developed and managed by a quality council. The Council on Higher Education (CHE), as the quality council for higher education, is responsible for the development and management of the HEQSF; Umalusi, the Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Education and Training, is responsible for the development and management of the GFETQSF; and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), is responsible for the development and management of the OQSF.
- 1.1.4 The GFETQSF provides for qualifications at NQF Levels 1 to 4; the HEQSF provides for qualifications at NQF Levels 5 to 10; and the OQSF provides for qualifications at NQF Levels 1 to 8, straddling the GFETQSF from NQF Levels 1 to 4, and straddling the HEQSF from levels 5 to 8. Table 1 illustrates this architecture of the NQF and the three qualifications sub-frameworks.

Table 1: An overview of qualification types and their levels on the three sub-frameworks

NQF Sub-Framework and Quality Council Responsible	NQF Level	Qualification Type		NQF Sub-Framework and Quality Council Responsible
Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF)/ Council on Higher Education (CHE)	10	Doctoral Degree		Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) / Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO)
	9	Master's Degree		
	8	Bachelor Honour's Degree Postgraduate Diploma Bachelor's Degree	Specialised Occupational Diploma	
	7	Bachelor's Degree Advanced Diploma	Advanced Occupational Diploma	
	6	Diploma Advanced Certificate	Occupational Diploma Advanced Occupational Certificate	
	5	Higher Certificate	Higher Occupational Certificate	
General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) / Umalusi	4	National Certificate	National Occupational Certificate	
	3	Intermediate Certificate	Intermediate Occupational Certificate	
	2	Elementary Certificate	Elementary Occupational Certificate	
	1	General Certificate	General Occupational Certificate	

1.2 The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework in Context

- 1.2.1 The HEQSF was determined by the minister responsible for higher education in accordance with section 8(2)(e) of the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended. It was developed and initially published by the CHE in 2013 as mandated by section 27(e) of the same Act, as the successor to the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) that was published in 2007 (CHE, 2013).
- 1.2.2 Qualifications on the HEQSF fall into nine types. These are Higher Certificate, Advanced Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Postgraduate Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Bachelor's Honours Degree, Master's Degree, and Doctoral Degree.
- 1.2.3 The HEQSF provides common parameters for structuring qualifications, thereby making qualifications at the same NQF levels, and in the same fields of study, comparable across the higher education system in the country. In addition, the HEQSF is internationally benchmarked which makes the South African higher education qualifications comparable with higher education qualifications from other countries.
- 1.2.4 The HEQSF focuses on the conceptualisation and structuring of qualifications. It does not prescribe the curricula of the learning programmes leading to those qualifications. It, therefore, leaves ample room for higher education institutions to be innovative and reformative in their approaches to designing and developing the learning programmes leading to the qualifications. Higher education institutions have much latitude to design educational offerings to realise their different visions, missions and strategic plans, and to meet the varying needs of the stakeholders and communities they serve.
- 1.2.5 The HEQSF has inbuilt flexibility to accommodate, for example, the development of new qualification types and specialisations, as the need arises. It is also inherently flexible in that it is designed to facilitate articulation within higher education, as well as between higher education, on the one hand, and other sectors of the national education and training system, on the other. Similarly, it is designed to facilitate articulation into the world of work and professional careers.
- 1.2.6 The main organising principle of the HEQSF is simplicity. This principle has several benefits. It enables stakeholders, including students and potential employers of graduates, to easily understand the HEQSF; it enables higher education institutions to implement it with relative ease; and it makes the CHE's responsibility of managing and quality assuring its implementation less onerous.
- 1.2.7 As a qualifications sub-framework of the NQF, the HEQSF is closely aligned to, and consistent with the NQF. It is essentially a microcosm of the NQF, adapted to the higher

education segment of the broader national education and training system of South Africa.

1.3 Purpose of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework

- 1.3.1 As a sub-framework of the NQF, the HEQSF seeks to advance the objectives of the NQF within higher education in South Africa by providing one integrated framework through which qualifications from all higher education institutions in South Africa, irrespective of their different historical backgrounds, should relate to one another. It also advances the objectives of the NQF by facilitating access to, and mobility and progression within higher education; enhancing the quality of higher education; and accelerating the redress of the past unfair discrimination in relation to access to, and success in higher education.
- 1.3.2 The mechanisms through which the HEQSF seeks to realise its purpose as stated above include (a) promoting the consistent use of qualification types, subtypes, routes, names, designators and qualifiers within the higher education system; (b) facilitating articulation within higher education, as well as between higher education qualifications, on the one hand, and qualifications on the GFETQSF and the OQSF, on the other; (c) enhancing the international comparability and recognition of the South African higher education qualifications; (d) safeguarding the credibility and integrity of the South African higher education qualifications; and (e) promoting common understanding of the architecture of the South African higher education qualifications, within the context of the NQF.

1.4 Legal and policy frameworks that govern the HEQSF

- 1.4.1 The development, implementation and management of the HEQSF is primarily governed by the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended. This Act mandates the CHE to develop the HEQSF and manage its implementation. It also mandates SAQA to coordinate these processes in its capacity as the custodian of the NQF.
- 1.4.2 The Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended, requires that all higher education qualifications should be aligned to, and be registered on the HEQSF segment of the NQF. It also makes it mandatory for foreign institutions that intend to provide higher education in South Africa, to have their qualifications registered on the HEQSF segment of the NQF after following the stipulated due processes.

- 1.4.3 The HEQSF is further governed by a suite of policies. These include policies and guidelines determined and developed by the minister responsible for higher education and training in terms of sections 8(b) and 8(c) of the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended; policies and criteria developed and implemented by SAQA in terms of sections 13(h)(i), 13(h)(iii), and 13(i); and policies developed and implemented by the CHE in terms of sections 27(h)(i), 27(h)(iii), and 27(i) of the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended.
- 1.4.4 All other national education and training policies that relate to qualifications also have a bearing on the NQF and the HEQSF. These include the *Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa* (DHET, 2019), the *Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions* (DHET, 2020), *Articulation Policy for the Post-School Education and Training System* (DHET, 2017) and the *Policy on the Recognition of South African Higher Education Institutional Types* (DHET, 2025), to mention a few examples.
- 1.4.5 Several regional and international protocols and conventions have a bearing on the development, review and revision, and implementation of the NQF and the HEQSF. The Southern African Development Community (SADC) *Protocol on Education and Training* of 1997, and the ten-level *SADC Qualifications Framework* (SADCQF) are examples at the regional level. At the level of the continent, there are the *African Continental Qualifications Framework* (ACQF) (AU, 2022); and the *Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees, and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States* (UNESCO, 2014), also known as the Addis Convention, and to which South Africa is a signatory. At a global level, South Africa is a signatory to the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education* (UNESCO, 2019).

2. Review and revision of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework

2.1 Motivation for the review and revision of the HEQSF, 2013

- 2.1.1 Section 27(e) of the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended, does not only mandate the CHE to develop the HEQSF, but also to manage it. Among other things, managing the HEQSF includes reviewing and revising it periodically concordant with the national policy development requirements of the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (Presidency, 2020). National policies are required

to be reviewed and/or revised every three to five years. Considering that the HEQSF was first published in 2013, its review and revision have been long overdue.

- 2.1.2 The pieces of legislation that govern higher education and the HEQSF, namely the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 and the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, have been amended after 2013. Also, since 2013, several new policies have been promulgated by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET); and similarly, SAQA and the CHE have developed and published new policies, as well as reviewed and revised policies that predate 2013. All these developments and changes in the legal and policy environment necessitated the review and revision of the HEQSF to ensure that it maintains close alignment to, and consistency with the relevant laws and policies.
- 2.1.3 Feedback received from higher education institutions and other stakeholders, especially after the extensive HEQSF alignment process undertaken between 2013 and 2019, indicated that there was a need for more clarification in some parts of the HEQSF. Similarly, internal reflections within the CHE pointed to the need to review and revise the HEQSF to make it less onerous to conform to and implement.
- 2.1.4 Critical engagement with the growing body of scholarly work that evaluates the ideological and philosophical underpinnings, as well as the design and implementation of the national and regional qualifications frameworks, provided valuable insights into the need to review and revise the HEQSF to strengthen its philosophy of education base and how this finds expression in the development and offering of qualifications.
- 2.1.5 International benchmarking with the higher education segments of the NQFs of countries with educational systems that are relatively similar to that of South Africa yielded results that suggested the need to review and revise the HEQSF with a view towards enhancing international comparability and international recognition of South African higher education qualifications.
- 2.1.6 The ratification by South Africa of the *Revised Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees, and Other Academic Qualifications in Higher Education in African States*, and the *Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education*; and the alignment of the NQF to the SADCQF in 2018, provided further impetus to review and revise the HEQSF to infuse the thinking behind these regional and international developments into the HEQSF.

2.2 The main changes in the revised HEQSF, 2025

- 2.2.1 The 240-credit diploma is not retained as a qualification type. It has been integrated into the 360-credit diploma with up to 120 of the total credits allocated to work-integrated learning.
- 2.2.2 More elaboration is provided on the description of qualification types. This has included making qualification sub-types and routes more explicit than they were in the HEQSF, 2013. More explanation about designators and qualifiers is also provided. The proliferation of qualifications is one of the challenges that, to a large extent, resulted from these concepts not being explained clearly, and good examples of their application not being provided.
- 2.2.3 The numbers of qualifiers to be used in the names of qualifications are capped as another measure to limit the proliferation of qualifications.
- 2.2.4 Clarification is provided on the use of elective streams as one of the means to reduce the proliferation of qualifications.
- 2.2.5 A new 'general' sub-type of the Higher Certificate is introduced as an access qualification.
- 2.2.6 The Diploma at NQF Level 6 is retained only as a Diploma (Vocational) with a focus on work-integrated learning.
- 2.2.7 The Advanced Certificate is reclassified as a vocational qualification.
- 2.2.8 The Postgraduate Diploma is split into 'general' and 'professional' sub-types.
- 2.2.9 The Master's Degree is listed with three sub-types: general (research), general (coursework), and professional.
- 2.2.10 The Doctoral Degree is listed with three sub-types: general (research), general (coursework and research), and professional.
- 2.2.11 Issues regarding the naming convention for Doctoral Degrees are clarified further.

- 2.2.12 For qualifications that have research components, the minimum credits for the research components are specified.
- 2.2.13 Provision is made for credits to be awarded for prior learning that is recognised through a formal recognition of prior learning process, as well as for successfully completed short learning programmes and micro-credentials, provided such short learning programmes and micro-credentials should have been subjected to the external quality assurance processes driven by the HEQC/CHE.
- 2.2.14 Provision is made for the conferment of early exit qualifications under special circumstances.
- 2.2.15 In general, concepts, principles and practices are articulated more clearly, with some examples, where necessary.

3. Foregrounding priorities of the National Qualifications Framework

As a sub-framework of the NQF, the HEQSF foregrounds and embeds the key priorities of the NQF. These priorities include articulation, credit accumulation and transfer, flexible learning pathways and modalities, progression, recognition of prior learning, and work-integrated learning. Details of how the HEQSF promotes these key priorities, and facilitates their realisation, are provided in the ensuing subsections.

3.1 Articulation

- 3.1.1 Articulation of qualifications within the same sub-framework and between sub-frameworks, is one of the key priorities of the NQF. The aim of articulation is to promote lifelong learning by ensuring that there are no dead-end qualifications. Each qualification on the HEQSF, for example, must have an articulation pathway or several articulation pathways. This means that articulation should be intentional and by design. It also means that barriers to articulation should be eliminated.
- 3.1.2 With respect to higher education, articulation is governed by the *Articulation Policy for the Post-School Education and Training System in South Africa* (DHET, 2017), and the *Policy on Articulation into and within Higher Education* (CHE, 2023). Further guidance

on the implementation of articulation is provided by the *Good Practice Guide on Articulation into and within Higher Education* (CHE, 2024a).

- 3.1.3 Articulation is multidirectional within and across the three qualifications sub-frameworks. However, the articulation from the GFETQSF and OQSF into the HEQSF is an important issue of access to higher education and it is governed by institutional admission policies. Section 37 of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended, mandates councils of universities or equivalent governing bodies of private higher education institutions, to determine and publish admission policies for their respective institutions. However, subsection 3 stipulates that the admission policies of institutions should provide measures for the redress of past inequalities and should not unfairly discriminate in any way.
- 3.1.4 Based on section 69 of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended, the minister responsible for higher education determined the minimum admission requirements that higher education institutions should consider when determining their admission criteria. These minimum admission requirements are stipulated in Government Gazette Number 31231 of 2008 (*Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programme Requiring a National Senior Certificate*), and Government Gazette Number 42092 of 2018 (*Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programme Requiring a National Certificate {Vocational}*). They serve as regulations governing direct articulation from the GFETQSF into the HEQSF, and from the OQSF into the HEQSF, respectively. Higher education institutions are not permitted to set their admission requirements lower than the minimum requirements presented in the two Government Gazettes.
- 3.1.5 As is explained later (see section 3.5), higher education institutions are encouraged to expand access to learning programmes leading to higher education qualifications through recognition of prior learning.
- 3.1.6 Within higher education, articulation is enabled by systems of progression, and credit accumulation and transfer. The latter is also used in articulation of qualifications at NQF Levels 5 to 8 on the OQSF, into higher education. The system of credit accumulation and transfer is explained below (see section 3.2).
- 3.1.7 Articulation options from OQSF qualifications into the HEQSF qualifications are provided in Annexure A.

3.2 Credit accumulation and transfer

- 3.2.1 Students are awarded credits for each unit of learning that they successfully complete. As they progress with their studies, they successfully complete more units of learning (modules or courses), and the quantity of credits earned builds up incrementally. The incremental build-up of the quantity of credits earned is described as credit accumulation.
- 3.2.2 In the event that a student decides to change the qualification that she or he enrolled for and to subsequently enrol for a different but closely related qualification at the same institution, the student may apply to transfer the credits that she or he accumulated while studying towards the previous qualification, to be recognised for the new qualification that she or he subsequently enrolls for. If the application is successful, the previously accumulated credits are transferred towards the newly enrolled for qualification. This entire process is known as credit accumulation and transfer.
- 3.2.3 A student may also decide to transfer from one institution to another to enrol for the same or similar qualification. Again, in this situation, the student can apply for the transfer of the credits that she or he accumulated while studying at the previous institution, to be recognised for the qualification she or he enrolls for at the institution that she or he has decided to transfer to. If the application is successful, the student would not be expected to repeat the same modules or other units of learning that she or he had successfully completed at the previous institution.
- 3.2.4 In higher education, the mechanism of credit accumulation and transfer is governed by the *Policy and Criteria for Credit and Accumulation and Transfer within the National Qualifications Framework* (SAQA, 2021), and the *Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment* (CHE, 2016). Each higher education institution is required to develop and implement an institutional-level policy on credit accumulation and transfer ensuring compliance with the policy positions of the two national policies mentioned in the foregoing sentence.
- 3.2.5 The credit accumulation and transfer mechanism should be used where the qualifications involved and the programmes leading to them are closely related. It is incumbent upon institutions to identify and establish the close relationship between the qualifications and the associated learning programmes, and to provide detailed information about possible credit accumulation and transfer arrangements for the different qualifications and the associated learning programmes that they offer.
- 3.2.6 In principle, all credits accumulated for an incomplete qualification can be recognised by the same or by a different institution for transfer towards a different but cognate

qualification. However, the long-standing residency rule requires that a student studying for a degree qualification should earn at least fifty percent (50%) of the credits required at the institution that eventually awards the certificate for the qualification. Practically, this means that the institution that confers the qualification should recognise credits transferred from an incomplete qualification from another institution up to a maximum of fifty percent (50%) of the total credits required for the institution to confer the qualification.

- 3.2.7 In exceptional circumstances, the CHE as the custodian of the HEQSF, may relax the requirement that a student must obtain at least fifty percent (50%) of the credits required for a qualification at the institution that eventually awards the certificate for the qualification. Exceptional circumstances include, for example, when an institution has been deregistered by the DHET or has been disestablished by the minister responsible for higher education and training, and the deregistered or disestablished institution is not in a position to develop and successfully implement a teach-out plan. The pipeline students would then be directed to other institutions to complete their studies and obtain the qualifications they enrolled for at the deregistered or disestablished institution. In such exceptional circumstances, the CHE shall specify a proportion in excess of fifty percent (50%) of the credits accumulated at the deregistered or disestablished institution, that the receiving institutions may recognise towards the qualifications enrolled for by the students concerned.
- 3.2.8 A holder of a completed qualification who decides to enrol for and pursue studies towards another cognate qualification, may apply for up to fifty percent (50%) of the credits obtained for the completed qualification, to be recognised towards the different qualification that she or he enrolls for.
- 3.2.9 Credits accumulated from learning that does not lead to formal qualifications (for example, credits earned from 'studies for non-degree purpose', short learning programmes and micro-credentials) may be transferred towards qualifications, provided such short learning programmes and micro-credentials should have been subjected to the external quality assurance processes driven by the HEQC/CHE. This means that such credits would constitute a proportion of the total credits required for the target qualifications.

3.3 Flexible learning

The goals of the National Qualifications Framework cannot be achieved in a rigidly structured educational and training system with inflexible learning pathways. A less rigidly structured education and training system with flexible learning pathways promotes leveraging innovation and technological development, facilitates lifelong learning, and enables the pursuit of the goal of inclusive and equitable quality education, which is one of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The HEQSF supports the adoption of flexible learning pathways in several ways as briefly articulated in the following paragraphs.

- 3.3.1 The HEQSF makes provision for credits to be awarded for units of prior learning that are recognised through a formal recognition of prior learning process. These credits can be transferred to be recognised towards a relevant formal qualification. This introduces an alternative route towards formal qualifications and represents a significant shift from the rigidity of having only one route towards formal qualifications.
- 3.3.2 The HEQSF similarly makes provision for credits to be awarded to successfully completed short learning programmes and micro-credentials, provided such short learning programmes and micro-credentials should have been subjected to the external quality assurance processes driven by the HEQC/CHE. These credits are recognised towards a relevant formal qualification. Similar to what has been stated in paragraph 3.3.1, this introduces an alternative route towards formal qualifications.
- 3.3.3 The HEQSF also supports flexibility in terms of modes of provision. The requirements for flexibility in terms of modes of provision are stipulated in the *Higher Education Practice Standard on Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision* (CHE, 2024b).
- 3.3.4 The HEQSF permits collaboration between and among institutions in South Africa in the development and offering of qualifications. Similarly, and informed by the *Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa* (DHET, 2019), the HEQSF permits collaborative qualifications developed and offered jointly by institutions in South Africa and their partner institutions in other countries. The development and offering of in-country and cross-border collaborative qualifications eliminates the rigidity of qualification beings wholly attached to individual institutions.
- 3.3.5 The HEQSF supports the policy position of the *Policy for the Recognition of South African Higher Education Institution Types* (2025) permitting higher education institutions the flexibility of offering qualifications on the OQSF in addition to offering higher education qualifications. However, it is important to note that OQSF qualifications are 'national qualifications' developed by the QCTO, the quality council responsible. The

HEQSF does not provide guidance regarding the requirements for offering learning programmes leading to qualifications on the OQSF. Such guidance can be obtained from the OQSF policy document (QCTO, 2021) and/or from the QCTO itself.

3.3.6 The HEQSF makes provision for the conferment of early exit qualifications under special circumstances. An early exit qualification is one that a student may apply to be conferred as an alternative to the one the student was enrolled for initially. Ordinarily, the early exit qualification is either at a lower level, or is of less minimum duration and credit load than the one that the student initially enrolled for. The following are the requirements for the conferment of an early exit qualification:

3.3.6.1 The student applying for an early exit qualification must demonstrate that she or he is not able to complete the learning programme leading to the initially enrolled for qualification, for reasons other than not achieving the stipulated levels of competency and proficiency required for progression.

3.3.6.2 The qualification that the student initially enrolled for must not be a Higher Certificate. This is because of the requirement that an early exit qualification is either at a lower level, or is of less minimum duration and credit load than the one that the student initially enrolled for, and there is no higher education qualification that is at a lower level, or is of less minimum duration and credit load than the Higher Certificate.

3.3.6.3 The student must apply for the credits accumulated over the years of study towards the qualification initially enrolled for, to be recognised towards a lower-level qualification, or a qualification of less minimum duration and credit load than the one that the student initially enrolled for.

3.3.6.4 The lower-level qualification, or the qualification of less minimum duration and credit load than the one that the student initially enrolled for should exist on the programme-qualification-mix of the institution; it should be on the list of accredited qualifications for the institution; it should be registered on the HEQSF segment of the NQF; and it should be reflected as active on the NQF register of qualifications. In addition, the qualification should be in a cognate field of study, and should have a similar overall qualification purpose as the qualification that the student initially enrolled for.

3.3.6.5 The student must not have attempted and failed the final year modules or courses of the learning programme leading to the award of the qualification that she or he initially enrolled for. In other words, an early exit qualification is not a

reward for not being successful in meeting the exit level requirements of a qualification that a student initially enrolled for.

3.3.6.6 An evaluation process similar to a credit mapping exercise must be undertaken to determine if the student meets the requirements for an early exit qualification. The credit mapping exercise should be properly documented. The fifty percent (50%) limit to the proportion of credits that can be transferred towards a new qualification does not apply when considering applications for the award of an early exit qualification. Furthermore, a student should not be permitted to use the same set of credits to apply for the award of more than one early exit qualifications.

3.3.6.7 When a student withdraws from a qualification and successfully applies for the conferment of an early exit qualification, the records in the Higher Education Quality Committee Information System (HEQCIS) or in the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) must be accordingly amended to reflect that the student discontinued the studies towards the qualification that she or he initially enrolled for, and also to reflect that the student subsequently enrolled for another qualification and the credits earned for the former qualification were transferred to the latter qualification. The same amendments of records must be made on the National Learners' Records Database (NLRD).

3.4 Progression

3.4.1 The progression of students within the sub-framework is an indicator of achievement of the learning required or expected at each level, or in each phase of a learning programme. One of the objectives of the NQF is to facilitate progression of students within their learning pathways. The HEQSF, as a sub-framework of the NQF, is also designed to facilitate progression.

3.4.2 The HEQSF is designed to facilitate vertical, horizontal and diagonal progression. Vertical progression is the norm, and the minimum requirements for such progression within and between qualifications are stipulated in the qualification type descriptors. Horizontal and diagonal progressions are facilitated by the credit accumulation and transfer mechanism explained earlier. Vertical progression is usually from a lower level to the immediately next higher level. Levels should not be skipped, unless in exceptional circumstances.

- 3.4.3 Each higher education institution is required to have an institutional policy on progression that should clearly articulate the minimum requirements for progression within the learning programmes leading to specified higher education qualifications. The policy should not place unnecessary barriers to progression within learning programmes leading to specified higher education qualifications, as well as between learning programmes that lead to cognate qualifications.

3.5 Recognition of prior learning

- 3.5.1 Recognition of prior learning refers to the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated, and assessed for formal recognition for the purposes of credits, access to a learning programme, or advanced standing subsequent to having obtained access to a learning programme, which means exemption from modules and/or courses in the learning programme leading to a particular qualification. The prior learning can be informal, non-formal, or formal.
- 3.5.2 Recognition of prior learning is one of the mechanisms for making higher education accessible to individuals who were previously denied access because of discrimination, marginalisation, and exclusion on the grounds of not having the wherewithal to meet the costs of higher education. Recognition of prior learning also facilitates progression and articulation through advanced standing. Therefore, recognition of prior learning can play a vital role in advancing social justice in education and training, including in higher education.
- 3.5.3 In higher education, recognition of prior learning is governed by the *Recognition of Prior Learning Implementation Framework* (DHET, 2024), *National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of Recognition of Prior Learning* (SAQA, 2019), and *Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment* (CHE, 2016). Each higher education institution is required to develop and implement an institutional level policy on recognition of prior learning informed by the positions articulated by the aforementioned two national policies, and the implementation framework.
- 3.5.4 In higher education, a qualification cannot be obtained based entirely on recognition of prior learning. This is in compliance with section 65B(2) of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended, which states that, save for honorary degrees, no higher education qualification may be awarded to or conferred on any person who has not (a) been registered as a student at a higher education institution for the prescribed period

for a particular qualification, and (b) completed the work and attained the standard of proficiency determined through assessment as required by the institution.

- 3.5.5 Recognition of prior learning requires specialised forms of assessment and evaluation of knowledge, skills and competencies. It is therefore necessary that institutions acquire and/or build and develop the requisite internal capacity and capability to conduct the specialised forms of assessment and evaluation for the recognition of prior learning. Staff with disciplinary knowledge and expertise should be the ones to conduct the assessments and evaluations for the recognition of prior learning.
- 3.5.6 Recognition of prior learning is not applicable to the same extent across all disciplines and fields of study. It might be more suited to, and easy to conduct in some disciplines or fields of study, and less so in other disciplines or fields of study. Therefore, the institutional policy should clearly indicate the extent to which recognition of prior learning can be applied within the different disciplines or fields of study. This would be possible if discipline experts are engaged and consulted in the process of developing the institutional policy on recognition of prior learning. However, the institutional policy should not legitimise the perpetuation of unjustifiable barriers to recognition of prior learning that have traditionally existed in some disciplines.
- 3.5.7 Credits obtained from the recognition of prior learning should not make more than fifty percent (50%) of the total credits required for the qualification that the student is enrolled for.
- 3.5.8 Higher education institutions are required to capture data on students who are admitted to higher education learning programmes through recognition of prior learning in HEQCIS, if they are private higher education institutions, or in HEMIS if they are public higher education institutions.

3.6 Work-integrated learning

- 3.6.1 Work-integrated learning is a practice of blending or fusing the learning of theory with hands-on learning. This is common in practical oriented learning programmes that lead to vocational and/or professional qualifications, although it may also be part of learning programmes that lead to general qualifications. Work-integrated learning is structured, monitored and assessed to determine if the students can demonstrate practically the skills, competencies and other attributes they are expected to acquire from a learning programme. The purpose of work-integrated learning is to provide students with opportunities to 'learn by doing', and to put into practice the theoretical knowledge and

understanding acquired in the conceptual and/or theoretical component of the learning programme.

- 3.6.2 Work-integrated learning can be implemented in many ways, and at all levels of the NQF within the HEQSF segment. It may take various forms including simulated learning, work-directed theoretical learning, problem-based learning, service learning, project-based learning, and workplace-based learning. Work-place experience can also be achieved through work simulation in specific cases, which requires suitable conditions and activities to achieve an acceptable level of competence. In some cases of professional programmes, both simulation and actual workplace experience may be required (for example, nursing and medicine) as the purposes and outcomes of these programmes cannot be achieved outside of the work environment.
- 3.6.3 Workplace-based learning as a form of work-integrated learning involves the placement of students in a practical work environment. Such placement should be through formal arrangements between a higher education institution and the organisation where the students are placed. The time that students spend placed in a work environment expressed as a proportion of the total time prescribed for the learning programme, varies depending on the requirements of each discipline, profession or occupation.
- 3.6.4 The selection of the appropriate forms of work-integrated learning depends on the nature and purpose of the qualification type, objectives and outcomes of learning programmes, the NQF level at which the work-integrated component is pegged, institutional capacity to provide work placement opportunities, and the structures and systems that are in place within professional settings and sites of practice to support student learning. The *Higher Education Practice Standard for Experiential Learning* (CHE, 2024c) provides guidance in this regard.
- 3.6.5 The purpose of a qualification and its cognitive demands as outlined in the appropriate level descriptors, determine how much of the associated learning programme should be in the form of work-integrated learning. Where the work-integrated learning takes the form of workplace-based learning, it is the responsibility of the higher education institution concerned, to place students into appropriate workplaces. Such workplace-based learning must be appropriately structured, properly supervised and assessed.

4. Characteristics of the revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework

4.1 Qualifications and learning programmes

- 4.1.1 A qualification is a formal designation that a higher education institution confers on a person who has, (a) completed a prescribed learning programme and, (b) attained a specified level of achievement in relation to the learning outcomes of the learning programme. In essence, a qualification is a formal recognition of learning achievements. Qualifications confer special formal status and privileges on the recipients. Certificates constitute the physical and/or digital (or electronic) manifestation of qualifications.
- 4.1.2 Qualifications awarded or conferred by higher education institutions in South Africa must be those that are registered on the NQF. Records of the learning achievements that lead to the successful students being awarded or conferred qualifications, must be captured on the NLRD. Both are critical conditions for South African qualifications to be recognised locally and internationally.
- 4.1.3 A learning programme (or simply a 'programme') is a purposeful and structured set of learning activities designed to enable a student to demonstrate the knowledge, competences and attributes necessary for the award of a specified qualification. Learning programmes may be discipline-based; professional; career-focused; trans-, inter- or multi-disciplinary in nature. A learning programme has recognised entry and exit points, entry or admission requirements, and exit-level outcomes.
- 4.1.4 There is an inextricable link between learning programmes and qualifications as the latter are awarded or conferred after students have successfully completed the prescribed learning programmes. However, the HEQSF focuses on qualifications and not on learning programmes. Although such is the case, the inextricable link between the two makes it inevitable that, to illuminate matters effectively, the HEQSF is sometimes compelled to touch on learning programmes. When such happens, it should be understood in the context as explained.
- 4.1.5 Guidance on the design, development and delivery of learning programmes is provided in qualification standards which are developed by the CHE working closely with the relevant discipline, profession or vocation experts. Details about qualification standards are provided in the *Implementation Protocols for the External Quality Assurance Functions of the Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education in South Africa* (CHE, 2025) and the associated manuals; as well as in the *Higher Education Practice Standard for Programme Process* (CHE, 2024d).

4.2 Elements of qualifications

4.2.1 There are four essential elements in the architecture of qualifications. These are level descriptors, qualification types, designators, and qualifiers. These inform and guide the processes of conceptualising, developing and naming qualifications. The four elements are inextricably linked in a nested manner as illustrated in Figure 1.

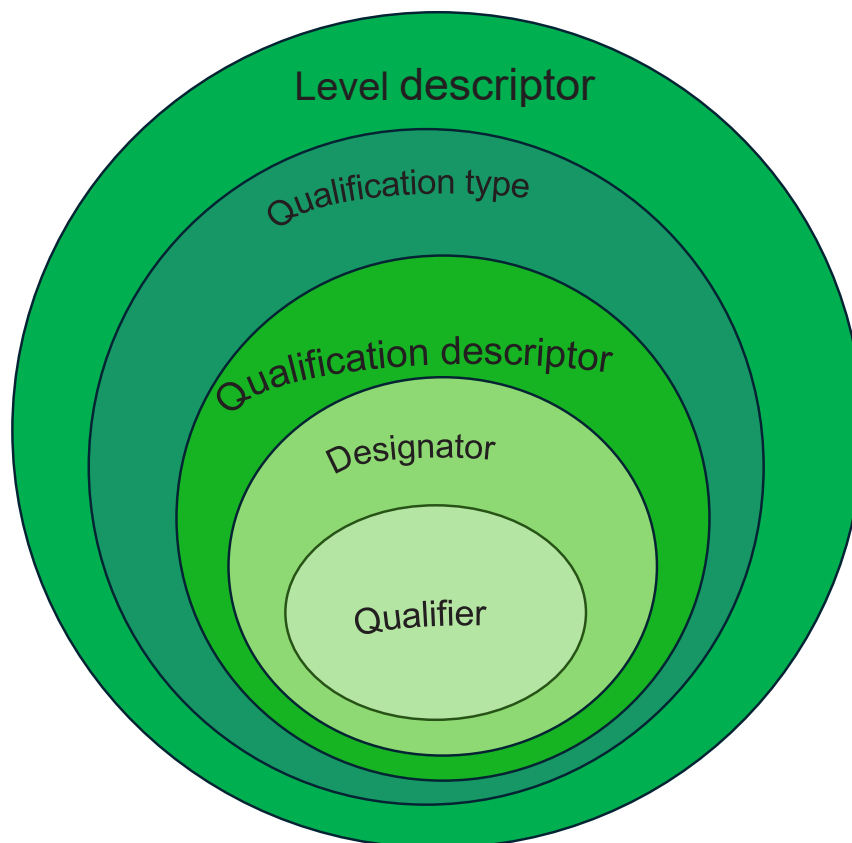


Figure 1: The Nested Layers of the Elements of a Qualification

4.2.2 *Level descriptors* are statements developed by SAQA in consultation with the quality councils that describe the learning that is expected to be achieved at a particular level of the NQF, and its complexity thereof. They also provide a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at a particular NQF level. Level descriptors are expressed in terms of learning outcomes, and they provide guidelines for differentiating the varying levels of complexity of qualifications on the NQF. Furthermore, level descriptors are intended to provide a

general sense of the articulation pathway options available to a qualification within a particular qualifications sub-framework (for example, HEQSF), as well as across qualifications sub-frameworks (SAQA, 2012). The process of conceptualising and developing qualifications begins with the careful consideration of the level descriptors.

4.2.3 *Qualification types* are broad categories of qualifications, defined in terms of the level descriptors and other distinct features. When conceptualising and developing qualifications, it is essential to have a clear understanding of the type of qualification desired. The HEQSF has nine broad qualification types mapped into the six levels of the NQF from level 5 to 10. Five of these are at undergraduate level, while the remaining four are at postgraduate level. They are as follows:

4.2.3.1 Undergraduate qualification types

- Higher Certificate
- Advanced Certificate
- Diploma
- Advanced Diploma
- Bachelor's Degree

4.2.3.2 Postgraduate qualification types

- Bachelor's Honours Degree
- Postgraduate Diploma
- Master's Degree
- Doctoral Degree

The nine qualification types on the HEQSF are full qualifications that are registered as such on the NQF. At this stage, the HEQSF does not disaggregate the full qualifications into units that can be registered separately as part-qualifications on the higher education section of the NQF.

4.2.4 *Qualification descriptors* provide detailed characterisation of qualifications to enable further differentiation within the qualification types. They state the purpose of the qualification, its characteristics, including NQF level and credit load, and how it relates to other qualification types. As such, they provide the basis for designing, approving, accrediting and reviewing learning programmes that lead to specific qualifications. They

also enable comparison between qualification types. The HEQSF provides the qualification descriptors of all nine qualification types and their sub-types (see section 5). It is of critical importance that the qualification descriptors are studied prior to, and during the process of conceptualising and developing qualifications.

- 4.2.5 In higher education, the qualification descriptors presented in the HEQSF are complemented with *graduate attributes* as specified in qualification standards. Graduate attributes are the high-level qualities, skills and understanding that students must gain as a result of their learning and related experiences while pursuing a learning programme leading to a qualification. Graduate attributes emphasise a learning architecture that validates the agency and social and cultural resources of students. Currently not all higher education qualifications have qualification standards developed. However, for those that have qualification standards in place, the graduate attributes that are identified in the qualification standards must be considered in addition to the qualification descriptors when higher education institutions are conceptualising and developing qualifications.
- 4.2.6 *Designators* indicate the generic fields of study or disciplines that the qualifications encompass and/or the professions that the qualifications are aligned to. They are equated to the first order of the revised Classification of Educational Subject Matter (CESM). In few instances, they are equated to the second order of the revised CESM (DoE, 2008, as revised). Arts, Administration, Commerce, Education, Engineering, Science, and Social Sciences are examples of common qualification designators. Tight control in the identification, selection and definition of qualification designators is essential to limit the unnecessary proliferation of qualifications. Only degrees may have designators. Diplomas and certificates cannot have designators.
- 4.2.7 *Qualifiers* indicate the areas of specialisation within the fields of study, disciplines or professions. They are equated to the second and/or third order of the revised CESM (DoE, 2008), and may be used in all qualification types in order to indicate a field of specialisation. Qualifiers must be cognate to the field represented by a designator. As with designators, tight criteria should be used to decide on qualifiers for qualifications to prevent unnecessary proliferation of qualifications. At least fifty percent (50%) of the learning programme leading to the qualification should focus on the specialisation indicated by the qualifier. In addition, half (50%) of the credit load at the exit level for the qualification should be assigned to modules or courses whose content is focused on the specialisation indicated by the qualifier.
- 4.2.8 Annexure B provides further clarification and illustration of the relationship between CESM orders and designators and qualifiers.

4.3 Further characterisation of qualifications

4.3.1 Qualification types represent a higher level of characterisation of qualifications. Further characterisation at lower levels identifies qualification sub-types, and qualification elective streams. There are also exceptions to these lower-level characterisations of qualifications. All these are explained in the ensuing paragraphs.

4.3.2 *Qualification sub-types* are variants of a qualification type defined in terms of qualification routes which reflect the purposes and intended outcomes of qualifications, and their orientation towards conceptual and contextual knowledge. Although all higher education qualifications are required to include some components of conceptual and contextual knowledge, there are differences in the proportions and/or depth of conceptual and contextual knowledge embedded in them. Based on such differences, as well as on differences in the purposes and outcomes of qualifications, three qualification routes are distinguished. These are general, vocational and professional qualification routes.

4.3.2.1 The *general qualification route* comprises qualifications whose main purpose is to provide formative broad-based education, which is rich in conceptual knowledge and/or in investigative techniques that are used to create knowledge or refine and update existing knowledge to enrich the knowledge base in a particular discipline or field of study. The knowledge and investigative techniques are of a generic nature and, therefore, they can be adapted to be applied in diverse contexts (geographical, temporal, societal, political, legal, technological and other contexts). The main intended outcome of qualifications that fall within this qualification route is to produce graduates with a well-rounded knowledge base that can be applied in different contexts, including different work environments. Other intended outcomes are to produce graduates who are prepared to pursue advanced studies in the same fields or in related fields; and to produce graduates who can pursue academic and research careers. Some professional bodies also recognise qualifications in this category for professional registration purposes.

4.3.2.2 The *vocational qualification route* comprises qualifications whose main purpose is to provide instructional education that is designed for the students to acquire the knowledge, skills and competencies required for specific vocations or jobs. They are intended to make students acquire sound understanding of scientific and technological theory and their use or application in specific areas or fields of practice. The qualifications are

premised on the application of knowledge in authentic work contexts, and, therefore, there is much emphasis on contextual knowledge and/or technology which is specific to each vocation or job. For this reason, work-integrated learning, which can be achieved through work placement or work simulation or a combination of both, forms an integral component of the learning programmes leading to the qualifications within the vocational qualification route. The intended outcome of this qualification route is to produce graduates who are ready to work in specific vocations or jobs without the need for further training after obtaining their qualifications from higher education institutions. The graduates typically proceed straight to work as entry-level or intermediate-level technicians. After further and advanced studies, some may become technical instructors or lecturers in universities of technology or in technical and vocational education and training colleges, or progress to more advanced positions in the field.

- 4.3.2.3 The *professional qualification route* comprises qualifications that are developed and offered to provide education in specialised areas that are linked to specific practice-oriented professions such as architecture, engineering, and medicine, to give a few examples. The practice of these professions is regulated by statutory and/or non-statutory professional bodies, and the learning programmes leading to the qualifications are designed by the higher education institutions with some input from the relevant professional bodies. Therefore, qualifications that fall within this route provide education that has sound grounding in the conceptual and contextual knowledge in the specialised areas, as well as in the sets of skills and competencies determined by the relevant professional bodies. For this reason, the periods of study towards qualifications within this route are ordinarily longer than the corresponding periods of study towards qualifications on either the general or the vocational routes. The learning programmes leading to these qualifications may include components of work-integrated learning, workplace-based learning, project-based learning or simulation. The intended outcome of this qualification route is to produce graduates who possess the necessary conceptual and contextual knowledge linked to specific practice professions, as well as the sets of skills and knowledge that qualify them to be inducted into the respective professions after fulfilling the practice registration requirements of the respective professional bodies. At

postgraduate levels, qualifications that fall within this route produce graduates who can fulfil leadership roles in the fields of professional practice, take on specialist roles in the fields of practice, undertake advanced reflection on professional practices, and conduct research using sound methodologies in an area of specialisation.

4.3.2.4 The characteristics of the *general*, *vocational* and *professional* qualification routes as presented earlier are neither exclusive nor impermeable. This is intentional because not having sharp and hard boundaries around the qualification routes enables articulation to occur between qualifications that fall within different routes. For example, a student who successfully completes a vocational Advanced Diploma may articulate to a general Honours Bachelor's Degree.

4.3.3 Based on the three qualification routes, the qualification types multiply into sixteen qualification sub-types as reflected in Table 2.

Table 2: Higher education qualification types and sub-types

Higher education level	NQF level	Qualification type	Qualification sub-types defined on the basis of qualification routes		
			General	Vocational	Professional
Undergraduate	5	Higher Certificate	Higher Certificate: General	Higher Certificate: Vocational	N/A
	6	Advanced Certificate	N/A	Advanced Certificate: Vocational	N/A
	6	Diploma	N/A	Diploma: Vocational	N/A
	7	Advanced Diploma	N/A	Advanced Diploma: Vocational	N/A
	7	Bachelor's Degree	Bachelor's Degree: General	N/A	N/A – but note the exceptions in the qualification descriptors
Postgraduate	8	Bachelor's Degree	N/A	N/A	Bachelor's Degree: Professional
	8	Bachelor's Honours	Bachelor's Honours: General	N/A	
	8	Postgraduate Diploma	Postgraduate Diploma: General	N/A	Postgraduate Diploma: Professional
	9	Master's Degree (Research)	Master's Degree: General	N/A	N/A
	9	Master's Degree (Coursework)	Master's Degree: General	N/A	Master's Degree: Professional
	10	Doctoral Degree (Research)	Doctoral Degree: General	N/A	
	10	Doctoral Degree (Coursework and Research)	Doctoral Degree: General	N/A	Doctoral Degree: Professional

- 4.3.4 There must be due considerations of qualification sub-type when conceptualising and developing qualifications. Higher education institutions are required to specify the qualification sub-types when submitting applications to the HEQC for the accreditation of qualifications, and when reporting on them through the HEQCIS or HEMIS, whichever is applicable.
- 4.3.5 The Master's Degree has three *sub-types*. The first *sub-type* is the Master's: General, by research and thesis, for which the learning programme consists of a substantial advanced research project which culminates in the compilation of a thesis or dissertation, or other recognised research outputs such as scholarly publications. The second *sub-type* is Master's: General, by coursework and mini-dissertation or mini-thesis for which the learning programme comprises a structured curriculum with several modules or courses, and a short research project that culminates in the compilation of a mini-dissertation or a research report. The third *sub-type* is Master's: Professional, and its learning programme comprises a specialised practice-oriented course work, and a specialised practice-oriented research project leading to the compilation of a mini-dissertation, a treatise or a research report. Higher education institutions are required to specify the *sub-type* of the Master's Degree qualification when developing it, when applying to the HEQC for accreditation, and when reporting on it through the HEQCIS or HEMIS, whichever is applicable.
- 4.3.6 The Doctoral Degree has three *sub-types*. The first *sub-type* is Doctoral Degree: General, by research, for which the learning programme consists of research at the most advanced academic level which culminates in the preparation and submission of a thesis for assessment. Candidates may also present peer-reviewed scholarly publications, and, in certain fields, bodies of creative work such as artefacts. The second sub-type is Doctoral Degree: General, by coursework and research. The learning programme for this sub-type comprises a combination of prescribed coursework and advanced academic level research. The third *sub-type* is Doctoral Degree: Professional. Its learning programme comprises a combination of coursework and advanced research leading to the preparation and submission of a thesis for assessment, or the preparation and submission for assessment of other forms of research outputs recognised with the relevant professional field.
- 4.3.7 Below the qualification sub-type, a qualification can further be subdivided into *elective streams*, commonly known as 'majors'. Elective streams or majors are defined as areas of specialisation comprising closely related modules or courses. Having several elective streams within a qualification mitigates against the proliferation of qualifications because it counters the practice of developing each and every area of specialisation in a field of

study into a standalone qualification. An elective stream does not have the same conditions or requirements as a qualifier, but it still has to be cognate to a designator. Elective streams are not included in the name of a qualification, but they can be reflected on the certificate awarded for a qualification.

- 4.3.8 The HEQSF accommodates some qualifications which, owing to their national and international currency or to their specific vocational or professional training requirements, constitute *exceptions* to the qualifications sub-framework. The permitted exceptions are identified and elucidated as part of the descriptors of the relevant qualifications in section 5. They are not listed separately as they were in the HEQSF gazetted in 2013 (CHE, 2013).
- 4.3.9 The minister responsible for higher education, may, on the advice of the CHE, amend the exceptions.

4.4 Naming of qualifications

- 4.4.1 The HEQSF has a standard system for naming qualifications, which higher education institutions are expected to adopt in naming the qualifications that they develop and offer. When accrediting qualifications, the CHE requires that the names of the qualifications are consistent with the stipulations of the HEQSF. SAQA requires the same when registering higher education qualifications on the NQF.
- 4.4.2 The qualification type constitutes the first part of the name of a qualification. Therefore, the name of a qualification begins with *Higher Certificate ...*, *Advanced Certificate ...*, *Diploma ...*, *Advanced Diploma ...*, *Postgraduate Diploma ...*, *Bachelor ...*, *Bachelor Honours ...*, *Master ...*, and *Doctor ...*, as applicable.
- 4.4.3 For degrees, the second part of the name of a qualification is a designator that indicates the broad area of study, discipline, or profession linked to the degree (see paragraph 4.2.6). Common designators are Arts, Administration, Commerce, Education, Engineering, Science, and Social Sciences. When a designator is used, the first and second parts of the name of a degree are linked by the word 'of'. Therefore, where the first part is Bachelor (qualification type) and the second part is Science (designator), the two parts are linked by 'of' to become Bachelor of Science when written in full. However, the 'of' is omitted when the name of the qualification is abbreviated. For example, when abbreviated, Bachelor of Science is reflected as BSc without the 'of'. Similarly, where the first part is Bachelor (qualification type) and the second part is Commerce (designator), the two parts are linked by 'of' to become Bachelor of Commerce when

written in full. When the name of the qualification is abbreviated, the 'of' is omitted to become BCom.

- 4.4.4 Conventionally, the word 'Philosophy' is used as the designator for the Doctoral Degree: General. Therefore, the name of this qualification is Doctor of Philosophy which is abbreviated as PhD or DPhil. The designator for the Doctoral Degree: Professional, is usually the professional area of practice. For example, if the professional area of practice is Clinical Psychology, the latter becomes the designator, and the full name of the degree becomes Doctor of Clinical Psychology.
- 4.4.5 For diplomas and certificates, the second part of the name of a qualification is the qualifier that indicates the field of specialisation within a broad field of study (see paragraph 4.2.7). The qualifier follows immediately after the qualification type and is linked to the latter by the word 'in', for example, Postgraduate Diploma in Drama, and the abbreviated name becomes PGDip (Drama).
- 4.4.6 A qualifier can also be the third part of the name of a degree to denote the area of specialisation. In this regard, the word 'in' is used to link the third part of the name (qualifier) to the second part of the name (designator). The Bachelor of Science qualification, which is given as an example in paragraph 4.4.3 may have Biological Sciences as a qualifier which will make its full name Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences, for example. When abbreviated, the 'in' is dropped and the qualifier is enclosed in parentheses. Continuing with the example of Bachelor of Science in Biological Sciences, the abbreviated form of the name becomes BSc (Biological Sciences).
- 4.4.7 Qualifiers should be used sparingly to prevent unnecessary proliferation of qualifications. As stated in paragraph 4.2.7, three conditions must be met to use qualifiers. Firstly, at least fifty percent (50%) of the learning programme should focus on the specialisation indicated by the qualifier. Secondly, fifty percent (50%) of the credit load for the qualification should be assigned to modules or learning units that dwell on the specialisation indicated by the qualifier. Thirdly, fifty percent (50%) of the credit load at the exit level for the qualification should be assigned to modules or learning units that dwell on the specialisation indicated by the qualifier.
- 4.4.8 There are limits to the number of qualifiers permissible for each qualification type and sub-type. These limits are indicated in the qualification descriptors (see section 5). Instead of using more qualifiers for qualifications, higher education institutions could rather conceptualise and develop qualifications with elective streams or majors (see paragraph 4.3.6). Note, however, that elective streams are not standalone qualifications

and students who opt to take two elective streams in a qualification should still be conferred one qualification and not two qualifications. For example, a student who enrolls for a Bachelor of Commerce degree qualification, and who takes and successfully completes two elective streams – say Decision Science and Industrial Psychology – must simply be conferred a Bachelor of Commerce degree, and not two degrees (Bachelor of Commerce in Decision Science, and Bachelor of Commerce in Industrial Psychology). However, institutions may elect to indicate elective streams as endorsements on the certificates for the qualifications.

- 4.4.9 In cases where two qualifiers are used, the word 'in' should be used to link the second qualifier to the first qualifier. Using the example of the Postgraduate Diploma in Drama as provided in paragraph 4.4.5, if a second qualifier, Performance, is added, then the full name of the qualification becomes Postgraduate Diploma in Drama in Performance, abbreviated to PGDip (*Drama*) (*Performance*).
- 4.4.10 No designator or qualifier may be used in a qualification unless it is consistent with the stipulations of the HEQSF. To use a qualifier, at least fifty percent (50%) of the learning programme leading to the qualification should focus on the specialisation indicated by the qualifier, and half (50%) of the credit load at the exit level for the qualification should be assigned to modules or courses whose content focus on the specialisation indicated by the qualifier.
- 4.4.11 Institutions have the option of developing and offering degree qualifications without qualifiers. Such degree qualifications are known as '*generic qualifications*', because their names do not specify areas of specialisation, and yet they do cater for several areas of specialisation as indicated in the qualification descriptors. An example of a generic undergraduate level would be a Bachelor of Social Science degree that caters for specialisations in geography, history, sociology and political science. An example of a generic postgraduate qualification is a Master of Science degree that caters for specialisations in chemistry, ecology, and physics. Specialisations can be offered on the basis of HEQC approval and programme-qualification-mix approval as appropriate. The areas of specialisation are not included in the names of generic qualifications, but they can be reflected on the certificate awards for the respective qualifications as an endorsement.
- 4.4.12 Qualification routes, and by extension qualification sub-types, must not be included in the names of qualifications.
- 4.4.13 Full stops, commas, or other punctuation marks must not be used in full nor in the abbreviated names of qualifications. Similarly, abbreviations of names of qualifications

must be written without full stops, commas or other punctuation marks. For example, the Doctor of Law degree may be abbreviated as LLD and not LL.D.; and the Doctor of Nursing degree may be abbreviated as DNurs and not D.Nurs. Full names and abbreviations of qualifications must not be written using upper case (capital) letters exclusively. Only the first letter of the qualification type, designator, and qualifier should be in upper case (capital) letters, for example **B**achelor of **A**rts in **L**inguistics.

4.5 Volume of learning and credits

- 4.5.1 The design of a learning programme that leads to the award of a qualification includes an estimation of the volume of learning that is required to achieve the intended learning outcomes for a specified qualification. A credit, then, is a measure of a unit volume of learning that counts towards the full volume of learning required for a specified qualification.
- 4.5.2 The credit system quantifies the number of notional hours of learning required for achieving the learning outcomes specified for a qualification. One credit is earned after ten notional hours of learning, which include the time for attending classes or tutorials, and time for self-study, group discussion and/or other types of group work, work-integrated learning, assignments, projects and examinations.
- 4.5.3 Ordinarily, the academic year for undergraduate qualifications, as well as for Bachelor's Honours Degree and Postgraduate Diploma, comprises thirty (30) weeks of learning, while for master's and doctoral qualifications it comprises forty-five (45) weeks of learning. Each learning week comprises forty (40) hours. These translate into one thousand and two hundred (1 200) notional hours per academic year for undergraduate qualifications, as well as for a Bachelor's Honours Degree and Postgraduate Diploma; and one thousand and eight hundred (1 800) notional hours per academic year for master's and doctoral qualifications, respectively. In turn, since one credit is earned from ten notional hours, it means that a full academic year for undergraduate qualifications, as well as for a Bachelor's Honours Degree and Postgraduate Diploma, can lead to one hundred and twenty (120) credits; while a full academic year for master's and doctoral qualifications can lead to one hundred and eighty (180) credits.
- 4.5.4 It follows from the foregoing that the design of learning programmes that lead to qualifications should, therefore, provide for a standard of one hundred and twenty (120) credits per academic year of studies leading to undergraduate qualifications, as well as leading to a Bachelor's Honours Degree and Postgraduate Diploma; and a standard of one hundred and eighty (180) credits per academic year for studies leading to master's

and doctoral qualifications. However, for learning programmes that run for more than one academic year, higher education institutions have the leeway to design such learning programmes with a credit load that varies from one year to another, as opposed to being rigidly set at 120 credits per academic year. For example, for a qualification that is conceptualised to be earned after three academic years of study, a higher education institution may set the credit load at the first, second and third year at 110, 120 and 130 respectively.

- 4.5.5 It is important to note that an academic year does not necessarily correspond with a calendar year. For example, a student studying part time might take two calendar years to complete one academic year. This means a student studying part time would likely accumulate a smaller number of credits each calendar year.
- 4.5.6 The volume of learning required for a qualification can be specified in terms of the total minimum number of credits required, as well as in terms of the minimum number of credits required at its exit level. In general, the number of credits required at the exit level of qualifications that span multiple levels, is one hundred and twenty (120). For example, a Bachelor's degree is a multi-level qualification with the three hundred and sixty (360) credits spread out across the multiple levels. However, 120 of those three hundred and sixty (360) credits must be at the exit level, which is NQF Level 7. On the other hand, a Higher Certificate has one level only, which is also the exit level. Therefore, its exit level credit load of one hundred and twenty (120) is also the total number of credits for the qualification. Furthermore, all of these credits are at the same level, which is Level 5.
- 4.5.7 The credit load for a qualification is independent of the mode of provision, which refers to how a learning programme is offered or delivered. For example, if the same qualification is offered in contact, distance, or blended mode, the credit load must be the same.
- 4.5.8 The credit loads stipulated by the HEQSF for each qualification type and/or sub-type represent the minimum. Some qualifications may require credit loads that exceed the minimum. If a qualification is conceptualised and developed to have more credits than the minimum stipulated by the HEQSF, the quantity of credits in excess of the minimum must be reasonable so as not to unfairly overburden students with heavy workloads. To this end, the quantity of credits in excess of the minimum is capped at ten percent (10%) of the minimum credit load stipulated by the HEQSF. This limit must not be exceeded unless it is a professional requirement which is stipulated by a professional body recognised by SAQA.

- 4.5.9 For a qualification that requires more than one academic year of full-time study to complete, credits for the foundational years should be at relevant levels that are lower than the exit level. For example, for a three-year Bachelor's degree at NQF Level 7, the one hundred and twenty (120) credits at the end of the first academic year would ordinarily be at NQF Level 5 (perhaps with a small portion at NQF Level 6); the one hundred and twenty (120) credits at the end of the second academic year would ordinarily be at NQF Level 6 (perhaps with a small portion at NQF Level 7); and the one hundred and twenty (120) credits at the end of the third and exit year must be at NQF Level 7.
- 4.5.10 No qualifications should have credits at a level that is higher than its exit level. For example, a Bachelor's Degree at NQF Level 7 must not be designed to have a portion of its credit load at Level 8.
- 4.5.11 Although credits at particular NQF levels represent achievement of learning at the relevant cognitive level of difficulty, credits for different qualification types which are at the same NQF level, are not necessarily directly exchangeable or interchangeable because the credits relate to the purpose of a particular qualification. This means that, for example, credits for a Higher Certificate at NQF Level 5 are not necessarily interchangeable with credits for NQF Level 5 in a learning programme designed to lead to a Bachelor's Degree. Therefore, the mere fact that the Higher Certificate and the first year of a Bachelor's Degree are both on NQF Level 5, does not imply that the content is the same and the credits are directly exchangeable or interchangeable. Similarly, credits earned for qualifications on NQF Levels 5 to 8 on the OQSF, are not necessarily directly exchangeable or interchangeable with credits earned for qualifications on levels 5 to 8 on the HEQSF.

5. Qualification descriptors

Certificates

<p>Qualification type Higher Certificate</p>
<p>Sub-type and route Higher Certificate (General)</p>
<p>Type specifications NQF Level: 5 Minimum total credits: 120 Minimum credits at Level 5: 120</p>
<p>Designators Not applicable</p>
<p>Qualifiers Maximum one Example: Higher Certificate in Tourism</p>
<p>Abbreviation HCert (Tourism)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics The purpose of this qualification is to equip graduates with basic knowledge, cognitive and conceptual tools, and skills required for success in a particular discipline in higher education. WIL in selected modalities can be integrated, but is not required. The qualification can be designed for specific use as an access qualification for admission to study for a degree.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements The minimum admission requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Senior Certificate (SC) with achievements that meet the legislated requirements set for entry into a Higher Certificate; or • A National Senior Certificate (NSC) with achievements that meet the requirements set for entry into a Higher Certificate; or • A National Senior Certificate – Vocational Level 4 (NCV) with achievements that meet the legislated requirements set for entry into a Higher Certificate. <p>Applicants may also be admitted to the Higher Certificate via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of prior learning; • A National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA); and • National or Higher Occupational Certificate.
<p>Progression Completion of the Higher Certificate meets the minimum admission requirement into a cognate Advanced Certificate, or an appropriate Diploma or a Bachelor's Degree. A qualification may not be awarded for early exit from a Higher Certificate programme.</p>

<p>Qualification type Higher Certificate</p>
<p>Sub-type and route Higher Certificate (Vocational)</p>
<p>Type specifications NQF Level: 5 Minimum total credits: 120 Minimum credits at Level 5: 120</p>
<p>Designators Not applicable</p>
<p>Qualifiers Maximum one Example: Higher Certificate in Nursing</p>
<p>Abbreviation HCert (Nursing)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics The purpose of this qualification is to ensure the attainment of a basic level of higher education knowledge and competence for a particular occupation. The student has to be capable of applying such knowledge and competence in an occupation or role in the workplace. The qualification typically prepares people for entry-level jobs in certain fields, intermediate jobs in certain fields or income generating opportunities. This qualification includes a WIL component in the form of a simulated work experience or a workplace-based learning component.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements The minimum admission requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Senior Certificate (SC) with achievements that meet the legislated requirements set for entry into a Higher Certificate; or • A National Senior Certificate (NSC) with achievements that meet the requirements set for entry into a Higher Certificate; or • A National Senior Certificate – Vocational Level 4 (NCV) with achievements that meet the legislated requirements set for entry into a Higher Certificate. <p>Applicants may also be admitted to the Higher Certificate via:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of prior learning; • A National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA); and • National or Higher Occupational Certificate.
<p>Progression Completion of the Higher Certificate meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to an appropriate Advanced Certificate. Accumulated credits may also be presented for admission into a cognate Diploma. A Higher Certificate may also allow access to an appropriate Bachelor Degree. A qualification may not be awarded for early exit from a Higher Certificate programme.</p>
<p>Exception Note that some professional Higher Certificates require a minimum number of credits that exceeds the 10% limit. For example, the Higher Certificate in Engineering (140 credits).</p>

Qualification type Advanced Certificate
Sub-type and route Advanced Certificate (Vocational)
Type specifications NQF Level: 6 Minimum total credits: 120 Minimum credits at Level 6: 120
Designators Not applicable
Qualifiers Maximum one Example: Advanced Certificate in Banking
Abbreviation AdvCert (Banking)
Purpose and characteristics This qualification is primarily vocational or industry oriented. It emphasises selected general principles together with more specific procedures and their application and/or technology transfer. The qualification provides students with a sound knowledge base in a particular field or discipline and the ability to apply their knowledge and skills to particular career or professional contexts. Students on this qualification are normally prepared to enter a specific niche in the labour market. This qualification typically includes a WIL component in the form of a simulated work experience or workplace-based learning.
Minimum admission requirements The minimum admission requirement is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Higher Certificate in an appropriate field. Applicants may also be admitted to the Advanced Certificate on the basis of recognition of prior learning.
Progression Completion of the Advanced Certificate meets the admission requirements for a cognate Diploma or Bachelor's Degree.

Diplomas

Qualification type Diploma
Sub-type and route Diploma (Vocational)
Type specifications NQF Level: 6 Minimum total credits: 360 Minimum credits at Level 6: 120
Designators

Not applicable
Qualifiers Maximum one Example: Diploma in Nursing
Abbreviations Dip (Nursing)
Purpose and characteristics This qualification primarily has a vocational orientation, which includes professional, vocational, or industry specific knowledge that provides a sound understanding of general theoretical principles as well as a combination of specific procedures and their applications. A depth and specialisation of knowledge, together with practical skills and experience in the workplace, enable successful students to enter a number of career paths and to apply their learning to particular employment contexts from the outset. WIL in the form of a simulated work experience of workplace-based learning has to be added. Up to 120 credits can be assigned to WIL.
Minimum admission requirements The minimum admissions requirement is: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Senior Certificate (SC) with achievements that meet the legislated requirements set for entry into a Diploma; or • A National Senior Certificate (NSC) with achievements that meet the requirements set for entry into a Diploma; or • A National Senior Certificate Vocational (NCV) Level 4 with achievements that meet the legislated requirements set for entry into a Diploma; or • A Higher Certificate or Advanced Certificate in a cognate field. Applicants may also be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.
Progression Completion of the 360-credit Diploma meets the entrance requirements for the Advanced Diploma.

Qualification type Advanced Diploma
Sub-type and route Advanced Diploma (Vocational)
Type specifications NQF Level: 7 Minimum total credits: 120 Minimum credits at Level 7: 120
Designators Not applicable
Qualifiers Maximum one Example: Advanced Diploma in Nursing, Advanced Diploma in Technical and Vocational Teaching
Abbreviations AdvDip (Nursing); AdvDip (TVT)
Purpose and characteristics The purpose of this qualification is to provide professional preparation by offering an intensive, focused and applied specialisation. This qualification is therefore particularly suitable for continuing

<p>professional development through the inculcation of a deep and systematic understanding of current thinking, practice, theory and methodology in an area of specialisation. For example, a graduate might register for an Advanced Diploma in Education to start a career in teaching after completing a relevant Bachelor's Degree (see the Qualification Exception below regarding the PGCE).</p> <p>This qualification also aims to prepare students for postgraduate study through the deepening of their knowledge and understanding of theories, methodologies and practices in specific academic disciplines and fields, as well as the development of their ability to formulate, undertake and resolve more complex theoretical and practice-related problems and tasks through the selection and use of appropriate methods and techniques.</p> <p>The Advanced Diploma may be offered with a combination of coursework and WIL in the form of workplace-based learning or work-simulated learning. Some professional bodies can also endorse qualifications in this category for professional recognition. A formal research component is not required.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements The minimum admissions requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Diploma of 360 credits; or • A Bachelor's Degree. <p>Applicants may also be admitted to the Advanced Diploma on the basis of the recognition of prior learning.</p>
<p>Progression Completion of an Advanced Diploma may meet the requirements for entry into a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Postgraduate Diploma; • A Bachelor Honours Degree; or • A Bachelor's Degree.
<p>Qualification exception The Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) conforms to the descriptors for an AdvDip at NQF Level 7, and the admission requirements, purpose, characteristics and progression opportunities for the PGCE are the same as those of the AdvDip. This has to be read in the context of the Revised Policy for Teacher Education Qualifications as published in Government Gazette No 38487, 19 February 2015.</p>

<p>Qualification type Postgraduate Diploma</p>
<p>Sub-type and route Postgraduate Diploma (General)</p>
<p>Type specifications NQF Level: 8 Minimum total credits: 120 Minimum credits at Level 8: 120</p>
<p>Designators Not applicable</p>
<p>Qualifiers Maximum one Example: Postgraduate Diploma in Organisational Systems; Postgraduate Diploma in Gender Studies</p>

<p>Abbreviations PGDip (Organisational Systems); PGDip (Gender Studies)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics The primary purpose of a Postgraduate Diploma is to strengthen and deepen working professionals' theoretical and practical knowledge to enhance their professional and leadership capabilities. This qualification can also enable people from different disciplinary backgrounds to gain access to, and specialise in, an interdisciplinary field. For example, a qualified medical specialist may opt to complete a Postgraduate Diploma in Data Science to assist with the processing of data for work purposes. Such a person may have no prior qualifications in Data Science and may not want to follow vertical articulation into Data Science. The Postgraduate Diploma may be offered with a combination of coursework and integrated forms of WIL. A formal research component is not required.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements The minimum admissions requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Bachelor's Degree; or • An Advanced Diploma. <p>Applicants may be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.</p>
<p>Progression Completion of a Postgraduate Diploma meets the minimum entrance requirement for admission to a cognate Master's Degree, usually in the area of specialisation of the Postgraduate Diploma. While the Postgraduate Diploma may serve as a minimum admission requirement for a Master's Degree (General by Coursework) or a Master's Degree (Professional), students intending to progress to a Master's Degree (General by Research) may be required to complete additional research methodology modules at NQF Level 8, as determined by the admitting institution.</p>

<p>Qualification type Postgraduate Diploma</p>
<p>Sub-type and route Postgraduate Diploma (Professional)</p>
<p>Type specifications NQF Level: 8 Minimum total credits: 120 Minimum credits at Level 8: 120</p>
<p>Designators Not applicable</p>
<p>Qualifiers Maximum one Example: Postgraduate Diploma in Nursing; Postgraduate Diploma in Special Needs Education</p>
<p>Abbreviations PGDip (Nursing); PGDip (Special Needs Education)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics The primary purpose of a Postgraduate Diploma is to strengthen and deepen professional knowledge. This qualification carries recognition by a professional or statutory body. Students will learn about methods and techniques for analysing and resolving practice-related problems and tasks. Critical reflection on experience in the field of practice will be a key pedagogical tool. This qualification is offered with a combination of coursework and appropriate forms of WIL in the form of workplace-based learning or work-simulated learning. A formal research component is not required.</p>

<p>Minimum admission requirements</p> <p>The minimum admissions requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Bachelor's Degree in a cognate field; or • An Advanced Diploma. <p>Applicants may be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.</p>
<p>Progression</p> <p>Completion of a Postgraduate Diploma meets the minimum entrance requirement for admission to a cognate Master's Degree, usually in the area of specialisation of the Postgraduate Diploma. While the Postgraduate Diploma may serve as a minimum admission requirement for a Master's Degree (General by Coursework) or a Master's Degree (Professional), students intending to progress to a Master's Degree (General by Research) may be required to complete additional research methodology modules at NQF Level 8, as determined by the admitting institution.</p>

Bachelor's Degrees

<p>Qualification type</p> <p>Bachelor's Degree</p>
<p>Sub-type and route</p> <p>Bachelor (General)</p>
<p>Type specifications</p> <p>NQF Level: 7 Minimum total credits: 360 Minimum credits at Level 7: 120</p>
<p>Designators</p> <p>Designators are permitted for general degrees. Bachelor's Degree designators indicate broad and generic areas of study, disciplines or professions. Examples include Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Social Science, Bachelor of Science and Bachelor of Commerce.</p>
<p>Qualifiers</p> <p>Maximum one is permitted for a general degree with a designator. A maximum of two qualifiers is permitted for generic general Bachelor's Degrees. Example: Bachelor of Commerce in Accounting. The subject matter of the qualifier must constitute at least 50% of the total content and credit value of the qualification, and at least 50% of the content and credits at the exit level. A single qualifier can also be used without a designator. A single qualifier can also be used without a designator. In this case the rules for designators apply to the qualifier.</p>
<p>Abbreviations</p> <p>BCom; BCom (Accounting)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics</p> <p>The general Bachelor's Degree is designed to provide students with a well-balanced education that emphasises general principles and theory as preparation for entry into general employment or for a postgraduate programme. Graduates will develop cognitive academic proficiency and learn how to apply theories in addressing a broad range of problems in the rapidly changing technological, economic and social environment. In some cases, the Bachelor's Degree may enable graduates to meet the requirements for registration with professional bodies. A research component is not a requirement.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements</p> <p>The minimum admission requirement is:</p>

- A Senior Certificate (SC) with achievements that meet the legislated requirements set for entry into a degree; or
- A National Senior Certificate (NSC) with achievements that meet the requirements set for entry into a degree; or
- A National Senior Certificate (Vocational) (NCV) - Level 4 - with achievements that meet the legislated requirements set for entry into a degree; or
- A Higher Certificate.

Applicants may also be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.

Progression

A Bachelor's Degree is the minimum requirement for admission to a Bachelor Honours Degree or a Postgraduate Diploma. Admission into these qualifications is usually in the area of specialisation or in the discipline taken as a major, or field of practice, in the Bachelor's Degree. Graduates of a general Bachelor's degree may be eligible for admission into a professionally oriented Advanced Diploma, depending on the focus and relevance of their prior studies.

Qualification exception

The Bachelor of Education (BEd) is a 480-credit qualification at NQF Level 7 and thus differs from other Bachelor's Degrees that consist of 360 credits. The higher credit value of the BEd accommodates the substantial component of workplace-based learning. Students who graduate with a BEd have to complete an NQF 8 qualification such as the BEd (Hons) before they may enrol for a Master's Degree. This has to be read in the context of the Revised Policy for Teacher Education Qualifications as published in Government Gazette No 38487, 19 February 2015.

Some professional bodies recognise the Bachelor's degree (general, NQF Level 7) for educating and training certain categories of professionals in their respective professions. In that regard, the professional bodies concerned stipulate unique credit and WIL requirements that are not consistent with the requirements of the ordinary Bachelor's degree (Level 7). An example is the Bachelor of Engineering Technology that has 420 credits and that leads to professional registration with the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA).

<p>Qualification type Bachelor's Degree</p>
<p>Sub-type and route Bachelor (Professional)</p>
<p>Type specifications NQF Level: 8 Minimum total credits: 480 Minimum credits at Level 8: 120 Minimum guided research credits at Level 8: 30</p>
<p>Designators Bachelor's Degree designators indicate the professional area of practice.</p>
<p>Qualifiers Maximum one is permitted. The qualifier has to be cognate to the field of the designator and has to constitute at least 240 credits (50%) with 120 credits at Level 8. Half (50%) of the credits at the exit level should be directly tied to the specialisation or field of the qualifier.</p> <p>Examples: Bachelor of Engineering in Electrical Engineering; Bachelor of Social Work; Bachelor of Pharmacy</p>
<p>Abbreviations</p>

BEng (Electrical Engineering); B (Social Work); B (Pharm)
<p>Purpose and characteristics</p> <p>The professional Bachelor's Degree qualifies graduates to undertake professional training or work in a specific field of practice. Graduates will develop a broad and coherent understanding of the concepts, principles and methodologies that underpin professional or industry-related practice in a specific field. The degree prepares students to be able to undertake Master's level study by providing them with an opportunity to develop knowledge and skills in research methodologies and techniques of the discipline.</p> <p>A professional Bachelor's Degree at Level 8 has to include a research component or a practical project that is appropriate to the field of study or practice, and that is aligned with the exit level of the qualification. The practical project can involve the application of advanced methodologies to a specific real-world problem. The Bachelor's Degree (professional) may include a component of work-integrated learning and is usually designed in consultation with a professional body.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements</p> <p>The minimum admission requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Senior Certificate (SC) with achievements that meet the legislated requirements set for entry into a degree; or • A National Senior Certificate (NSC) with achievements that meet the requirements set for entry into a degree; or • A National Senior Certificate (Vocational) (NCV) - Level 4 - with achievements that meet the legislated requirements set for entry into a degree; or • A Higher Certificate. <p>Applicants may also be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.</p>
<p>Progression</p> <p>A professional Bachelor's Degree (480 credits) is the minimum requirement for admission to a Master's Degree. Admission into these qualifications is usually in the area of specialisation or in the field of practice, in the Bachelor's Degree.</p>
<p>Qualification exception</p> <p>Qualifications in professional fields such as the Health Sciences, for example the MBChB, BChD and BVSc, require a formal learning programme that considerably exceeds the specifications for a professional Bachelor's degree in terms of their credit load.</p> <p>The LLB should be considered an integrated professional Bachelor's Degree that is offered over a minimum of four years to accommodate the relevant curriculum structures of the LLB.</p>

<p>Qualification type</p> <p>Bachelor Honours Degree</p>
<p>Sub-type and route</p> <p>Bachelor Honours (General)</p>
<p>Type specifications</p> <p>NQF Level: 8 Minimum total credits: 120 Minimum guided research credits at Level 8: 30</p>
<p>Designators</p> <p>Bachelor Honours Degree designators are specific and limited to broad, interdisciplinary and generic areas of study, disciplines and disciplines. Examples include Bachelor of Arts Honours, Bachelor of Social Science Honours, Bachelor of Science Honours, Bachelor of Commerce Honours.</p>

<p>Qualifiers Maximum one is permitted. Example: Bachelor of Science Honours in Microbiology or Bachelor of Arts Honours in Applied Linguistics.</p>
<p>Abbreviations BSchHons (Microbiology); BAHons (Applied Linguistics)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics A Bachelor Honours Degree enables students to consolidate and advance their knowledge and skills in a field of study and to develop research capacity in the methodology, techniques and technology used in the field of study. This qualification has to include conducting and reporting research under supervision, worth at least 30 credits, in the form of a discrete research component that is appropriate to the field of study. In some cases, the Bachelor Honours Degree may enable graduates to meet the requirements for registration as professional designations with professional bodies.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements The minimum admission requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appropriate Bachelor's Degree; or • An Advanced Diploma within a cognate field of study. <p>Applicants may be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.</p>
<p>Progression Completion of a Bachelor Honours Degree is the minimum requirement for admission into a Master's degree in a cognate field of study or specialisation area of the Bachelor Honours Degree.</p>

Master's Degrees

<p>Qualification type Master's Degree</p>
<p>Sub-type and route Master (General) (Research)</p>
<p>Type specifications NQF Level: 9 Minimum total credits: 180 Minimum credits at Level 9: 180 Minimum independent research credits: 180 (Level 9)</p>
<p>Designators The designators for the Master's Degree describe the broad academic knowledge area of the qualification. Examples include Master of Arts; Master of Science, Master of Social Science, Master of Commerce, Master of Laws, Master of Education. A Master's Degree by dissertation with a strong theoretical base may be known as a Master of Philosophy.</p>
<p>Qualifiers Maximum one is permitted. This also applies to generic Master's Degrees. Example: Master of Arts in Chinese Studies</p>
<p>Abbreviations MA (Chinese Studies)</p>

<p>Purpose and characteristics</p> <p>Master's Degree graduates, in general, have to be able to reflect critically on theory and its application. They have to be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, design and critically appraise research, make sound judgements using data and information at their disposal and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences. They have to demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks with a theoretical underpinning and continue to advance their knowledge, understanding and skills.</p> <p>This Master's Degree requires students to conduct research on a particular topic/issue at an advanced level in a field of specialisation, comprising a minimum of 180 credits. The research component or components of a general Master's Degree should be commensurate with the characteristics of the discipline and field as well as the purpose of the programme, and in addition to a dissertation or treatise may take the form of a technical report, one or more creative performances or works, or a series of peer-reviewed articles or other research-equivalent outputs.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements</p> <p>The minimum admissions requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A relevant Bachelor Honours Degree; or • A relevant Postgraduate Diploma; or • A relevant Professional Bachelor Degree at Level 8. <p>Applicants may be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.</p>
<p>Progression</p> <p>Completion of a Master's Degree meets the minimum requirement for admission into a Doctoral Degree in the knowledge area of the Master's degree or cognate knowledge area.</p>

<p>Qualification type</p> <p>Master's Degree</p>
<p>Sub-type and route</p> <p>Master's (General) (Coursework)</p>
<p>Type specifications</p> <p>NQF Level: 9 Minimum total credits: 180 Minimum credits at Level 9: 180 Minimum independent research credits: 60</p>
<p>Designators</p> <p>The designators for the Master's Degree describe the broad academic knowledge area of the qualification. Examples include Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of Social Science, Master of Commerce, Master of Laws, Master of Education. A Master's Degree by dissertation with a strong theoretical base may be known as a Master of Philosophy.</p>
<p>Qualifiers</p> <p>Maximum one is permitted. Example: Master of Arts in Chinese Studies</p>
<p>Abbreviations</p> <p>MA (Chinese Studies)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics</p>

<p>A coursework Master's degree deepens knowledge and understanding of theory and research methodology, required for high levels of scholarly research in a field of specialisation. Coursework has to be of sufficient depth and specialisation in line with the level of the programme.</p> <p>Students have to be able to reflect critically on the theory and its applications. They have to be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively; design and critically appraise research, make sound judgements using data and information at their disposal; communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences; demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems; act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks with a theoretical underpinning; and continue to advance their knowledge, understanding and skills.</p> <p>The research component has to be commensurate with the characteristics of the discipline and field as well as the purpose of the programme, and in addition to a dissertation or treatise, may take the form of a technical report, one or more creative performances or works, or a series of peer-reviewed articles or other research-equivalent outputs that demonstrate the required depth of independent research. The research project has to be produced at Level 9 for the total of 60 credits.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements The minimum admissions requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A relevant Bachelor's Honours Degree; or • A relevant Postgraduate Diploma; or • A relevant Professional Bachelor's Degree at Level 8. <p>Applicants may also be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.</p>
<p>Progression Completion of a Master's Degree meets the minimum requirement for admission into a Doctoral Degree in the knowledge area of the Master's Degree or cognate knowledge area.</p>

<p>Qualification type Master's Degree</p>
<p>Sub-type and route Master's (Professional)</p>
<p>Type specifications NQF Level: 9 Minimum total credits: 180 Minimum credits at Level 9: 180 Minimum independent research credits: 45 (Level 9)</p>
<p>Designators The designators for the Master's Degree describe the broad academic knowledge area of the qualification. Examples include Master of Education (MEd) and Master of Medicine (MMed).</p>
<p>Qualifiers Maximum one Example: Master of Education in Educational Psychology; Master of Medicine in General Surgery</p>
<p>Abbreviations MEd (Educational Psychology), MMed (General Surgery)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics The Master's Degree (professional) will expose students to a body of knowledge that promotes deep understanding of developments in a field of study and specialised professional practice, as well as</p>

knowledge of research principles, methods and technology applicable to the discipline and its professional practice. Coursework has to be of sufficient depth and specialisation in line with the level of the programme.

Students have to be able to reflect critically on the theory and its applications. They have to be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively; design and critically appraise research, make sound judgements using data and information at their disposal; communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences; demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems; act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks with a theoretical underpinning; and continue to advance their knowledge, understanding and skills.

The research component or components of a professional Master's Degree has/have to be commensurate with the characteristics of the discipline and field as well as the purpose of the programme, and in addition to a dissertation or treatise may take the form of a technical report, one or more creative performances or works, or a series of peer-reviewed articles or other research-equivalent outputs that demonstrate the required depth of independent research at this level and a contribution to the practice of the discipline. The research project, combination of projects, artefacts or performance has to be produced at Level 9 with a minimum of 45 credits.

The endorsement of professional body is not an absolute requirement.

Minimum admission requirements

The minimum admissions requirement is:

- A relevant Bachelor Honours Degree; or
- A relevant Postgraduate Diploma; or
- A relevant Professional Bachelor's Degree at Level 8.

Applicants may also be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.

Progression

Completion of a Master's Degree meets the minimum requirement for admission into a Doctoral Degree in the knowledge area of the Master's Degree or cognate knowledge area.

Exception

In certain professions, for example in the Health Sciences (Medicine), a specific type of Master's Degree is required for registration as a professional who can practice (namely, the MMed, MMedVet and MDent). This type of Master's Degree may carry a credit load far in excess of the indicative 180 credits that the HEQSF ordinarily requires for a Master's Degree.

Doctoral Degrees

<p>Qualification type Doctoral Degree</p>
<p>Sub-type and route Doctor (General) (Research)</p>
<p>Type specifications NQF Level: 10 Minimum total credits: 360 Minimum credits at Level 10: 360 Minimum independent research credits: 360</p>
<p>Designators The designator is indicated as Philosophy. The name Doctor of Philosophy is used with the abbreviation PhD.</p>

<p>Qualifiers Maximum one is permitted – often the qualifier is the name of the discipline or area of specialisation. This also applies to a generic Doctoral Degree. Example: PhD in Education; PhD in Fine Arts</p>
<p>Abbreviations PhD (Education); PhD (Fine Arts)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics A Doctoral Degree allows graduates to develop the highest level of holistic and systematic understanding of scholarship in, and stewardship of, a field of study through an original contribution that deepens the frontiers of knowledge and/or a creative domain.</p> <p>This qualification is based on empirical or theoretical/conceptual research and intends to generate new knowledge. The emphasis is on scientific research that investigates some aspect of reality or theory in detail and depth to introduce into a field of expertise a new concept/theory that should be acceptable to a particular community of practice or researchers.</p> <p>Coursework may be required as preparation or value addition to the research, but does not contribute to the credit value of the qualification.</p> <p>The Doctoral Degree requires a student to undertake research at the most advanced academic levels culminating in the submission, assessment and acceptance of a thesis. However, students may also present peer-reviewed academic articles and papers, and, in certain fields, creative work, such as artefacts, compositions, public performances and public exhibitions in partial fulfilment of the research requirements. The degree may be earned through pure discipline-based or multidisciplinary research that demonstrates the required depth of independent research at this level and a contribution to the discipline.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements The minimum admissions requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appropriate Master's Degree. <p>Applicants may also be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.</p>
<p>Progression The Doctoral Degree is the highest qualification awarded within this framework.</p>

<p>Qualification type Doctoral Degree</p>
<p>Sub-type and route Doctor (General) (Coursework and Research)</p>
<p>Type specifications NQF Level: 10 Minimum total credits: 360 Minimum credits at Level 10: 360 Minimum independent research credits: 240</p>
<p>Designators The designator is indicated as Philosophy. The name Doctor of Philosophy is used with the abbreviation PhD.</p>

<p>Qualifiers Maximum one is allowed as the name of the discipline or area of specialisation. This also applies to generic Doctoral Degrees. Example: PhD in Education; PhD in Fine Arts</p>
<p>Abbreviations PhD (Education); PhD (Fine Arts)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics A Doctoral degree allows graduates to develop the highest level of holistic and systematic understanding of scholarship in, and stewardship of, a field of study through an original contribution that deepens the frontiers of knowledge and/or a creative domain.</p> <p>This qualification is based on the combination of prescribed coursework and an empirical or theoretical/conceptual research that seeks to generate new knowledge. The prescribed coursework required as preparation for research work, and, in some fields, as the necessary learning to develop and/or assess some of the requisite graduate attributes that may not be easily developed and/or assessed through research and thesis. Up to a maximum of 120 credits of the total of 360 credits can be allocated to prescribed coursework.</p> <p>The research component focuses on scientific research that investigates some aspect of reality or theory in detail and depth to introduce into a field of expertise a new concept/theory that should be acceptable to a particular community of practice or researchers.</p> <p>This Doctoral Degree requires a student to undertake research at the most advanced academic levels culminating in the submission, assessment and acceptance of a thesis. However, students may also present peer-reviewed academic articles and papers, and, in certain fields, creative work, such as artefacts, compositions, public performances and public exhibitions in partial fulfilment of the research requirements. The degree may be earned through pure discipline-based or multidisciplinary research that demonstrates the required depth of independent research at this level and a contribution to the discipline. The research component has to be produced at Level 10 with a minimum of 240 credits.</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements The minimum admissions requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appropriate Master's Degree. <p>Applicants may also be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.</p>
<p>Progression The Doctoral Degree is the highest qualification awarded within this framework.</p>

<p>Qualification type Doctoral Degree</p>
<p>Sub-type and route Doctor (Professional)</p>
<p>Type specifications NQF Level: 10 Minimum total credits: 360 Minimum credits at Level 10: 360 Minimum independent research credits: 240</p>
<p>Designators Name of discipline.</p>

<p>Professional Doctorates have significant affiliations with professional bodies or a significant degree of recognition by industry or the community of practice. A commonly accepted designator should be used to indicate a specific area of professional practice. For example, Doctor of Internal Auditing, etc.</p>
<p>Qualifiers Maximum one Examples: Doctor of Education in Teacher Education; Doctor of Business Administration in Business Analytics; Doctor of Fine Arts in Music.</p>
<p>Abbreviations DEd (Teacher Education); DBA (Business Analytics); DFA (Music)</p>
<p>Purpose and characteristics The professional Doctorate is aimed at a career in the professions and/or industry and is designed around the development of high-level performance and innovation in a professional context. Coursework has to be of sufficient depth and specialisation in line with the level of the programme. Students are required to undertake a combination of coursework and advanced research leading to the submission, assessment and acceptance of a research component comprising an original thesis or research that is commensurate with the nature of the discipline or field and the specific area of enquiry. Professional Doctorates may also include appropriate forms of work-integrated learning.</p> <p>The defining characteristic of this qualification is that in addition to the demonstration of high-level research capability it requires the ability to integrate theory with practice through the application of theoretical knowledge to overly complex problems in a wide range of professional contexts. The degree allows graduates to develop the highest level of performance and innovation in a professional, industry/work or creative context. It provides an opportunity to entrench professional knowledge in a given field of study into a theoretical framework through an original contribution to knowledge or original application of existing knowledge to advance the frontiers of professional practice or creative domain and solve overly complex problems in a wide range of professional, industry/work and/or creative contexts. It also provides crucial skills to professionals who have to navigate complexities of a chosen profession.</p> <p>The research focuses, in general, on the ability to use theory to explain or clarify practice by examining the theoretical knowledge base and practice upon which it draws and, if necessary, identify what is essential to improve practice. The degree by research requires a student to undertake research culminating in the submission, assessment and acceptance of a thesis. However, students may also present peer-reviewed academic articles and papers, and, in certain fields, creative work, such as artefacts, compositions, public performances and public exhibitions in partial fulfilment of the research requirements that demonstrate the required depth of independent research at this level and a contribution to the practice of the discipline. The research component should comprise at least 66.7% of the degree (240 credits).</p>
<p>Minimum admission requirements The minimum admissions requirement is:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appropriate Master's Degree. <p>Applicants may also be admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning.</p>
<p>Progression The Doctoral Degree is the highest qualification awarded within this framework.</p>

Higher Doctorate

The Higher Doctorate is not a qualification type on the HEQSF. It is an earned award in recognition of a distinguished record of research in the form of published works, creative works and/or other scholarly contributions that are judged by leading national and international experts to make an exceptional and independent contribution to one or more disciplines or fields of study.

Honorary Doctorate

The Honorary Doctorate is not a qualification type on the HEQSF. It is an earned award in recognition of a record of work and/or contributions in a community or field of practice. The Higher Education Act (Act 101 of 1997, as amended), section 65, states that subject to its institutional statute, a public higher education institution may, without examination, confer honorary degrees of Master or Doctor in any faculty upon any person whom the public higher education institution may deem worthy of such a degree. The award of a degree contemplated in subsection (1) does not entitle the holder to practice any profession.

6. Conferring qualifications

6.1 Eligibility

- 6.1.1 Qualifications are conferred on the eligible candidates to mark their successful completion of learning programmes leading to the qualifications, and the achievement of the specified outcomes. As stipulated by section 65B(2) of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended, higher education institutions should confer qualifications only on those persons who registered as students at the higher education institutions for the prescribed periods, and who subsequently completed their learning programmes and attained the specified levels of achievement in the assessments attached to the relevant learning programmes.
- 6.1.2 Higher education institutions use student academic records as the basis to inform decisions to confer qualifications on the successful candidates. Student academic records include data and/or information about (a) the particulars of the students, (b) details about their admission to, and enrolment for the relevant learning programme, (c) achievements in various assessment activities attached to the learning programmes, (d) progression through the different levels of study within the learning programmes, and (e) fulfilment of the requirements for the qualifications in question. Qualifications should be conferred on students for whom the higher education institutions have complete academic records, from their admissions, all the way to the exit-level achievements.
- 6.1.3 Higher education institutions may also set other reasonable institution-specific eligibility requirements in addition to those presented in paragraphs 6.1.1 and 6.1.2.

6.2 Certification

- 6.2.1 Certificates are issued to the successful students to attest that they were conferred the specified qualifications by a particular higher education institution.
- 6.2.2 Along with the certificate, each graduating student must be issued a free complimentary academic transcript that forms part of the qualification documents. An academic transcript is not a qualification, but a document issued by an institution to provide a descriptive record of the learning a student has achieved at that institution. It also confirms whether or not a qualification has been conferred to the student in question.
- 6.2.3 An academic transcript must be accompanied by a transcript supplement, a document that provides details of the nature, level, content and context of the learning programme, and activities leading to the award of the qualification. The transcript supplement is the equivalence of a 'Diploma Supplement' of the European Higher Education Area, the 'Higher Education Statement' of Australia, and the 'Tertiary Education Qualification Statement' of New Zealand. The transcript supplement is intended to make the qualification more portable across national or state/provincial borders.
- 6.2.4 The *Norms of Certification for the Higher Education Sector within the context of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* (CHE, 2020) provides guidance to higher education institutions on the principles, rules and practices for fostering and enhancing the credibility, integrity, reliability, and validity of the systems and processes for conferring qualifications and issuing certificates to successful students.

7. Implementation

7.1 Implementation effective date and process

- 7.1.1 The revised HEQSF will be effective from the date on which it will be published in a Government Gazette. On that date, it will replace the HEQSF that was gazetted in 2013.
- 7.1.2 It is envisaged that implementation will not entail an elaborate project of aligning current higher qualifications and learning programmes to the revised HEQSF, 2025, at the same scale and in the same *modus operandi* as the HEQSF alignment project that ran from 2013 to 2019. The revisions to the qualification descriptors have not altered the fundamental structure and configuration of qualifications, such that it would not be necessary for higher education institutions to redesign and restructure their qualifications, and to remap the learning programmes leading to the qualifications. Only the 240-credit diploma is fundamentally affected because it is delisted and discontinued.

7.1.3 The implementation of the revised HEQSF will be managed through the processes outlined in the *Implementation Protocols for the External Quality Assurance Functions of the Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education in South Africa* (CHE, 2025) and manuals and good practice guides of the CHE.

7.2 Roles and responsibilities

7.2.1 The CHE

7.2.1.1 As the quality council for higher education, the CHE is responsible for the development and review of the HEQSF, as well as for managing the processes for its effective implementation.

7.2.1.2 A key responsibility in relation to managing the processes for the effective implementation of the HEQSF is that of developing and implementing a system for reviewing and evaluating qualifications and the learning programmes that are designed and developed to lead to those qualifications, to determine if they conform to (or are aligned to) the requirements of the HEQSF.

7.2.1.3 New qualifications and the associated learning programmes that are judged to be in conformity with (or aligned to) the requirements of the HEQSF are recommended to SAQA for registration on the NQF. Other responsibilities for the CHE include (a) managing data and information on higher education qualifications in general, in collaboration with SAQA and the DHET; (b) monitoring dates of expiry of registration of qualifications and liaising with both higher education institutions and SAQA regarding their reregistration and/or cancelation; (c) receiving and processing feedback from higher education institutions and other stakeholders regarding their experiences with the implementation of the HEQSF; and (d) using that feedback to plan and undertake review and updating of the HEQSF.

7.2.1.4 According to the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended, the CHE, as the quality council for higher education is further responsible for, accrediting higher education institutions that meet the requirements for developing and offering higher education qualifications; developing and implementing policy and criteria for the development of, registration and publication of higher education qualifications; developing and implementing policy and criteria for assessment, recognition of prior learning, and credit accumulation and transfer in higher education; and maintaining

databases of student achievement and related matters, and regularly submitting the data to the NLRD maintained by SAQA; and advising the Minister responsible for higher education and training, on matters regarding the advancement of the HEQSF, after consulting with SAQA.

7.2.2 SAQA

7.2.2.1 As the custodian of the NQF, and coordinator of the qualifications sub-frameworks, is responsible for, among other functions, (a) developing, maintaining and updating level descriptors; (b) developing and implementing, policy and criteria, for the development, registration and publication of qualifications and part-qualifications; (c) registering qualifications and the associated learning programmes on the HEQSF segment of the NQF, as recommended by the CHE; (d) developing broad policy frameworks on assessment, recognition of prior learning, and credit accumulation and transfer; and (e) maintaining an NLRD.

7.2.2.2 In relation to qualifications on the HEQSF, and data about achievements of higher education students, SAQA discharges the above responsibilities, working closely with the CHE.

7.2.3 Professional bodies

7.2.3.1 Professional bodies recognised by SAQA are enjoined by the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended, to cooperate with the CHE as the quality council for higher education, with respect to professional qualifications on the HEQSF and their quality assurance.

7.2.3.2 The CHE may require recommendations from professional bodies when considering applications for the accreditation of professional qualifications and/or the learning programmes leading to the professional qualifications.

7.2.3.3 The CHE and some statutory professional bodies have signed formal agreements to cooperate and collaborate in the processes of quality assurance for professional qualifications and learning programmes that lead to such qualifications.

7.2.4 Higher education institutions

7.2.4.1 Higher education institutions are responsible for conceptualising and developing qualifications that conform to the requirements of the HEQSF, and fit-for-purpose learning programmes that capture the essence of the intended qualification outcomes.

- 7.2.4.2 They are also required to submit the developed qualifications and/or learning programmes to the HEQC of the CHE to be considered for accreditation. Higher education institutions are not permitted to advertise and start offering qualifications before obtaining accreditation from the HEQC and before the qualifications are registered by SAQA.
- 7.2.4.3 Similarly, they are required to continue conforming to the requirements of the HEQSF after obtaining accreditation, subject themselves to quality reviews and/or themed reviews that the HEQC may undertake from time to time, and adopt and apply qualification and higher education practice standards.
- 7.2.4.4 Furthermore, public higher education institutions are expected to capture information and data on their HEQSF-aligned qualifications in HEMIS, while private higher education institutions are expected to capture information and data on their HEQSF-aligned qualifications in HEQCIS. Data and information captured in the HEMIS or the HEQCIS should include enrolment, progression and throughput, and achievements of students in the various qualifications. Institutions are required to ensure that the datasets submitted through HEMIS and HEQCIS are complete and accurate. The achievement data are extracted for submission to the NLRD maintained by SAQA. The NLRD plays an important role in the verification of qualifications obtained from South African higher education institutions.

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Annexure A

Articulation with QQSF Qualifications

<p>Qualification type Higher Certificate</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A National Occupational Certificate (Level 4) may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion, in the absence of regulations stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum admissions requirement for admission into a higher certificate. • A National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA) may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion, in the absence of regulations stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum admissions requirements set for entry into higher education; or • A Certificate for National Accredited Technical Education Diploma (NATED) 191 at N5 level may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion in the absence of a gazette stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum requirement for admission. In specific fields of study identified through Memoranda of Understanding an N4 may be deemed acceptable to gain admission into higher education in cognate fields. Such students would be deemed to have been admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning unless future regulations permit this practice subject to requisite achievement levels.

<p>Qualification type Advanced Certificate</p>
<p>A Higher Occupational Certificate in an appropriate field.</p>

<p>Qualification type Diploma</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A National Occupational Certificate (Level 4) may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion, in the absence of regulations stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum admissions requirement for admission into an Associate Diploma. • A National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA) may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion, in the absence of regulations stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum admissions requirements set for entry into higher education; or • A Certificate for NATED 191 at N5 level may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion, in the absence of a gazette stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum requirement for admission. In specific fields of study identified through Memoranda of Understanding an N4 may be deemed acceptable to gain admission into higher education in cognate fields. Such students would be deemed to have been admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning unless future regulations permit this practice subject to requisite achievement levels. • A National Occupational Certificate (Level 4) may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion in the absence of regulations stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum admissions requirement for admission into an Associate Diploma. • A National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA) may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion, in the absence of regulations stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum admissions requirements set for entry into higher education; or • A Certificate for NATED 191 at N5 level may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion in the absence of a gazette stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum requirement for admission. In specific fields of study identified through memoranda of understanding an N4 may be deemed acceptable to gain admission into higher education in cognate fields. Such students would be deemed to have been admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning unless future regulations permit this practice subject to requisite achievement levels.

Qualification type Advanced Diploma
An appropriate Occupational Diploma or Advanced Occupational Diploma may meet the requirement for admission.

Qualification type Postgraduate Diploma
An Advanced Occupational Diploma in a cognate field may satisfy the requirement for admission in a cognate field.

Qualification type Bachelor's Degree
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A National Occupational Certificate (Level 4) may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion, in the absence of regulations stipulating the conditions under which National Occupational Certificates meet the minimum admissions requirement into a Bachelor's Degree.• A National Senior Certificate for Adults (NASCA) may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion, in the absence of regulations stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum admissions requirements set for entry into higher education; or• A Certificate for NATED 191 at N5 level may enable access on the basis of recognition of prior learning or Senate discretion, in the absence of a gazette stipulating the achievements required to meet the minimum requirement for admission. In specific fields of study identified through memoranda of understanding an N4 may be deemed acceptable to gain admission into higher education in cognate fields. Such students would be deemed to have been admitted on the basis of recognition of prior learning unless future regulations permit this practice subject to requisite achievement levels.

Qualification type Bachelor Honours Degree
An Advanced Occupational Diploma in a cognate field may satisfy the requirement for admission in a cognate field.

Annexure B

The Classification of Educational Subject Matter (CESM), Designators and Qualifiers

The revised Classification of Educational Subject Matter (CESM) of 2008 (Department of Education, 2008) is helpful when considering the use of designators and qualifiers. The CESM provides an organisation of subject matter based on orders. The use of the CESM orders ensures that qualifiers are cognate to designators. Ordinarily, designators have to be aligned with the first or second order of CESM, and qualifiers have to be aligned with the second or third order of CESM. The following are examples:

First order (designator)	04: Business, Commerce and Management Sciences
Third order (qualifier)	040406: International Economics
Qualification type/sub-type	Bachelor's Degree (General)
Name of qualification	Bachelor of Commerce in International Economics

First order (designator)	03: Visual and Performing Arts
Second order (qualifier)	0303 Drama/Theatre Arts
Qualification type/sub-type	Bachelor Honours Degree (General)
Name of qualification	Bachelor of Arts Honours in Drama

Third order (qualifier)	081502: Mechatronic Engineering
Qualification type/sub-type	Higher Certificate (Vocational)
Name of qualification	Higher Certificate in Mechatronic Engineering