

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION

## The Higher Education Qualifications Framework

**Policy issued under the Higher Education Act, Act No. 101 of 1997**

**Draft for discussion**

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GOVERNMENT NOTICE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION  
NO. R ... of 2004The Higher Education Qualifications Framework  
HIGHER EDUCATION ACT, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997)

I, Grace Naledi Mandisa Pandor, Minister of Education, hereby publish *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework: Draft for Discussion*, as set out in the Schedule, for comment in terms of section 3 of the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997) and in fulfilment of section 4(3) of the Promotion of Administrative Justice Act, 2000 (Act No. 3 of 2000).

Separate and parallel qualifications structures for universities and technikons have hindered articulation and transfer between institutions and programmes. In Education White Paper 3: *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (1997), it was therefore proposed that a single qualifications framework should be developed for all higher education qualifications in line with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

*The National Plan for Higher Education* (2001) subsequently provided the strategic framework within which the national system of higher education is being re-engineered to meet the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The proposed higher education qualifications framework is an essential complement to the national plan.

A new qualifications framework must meet demanding criteria because it will guide the development of higher education qualifications and programmes for years to come. The framework should be clear and uncomplicated. It should reflect the present requirements of the unitary national higher education system and be capable of flexible application so that innovation is encouraged. It should be in line with international practice and should advance the objectives of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) of which it is an important part.

In developing the draft framework my Ministry has been greatly assisted by the reports of three specialist teams, each of which has evoked a penetrating and wide-ranging public response.

In January 2002, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) published *A New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education: Discussion Document* (2002). This study, known as the Draft NAP document, was prepared over a two-year period by an Academic Policy Task Team, comprising members of the CHE and representatives of national bodies including the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

The other two documents involved intensive work on the implementation of the NQF undertaken on behalf of the Ministries of Education and Labour. The *Report of the Study Team on the Implementation of the National Qualifications Framework* (April 2002) and *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework: Consultative Document* (July 2003) were both published by the Departments of Education and Labour. Both documents acknowledge the influence of the Draft NAP document.

This draft document has been developed with due recognition of the statutory authority of SAQA for the registration of qualifications on the NQF.

In preparing the present document the Department of Education has given careful consideration to this wealth of proposals and commentary. Fortunately a strong consensus has developed on a number of important issues. Where opinion has been divided, a judgment has had to be made. That is in the nature of policy-making.

The Department of Education will revise the document for Ministerial decision after considering the public's response and the CHE's advice, and after holding consultations with the organised higher education and professional communities, SAQA, government departments, statutory agencies and organised civil society.

The new policy will be determined concomitantly with any necessary change to the NQF architecture and implementation framework that are determined by the Government on the recommendation of the Minister of Education in consultation with the Minister of Labour.

Comments from interested parties are invited, and should reach the Department not later than 31 August 2004. Comments should be marked "Higher Education Qualifications Framework" and addressed to the Director-General, Department of Education, Private Bag X895, Room 534, Sol Plaatje House, 123 Schoeman Street, Pretoria, 0001, for attention: Dr Pamela Dube. The document may be faxed for Dr Dube's attention at (012) 325 4419 or sent by e-mail to [nap@doe.gov.za](mailto:nap@doe.gov.za). The name, address, telephone number and fax number of the person or organisation responsible for submitting comments should also be provided.



G. N. M. Pandor, MP  
Minister of Education

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

THE NEW FRAMEWORK IN CONTEXT.....	6
A single qualifications framework for a diverse system .....	6
The framework and the NQF.....	7
Standards generation in higher education .....	8
Qualifications, volumes of learning and credits .....	9
Accumulation of credits towards qualifications.....	10
THE FRAMEWORK .....	11
Characteristics .....	11
Number of levels and level descriptors.....	11
Qualification types.....	12
Undergraduate .....	12
Postgraduate.....	12
Qualification descriptors .....	13
Naming of qualifications .....	13
Awarding of qualifications.....	14
Certificates and transcripts.....	14
Language.....	14
Transcript supplement .....	14
Admission to higher education .....	15
Progression within the framework .....	15
The framework and HEMIS .....	16
IMPLEMENTATION AND TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS.....	17
Implementation date.....	17
New programmes and qualifications .....	17
Existing programmes and qualifications .....	17
Admission to higher education .....	17
APPENDIX 1.....	19
QUALIFICATIONS, LEVELS AND MINIMUM CREDITS.....	19
APPENDIX 2.....	20
HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATION DESCRIPTORS .....	20
Higher Certificate .....	20
Advanced Certificate.....	21
Diploma .....	22
Advanced Diploma .....	23
Bachelor's Degree .....	24
Bachelor Honours Degree .....	26
Postgraduate Diploma .....	27
Master's Degree.....	28
Doctoral Degree.....	30
APPENDIX 3.....	31
DRAFT LEVEL DESCRIPTORS .....	31
APPENDIX 4.....	37
DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF A NESTED APPROACH TO QUALIFICATION SPECIFICATION .....	37
APPENDIX 5.....	38
DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK.....	38

## THE NEW FRAMEWORK IN CONTEXT

### A single qualifications framework for a diverse system

Education White Paper 3, *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (1997), proposed a single qualifications framework for higher education. It has taken time, but this document makes good on that undertaking. When amended and approved it will replace the following policy documents:

A Qualification Structure for Universities in South Africa – NATED Report 116 (99/02)

General Policy for Technikon Instructional Programmes – NATED Report 150 (97/01)

Formal Technikon Instructional Programmes in the RSA – NATED Report 151 (99/01)

Revised Qualifications Framework for Educators in Schooling, in *Norms and Standards for Educators* (Government Gazette No. 20844, February, 2000)

The purpose of this policy is to provide a framework for the development and provision of higher education qualifications within a single, coordinated higher education sector. This gives effect to the goals for higher education set out in the White Paper 3: *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (1997) and in the *National Plan for Higher Education*.

The policy also provides the basis for integrating all higher education qualifications into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and its structures for standards generation and quality assurance. It improves the coherence of the higher education system and facilitates the articulation of qualifications, thereby enhancing the flexibility of the system and enabling students to move more efficiently over time from one programme to another as they pursue their academic or professional careers.

Public confidence in academic standards requires public understanding of the achievements represented by higher education qualifications. The qualifications framework is thus designed to ensure a consistent use of qualification titles.

The new qualifications framework establishes common parameters and criteria for qualifications design and facilitates the comparability of qualifications across the system. Within such common parameters programme diversity and innovation are encouraged. Higher education institutions will have ample scope to design educational offerings to realise their different

visions, missions and plans and to meet the varying needs of the clients and communities they serve.

The policy thus operates within the context of a single but diverse and differentiated higher education system. It applies to all higher education programmes and qualifications offered in South Africa by public and private institutions.

## **The framework and the NQF**

The higher education qualifications framework is an integral part of the NQF. The terms used in this policy are therefore consistent with NQF practice.

A *qualification* is the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by an accredited institution. The South Africans Qualifications Authority (SAQA) stipulates that the learning outcomes of all South African qualifications should include critical cross-field or generic skills to promote lifelong learning as well as discipline, domain-specific or specialised knowledge, skills and reflexivity. The format for qualification specification, where appropriate, should include the title and purpose of the qualification, its NQF level, credits, rules of combination for its learning components, exit-level outcomes and associated assessment criteria, entry requirements, forms of integrated assessment, and arrangements for the recognition of prior learning and for moderation of assessment.

A *programme* is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification. Programmes may be discipline based, professional, career-focused, trans-, inter- or multi-disciplinary in nature. A programme has recognised entry and exit points. All taught higher education programmes should have core and elective elements. This requirement is optional for research-based programmes. The internal organisation of programmes is otherwise not prescribed by this document.

The Ministry of Education is overall responsible for norms and standards for higher education, including funding, planning and the qualifications structure for the higher education system.

The Ministry recognises the distinct and important responsibilities of professional bodies whose functions are provided by law or undertaken in terms of international professional conventions and agreements. Nothing in this policy should be construed as transgressing upon the lawful rights and responsibilities of professional bodies in respect of standards for professional registration or membership and standards of professional conduct.

This policy makes a distinction between the act of generating standards for qualifications in terms of the SAQA Act, 1995 (Act No. 58 of 1995) and the Minister's responsibility for determining or setting standards for such

qualifications in terms of the Higher Education Act, 1997. In this regard, this policy recognises that:

- The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is responsible for providing intellectual and strategic leadership for the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework and specifically for recording and registering qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework that satisfy the relevant criteria.
- The Council on Higher Education (CHE) will have a statutory responsibility for coordinating and generating standards for all higher education qualifications and for ensuring that such qualifications meet the criteria for registration by SAQA on the NQF. The CHE will recommend policy in this regard to the Minister for approval.
- The CHE through its Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) has overall responsibility for quality assurance and promotion in higher education. It is responsible for the accreditation of providers to offer NQF-registered qualifications in the higher education band and for the accreditation of higher education programmes.
- The CHE will put in place appropriate safeguards to ensure the integrity of standards generation and quality assurance processes respectively. In discharging its responsibility, the CHE may work in collaboration with relevant statutory and non-statutory professional bodies and agencies.

## **Standards generation in higher education**

The framework incorporates a *nested approach* to qualifications design. Descriptions of learning move from the generic to the specific. Specific standards always meet the requirements of the generic standards within which they are nested or framed as exemplified in Appendix 4.

The NQF *level* and its *level descriptor* form the outer and most generic layer of qualification specification. One or more recognised *qualification types* such as a certificate, a diploma or a degree is pegged to each NQF level. A *qualification descriptor* specifies the level of the qualification type, its minimum credit rating and its purpose and characteristics. A qualification type must meet the generic competences described in the level descriptor for the level concerned. The basic qualification types, namely certificates, diplomas and degrees, are used as points of reference for the design of specialised qualifications and the programmes that deliver them.

The next layer of qualification specialisation nested within the qualification type is the *designated variant*. For example, a Bachelor *of Science* degree is

a designated variant of the generic Bachelor's degree. Such designated variants apply only to degrees and not to certificates or diplomas. A degree designator describes a generic field of study and is stated in the qualification nomenclature. A designated variant meets the generic specifications laid down for the qualification type of which it is a variant. For example, a Bachelor of Science complies with the generic requirements for a Bachelor's degree.

The last and most specific layer of qualification specification in the nest, on which most programmes are based, is the *qualification specialisation*. This is reflected in the qualification's *qualifier*. For example, the learning outcomes and specifications for a BSc *in Geology* meet the learning demands and specifications laid down for a BSc and include specialised learning outcomes related to the field of Geology.

### **Qualifications, volumes of learning and credits**

The framework is a qualifications framework, represented by level descriptors, the main qualification types and their descriptors, and standards for specific qualifications.

Level descriptors and qualification descriptors are expressed in terms of learning outcomes. The design of programmes makes assumptions about the volume of learning that is likely to be necessary to achieve the intended outcomes. This measure of volume is expressed in terms of study time, for example the number of academic years of study required, or the number of notional hours of study expressed as credits.

This framework recognises credits as a measure of the volume of learning required for a qualification, quantified as the number of notional study hours required for achieving the learning outcomes specified for the qualification. The credit rating of a qualification is independent of the mode of delivery of learning. The attainment of the expected learning outcomes is demonstrated through appropriate assessment.

The volume of learning required for a qualification can be specified in terms of the *total minimum number of credits* required, and in terms of the *minimum number of credits required at its specified exit level* on the qualifications framework. Where appropriate the maximum number of credits from the preceding level may be specified.

Credit ratings specified on the framework are expressed as minima. Programmes may offer qualifications with credit ratings above the minimum.

Study leading directly to a qualification will normally build upon assessed learning from earlier stages of a programme but it may also build on assessed prior learning achieved by private study, in the workplace or elsewhere.

## **Accumulation of credits towards qualifications**

Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) is the process whereby a learner's achievements are recognised and contribute to further learning even if the learner does not achieve a qualification. The Ministry of Education intends to undertake systematic work on the development of a national CAT scheme in collaboration with the higher education community and SAQA.

# THE FRAMEWORK

## Characteristics

The higher education qualifications framework is designed to:

- Complement the Ministry of Education's planning and funding policies;
- Be sufficiently flexible to accommodate different types of higher education institutions and enable institutions to pursue their own curriculum goals with creativity and innovation;
- Facilitate the education of graduates who will contribute to the social, cultural and economic development of South Africa and participate successfully in the global economy and knowledge society;
- Enhance the development of a vibrant, high quality research system;
- Be compatible with international qualifications frameworks in order to ensure international recognition and comparability of standards;
- Be suitably flexible to accommodate the development of new qualification types and specialisations as the need arises;
- Be simple, clear, easy to understand and user-friendly for the higher education system and its clients;
- Facilitate qualification articulation across the higher education system and assist learners to identify potential progression routes, particularly in the context of lifelong learning;
- Articulate with the rest of the NQF.

## Number of levels and level descriptors

The National Qualifications Framework will have ten levels, 1-10. The higher education qualifications framework will occupy six levels of the NQF, levels 5 to 10. Levels 5-7 are undergraduate and levels 8-10 are postgraduate.

Each qualification level has a level descriptor. Level descriptors provide a basis of differentiating the varying levels of complexity of qualifications on the framework.

The level descriptors are the outermost layer of qualification specification. At each level they describe the generic nature of learning achievements and their complexity. Level descriptors are thus broad qualitative statements against which more specific learning outcomes can be compared and located.

The positioning of two or more qualifications on the same NQF level only indicates that the qualifications are broadly comparable in terms of the general level of outcomes. It does not indicate that they have the same purpose, content or outcomes, nor does it necessarily demonstrate equivalence of qualifications. Level descriptors for levels 5-10 of the NQF, as developed by SAQA are at Appendix 3.

## **Qualification types**

The framework has nine qualification types mapped on to the six higher education qualification levels, five of which are undergraduate and four postgraduate. Some levels have more than one qualification type (see Appendix 1). The framework comprises the following qualification types:

### ***Undergraduate***

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

### ***Postgraduate***

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

Undergraduate programmes and qualifications are typically focused on particular disciplines, professions or broad areas of study, while postgraduate studies additionally include trans-, inter- and multi-disciplinary programmes and qualifications.

The nine qualification types and their designated variants are expected to accommodate present requirements but the list is not immutable. The Minister, on the advice of the CHE, may approve a new qualification type and its unique descriptor when a proven need arises as a result of developments in knowledge production or acknowledged international practice. The use of qualification types is regulated by this policy. A qualification type may only be used if the qualification fulfils the specifications for the type.

## Qualification descriptors

Each qualification type has a unique descriptor stating its purpose and how it relates to other qualification types.

Qualification descriptors designate the specifications (i.e. level and credit-rating), purpose and characteristics of qualification types recognised by the framework. Each descriptor is a fixed point of reference which enables comparisons with other qualifications and provides a basis for designing, approving and reviewing programmes. All qualifications using the same qualification type (and where appropriate, designated variant) in their titles must be pegged at the same NQF level and share common minimum credit ratings. The descriptor for each qualification type must be consistent with the level descriptor for its level on the NQF.

Descriptors for the nine qualification types recognised by the framework are at Appendix 2.

## Naming of qualifications

The *qualification type* is the first name given to a qualification.

The *designator* is the second name given to a qualification, to indicate its broad area of study, discipline or profession. All degrees (Bachelor, Master and Doctor) have designated variants of the degree type, but designators are not used for certificates and diplomas. The linking word between the qualification type and the designator is *of* (e.g. Bachelor *of* Social Science), and when abbreviated the 'of' is omitted (e.g. BSocSci).

The Council on Higher Education (CHE), which is the body responsible for coordinating and generating standards for all higher education qualifications, is mandated to determine and publish the criteria to be applied in adopting degree designators. The CHE will evaluate proposals for degree qualifications against its criteria to ensure that South African degree nomenclature is applied consistently. No designator may be used in a degree qualification unless it has been approved by the CHE in terms of its criteria and this policy.

The third name given to a qualification type is the *qualifier*. Qualifiers may be used in all qualification types in order to indicate a field of specialisation. The linking word between the qualification type or its designator and the qualifier is always *in* (e.g. Bachelor of Arts *in* Linguistics, Bachelor of Engineering *in* Electronics). When abbreviated, the *in* is dropped and the qualifier is placed in brackets (e.g. BA (*Linguistics*), BEng (*Electronics*)). In the case of certificates and diplomas, where there is no designator, the qualifier follows immediately after the qualification type (e.g. Postgraduate Diploma *in* Drama, abbreviated to PG Dip (Drama)).

A further area of specialisation for a certificate or diploma may be indicated by adding a colon and a *second qualifier* (e.g. Postgraduate Diploma in Drama: *Performance*, abbreviated to PG Dip (*Drama: Performance*)).

In order to use a qualifier, at least 50% of the minimum total credits for the qualification and at least 50% of the minimum credits at the qualification's exit level must be in the field of specialisation. The same applies to the use of a second qualifier. Qualifiers and second qualifiers are attached to a qualification type and designator at the discretion of the providing institution.

## **Awarding of qualifications**

Qualifications are awarded to mark the achievement of defined outcomes, not as compensation for failure at a higher level, or by default.

If consistent with the qualification type descriptor a qualification with two tiers may enable a successful learner to exit with a less senior qualification having completed the first tier.

## **Certificates and transcripts**

### ***Language***

The language of each certificate and transcript issued to a learner within the South African higher education system must be consistent with the Ministry of Education's *Language Policy for Higher Education* (Pretoria, November 2002) and the approved language policy of the issuing institution. A central aspect of the Ministry's policy is the promotion of multilingualism.

To enable employers, academic institutions, parents and others (including international academic institutions or employers) to understand the achievements and attributes represented by a qualification title, a certificate or transcript must be issued in English in addition to any other official language.

The use of Latin in certificates and transcripts has been practised by some South African institutions as a historical legacy. Its continued use for this purpose is not encouraged but is left to the discretion of individual institutions.

### ***Transcript supplement***

In order to improve the portability and transparency of qualifications each qualification and transcript awarded to a student or former student must have attached to it an official supplement. The supplement is designed to provide a description of the nature, level, content and where appropriate the context of the studies pursued by a learner and assessed by the institution. The Minister

of Education will propose the format and use of the supplement after consultation with higher education institutions and on advice from the Council on Higher Education.

### **Admission to higher education**

The framework is intended to facilitate articulation between further and higher education and within higher education. However, the possession of a qualification does not guarantee a learner's progression and admission to a programme of study.

In terms of the Higher Education Act, 1997 the decision to admit a learner to higher education study is the right and responsibility of the higher education institution concerned. A higher education institution's admissions policy and practice is expected to advance the objectives of the Act and the NQF and must be consistent with this policy.

The minimum requirement for admission to a higher education institution is the Further Education and Training Certificate whose specifications were approved by the Minister of Education in the *National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12 (General) and Policy, Government Gazette, Vol. 460, No. 25545, 2003*. Given the diversity of programmes and qualifications in higher education it is necessary to determine minimum norms for entry into undergraduate certificate, diploma and degree programmes based on subject combinations and levels of achievement.

The Ministry is currently consulting higher education institutions and relevant statutory organisations before determining minimum entry requirements for admission to undergraduate programmes.

### **Progression within the framework**

The framework is designed to facilitate horizontal, diagonal and vertical progression. The minimum qualification requirements for vertical progression between qualification types are stipulated in the qualification type descriptors, as exemplified in appendix 5. However, learners may progress horizontally or diagonally between qualifications either by transferring between qualifications or by presenting completed qualifications, usually in cognate study areas. An example would be a learner completing the first year of study of a Diploma programme and transferring to a cognate Degree programme. Another would be a learner presenting a Higher Certificate for admission to a cognate Diploma or Degree programme. With due regard to the policies, guides and recommended good practice of the HEQC, institutions may recognise other forms of prior learning and achievement, in addition to qualifications, to determine the equivalence of admission requirements. An example would be a learner being considered for admission to postgraduate study after

completing an Advanced Diploma and satisfying any additional academic requirements deemed necessary by an institution.

## **The framework and HEMIS**

Details of qualifications approved and accredited in terms of this policy will be recorded on the national higher education database, in accordance with the rules of the Department of Education's Higher Education Information Management System (HEMIS).

The fields in the HEMIS qualifications file will be expanded to take account of the requirement that volumes of learning required for a qualification and its specified exit levels will be set as minimum notional annual study hours.

In HEMIS, the properties of a qualification determine the total number of units of government subsidy approved by the Minister of Education for that qualification. The record of subsidy units per qualification is an essential part of the determination of full-time equivalent student totals. In turn these enable the Department of Education to calculate the annual government grant for each public higher education institution. Subsidy units are at present described for each qualification in terms of "approved total years", "approved formal years", and "approved experiential years". The Department will reconsider the specification of "years" in these terms while retaining the principle that approved subsidy units must be linked to qualifications.

Recording minimum study hours as sets of credits will not conflict with other properties of qualifications in the HEMIS national database.

## **IMPLEMENTATION AND TRANSITIONAL ARRANGEMENTS**

### **Implementation date**

The implementation date for this policy is 1 January 2006. However, a transitional period is necessary given the complex nature of higher education provision.

### **New programmes and qualifications**

A new programme or qualification is one which has not existed before or has been significantly changed, such as when its purpose, outcomes, field of study, mode or site of delivery has been changed to a considerable extent.

New higher education qualifications submitted for registration on the NQF must conform to the requirements of this policy from the date of implementation. Similarly, programmes submitted to the Council on Higher Education for accreditation must meet the requirements of this policy from that date.

Institutions are encouraged to ensure that new programmes scheduled to begin in 2006 meet the requirements of this policy.

### **Existing programmes and qualifications**

Existing qualifications are those that have been registered or interim registered on the NQF prior to the promulgation of this policy. Existing programmes are those that lead to such qualifications and have been accredited by the former Universities and Technikons Advisory Council (AUT), or the HEQC.

Qualifications and programmes currently offered by higher education institutions must conform over time with the requirements of this policy. The Minister of Education will determine appropriate transitional arrangements after consultation with the Council on Higher Education, the South African Qualifications Authority and higher education institutions.

### **Admission to higher education**

Until new minimum norms for admission to undergraduate study have been approved by the Minister and brought into effect, the current admission requirements for higher education remain applicable. They are as follows:

- To register for degree study a learner must have a Senior Certificate with a matriculation endorsement, a certificate of complete or conditional matriculation exemption, or a degree. The regulations published in terms of Section 74 of the Higher Education Act, 1997 as amended, set out the criteria and rules under which certificates of endorsement, complete and conditional exemption may be granted.
- To register for non-degree undergraduate programmes, a learner must have a Senior Certificate. Higher education institutions are able to set additional admission requirements for specific programmes.

## APPENDIX 1

### QUALIFICATIONS, LEVELS AND MINIMUM CREDITS

<i>NQF level</i>	<i>Minimum credits per qualification (and at exit level)</i>	<i>Qualification type</i>
10	360 (360)	Doctoral Degree
9	180 (120)	Master's Degree
8	120 (120) 120 (120)	Honours Degree Postgraduate Diploma
7	360/480+ (120) 120 (120)	Bachelor's Degree Advanced Diploma
6	360 (240) 120 (120)	Diploma Advanced Certificate
5	120 (120)	Higher Certificate

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATION DESCRIPTORS**

#### **Higher Certificate**

##### **Type specifications**

NQF Level 5

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 5: 120

##### **Designators**

Not applicable

##### **Qualifiers**

Specific, maximum two

##### **Abbreviations**

Cert. (Tourism), Cert. (Tourism: Eco-tourism)

##### **Purpose and characteristics**

This level 5 qualification is the entry-level higher education qualification. The qualification is primarily occupational, vocational, or industry oriented. The knowledge emphasises general principles and application. This qualification signifies that the learner has attained a basic level of higher education knowledge and competence in a particular field or occupation and is capable of applying such knowledge and competence in an occupation or role in the workplace. The Higher Certificate typically includes an experiential or simulated work experience component.

##### **Minimum admission requirements**

Currently a Senior Certificate is required. In future, the minimum entry requirement will be a FETC with appropriate subject combinations and levels of achievement.

##### **Progression**

Completion of the Higher Certificate meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to an appropriate Advanced Certificate or alternatively minimum mid-term entry into a cognate Diploma programme at level 6. A qualification may not be awarded for early exit from a Higher Certificate programme.

## **Advanced Certificate**

### **Type specifications**

NQF Level: 6

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 6: 120

### **Designators**

Not applicable

### **Qualifiers**

Specific, maximum two

### **Abbreviations**

Adv. Cert. (Real Estate), Adv. Cert. (Real Estate: Property Marketing)

### **Purpose and characteristics**

This level 6 qualification is primarily occupational, vocational, or industry oriented. The knowledge emphasises general principles and application or technology transfer. It is awarded on satisfactory completion of a stand-alone programme but in exceptional circumstances may be awarded as an exit qualification from an appropriate Diploma programme. Programmes leading to this qualification tend to have a strong vocational, professional or career focus and students exiting the system with this qualification are normally prepared to enter a specific niche in the labour market. Advanced Certificate programmes typically include an experiential or simulated work experience component.

### **Minimum admission requirements**

The minimum entry requirement is a Higher Certificate in the appropriate field.

### **Progression**

Completion of the Advanced Certificate meets the minimum entry requirement for mid-term admission into a cognate Diploma programme at level 6 or cognate Bachelor's degree programme at level 7. A qualification may not be awarded for early exit from an Advanced Certificate programme.

## **Diploma**

### **Type specifications**

NQF Level: 6

Minimum total credits: 360

Minimum credits at Level 6: 240

Maximum total credits at Level 5: 120

### **Designators**

Not applicable

### **Qualifiers**

Specific, maximum two

### **Abbreviations**

Dip. (Management), Dip. (Management: Finance)

### **Purpose and characteristics**

This level 6 qualification is primarily vocational, occupational or industry specific. The knowledge emphasises general principles and application. The purpose of the Diploma is to develop graduates who can demonstrate focused knowledge and skills in a particular field. Typically they will have gained experience in applying such knowledge and skills in a workplace context. A depth and specialisation of knowledge, together with practical skills and experience in the workplace, enables successful learners to enter a number of career paths and to apply their learning to particular employment contexts from the outset. Diploma programmes also prepare learners for further study at Level 7.

### **Minimum admission requirements**

Currently a Senior Certificate is required. In future, a FETC with appropriate subject combinations and levels of achievement will be the minimum entry requirement. Alternatively a Higher Certificate or Advanced Certificate in a cognate field will satisfy the minimum requirement.

### **Progression**

Completion of a Diploma meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to an Advanced Diploma at level 7 or alternatively as a mid-term entry into a cognate Bachelor's Degree programme at level 7. Under exceptional circumstances, if a learner is unable to continue studying and must exit the system, an Advanced Certificate may be awarded provided the required outcomes have been attained. A Higher Certificate may not be awarded as an early exit qualification from a Diploma programme.

## **Advanced Diploma**

### **Type specifications**

NQF Level: 7

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 7: 120

### **Designators**

Not applicable

### **Qualifiers**

Specific, maximum two

### **Abbreviations**

Adv. Dip (Taxation), Adv. Dip (Communication: Digital Media)

### **Purpose and characteristics**

One purpose of this level 7 qualification is to provide an intensive, focused and applied specialisation which meets the requirements of a specific niche in the labour market. Programmes offering this qualification will provide a diploma graduate with a deep and systematic understanding of current thinking, practice, theory and methodology in an area of specialisation. It is therefore particularly suitable for continuing professional development.

Another important purpose of the qualification is to provide entry-level professional preparation or specialisation for Bachelor's Degree graduates. For example a BSc graduate might register for an Advanced Diploma in Education: Secondary in order to become a science teacher, or a BPharm graduate might register for an Advanced Diploma in Marketing in order to become a marketing consultant in the pharmaceutical industry.

### **Minimum admission requirements**

An appropriate Diploma or Bachelor's Degree

### **Progression**

Completion of an Advanced Diploma meets the minimum requirement for mid-term entry into a cognate Bachelor's Degree programme at level 7. A qualification may not be awarded for early exit from an Advanced Diploma.

## **Bachelor's Degree**

### **Type specifications**

NQF Level: 7

Minimum total credits: 360 and minimum credits at Level 7: 120; or

Minimum total credits: 480 and minimum credits at level 7:120 and at Level 8: 96

Maximum total credits at Level 5: 96

### **Designators**

Bachelor's Degree designators are specific and limited to broad and generic areas of study, disciplines or professions. Examples include: *Bachelor of Arts*, *Bachelor of Social Science*, *Bachelor of Science*, *Bachelor of Commerce*, *Bachelor of Engineering*, *Bachelor of Architecture*, *Bachelor of Agriculture*, *Bachelor of Law*, *Bachelor of Education*, *Bachelor of Nursing*, *Bachelor of Medicine*, *Bachelor of Surgery*, *Bachelor of Veterinary Science*, *Bachelor of Business Science*.

### **Qualifiers**

Specific, maximum one

### **Abbreviations**

BA, BSc, BSocSci, BCom, LLB, BAgric, BCurr, MB.ChB., BEd, BBSci, BSc (Life Sciences), BA (Applied Linguistics), BAgric (Animal Science), BCom (Human Resource Management), BBSci (Actuarial Sciences)

### **Purpose and characteristics**

A Bachelor's Degree is awarded after satisfactory completion of and achievement in a programme of advanced higher education study intended to provide a well-rounded, broad education that equips graduates to demonstrate initiative and responsibility in an academic or professional context. Principles and theory are emphasised as a basis for entry into the labour market, professional training at level 7, post-graduate studies at level 8 or professional practice in a wide range of careers.

A "professional" Bachelor's Degree may be designed in consultation with a professional body and may be recognised by a professional body as a requirement for a licence to practice that profession. Such a qualification requires a thorough grounding in the knowledge and skills of the profession or career concerned, and the ability to apply these to professional or career contexts. Programmes leading to this qualification generally require a practicum or work-based component. A professional Bachelor's Degree may lead to further professional development or study for a Master's degree. A professional Bachelor's Degree comprises at least 480 credits with a minimum of 96 credits at Level 8. A minimum of 4 years' full-time study is normally required but some professions such as Medicine and Architecture require a longer period of study with proportionally more credits at Level 8.

**Minimum admission requirements**

Currently a Senior Certificate with Matriculation Endorsement or Exemption is required. In future an FETC with appropriate subject combinations and levels of achievement will be the minimum entry requirement. Alternatively a level 5 or 6 qualification in a cognate field will satisfy the minimum requirement.

**Progression**

Completion of a Bachelor's degree meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to a Bachelor Honours Degree or Postgraduate Diploma at level 8. A Bachelor's degree of 480 credits or more may meet the requirements for admission to a Master's Degree at level 9. Entry into these qualifications is usually in the area of specialisation or in the discipline taken as a major in the Bachelor's degree. A qualification may not be awarded for early exit from a Bachelor's degree.

## **Bachelor Honours Degree**

### **Type specifications**

NQF Level: 8

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 8: 120

### **Designators**

Designators are limited to disciplines or professions where there is theoretical and epistemological underpinning. The designators for the Bachelor's degree would thus describe the disciplinary or career focused base of the qualification. Examples of designators that must appear in the qualification's title include *Bachelor of Arts Honours*, *Bachelor of Social Science Honours*, *Bachelor of Science Honours*, *Bachelor of Commerce Honours*.

### **Qualifiers**

Specific, maximum one

### **Abbreviations**

BAHons, BScHons, BSocSciHons, BComHons, BScHons (Microbiology), BAHons (Applied Linguistics)

### **Purpose and characteristics**

The Bachelor Honours Degree is the initial postgraduate specialisation qualification, preparing students for research based postgraduate study. This qualification typically follows a Bachelor's Degree, and serves to consolidate and deepen the student's expertise in a particular discipline, and to develop research capacity in the methodology and techniques of that discipline. This qualification demands a high level of theoretical engagement and intellectual independence. In some cases a Bachelor Honours Degree carries recognition by an appropriate professional or statutory body. Bachelor Honours Degree programmes should include conducting and reporting research under supervision, worth at least 60 credits.

### **Minimum admission requirements**

The minimum admission requirement is an appropriate Bachelor's Degree.

### **Progression**

Completion of a Bachelor Honours Degree meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to a cognate Master's Degree at level 9. Entry into a Master's Degree programme is usually in the area of specialisation of the Bachelor Honours Degree. A qualification may not be awarded for early exit from a Bachelor Honours degree.

## **Postgraduate Diploma**

### **Type specifications**

NQF Level 8

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 8: 120

### **Designators**

Not applicable

### **Qualifiers**

Specific, maximum two

### **Abbreviations**

PG Dip (Organisational & Management Systems), PG Dip (Gender Studies), PG Dip (Agriculture: Rural Resource Management)

### **Purpose and characteristics**

A Postgraduate Diploma is generally multi- or interdisciplinary in nature but may serve to strengthen and deepen the student's knowledge in a particular discipline or profession. The primary purpose of the qualification is to enable a professional to undertake advanced reflection, development and upgrading, by providing the learner with a systematic survey of current thinking, practice and research methods in an area of specialisation. This qualification demands a high level of theoretical engagement and intellectual independence. A sustained research project is not required but the qualification may include conducting and reporting research under supervision.

### **Minimum admission requirements**

The minimum admission requirement is an appropriate Bachelor's degree.

### **Progression**

Completion of a Postgraduate Diploma meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to a cognate Master's Degree at level 9, usually in the area of specialisation of the Postgraduate Diploma. A qualification may not be awarded for early exit from a Postgraduate Diploma.

## Master's Degree

### Type specifications

NQF Level 9

Minimum total credits: 180

Minimum credits at Level 9: 120

### Designators

The designators for the Master's Degree describe the disciplinary or career focused base of the qualification. The following are examples of designators of Master's degrees which would appear in the qualification's title: *Master of Arts, Master of Science, Master of Medicine, Master of Social Science, Master of Commerce, Master of Laws, Master of Business Administration, Master of Education.*

### Qualifiers

Where appropriate only one specific qualifier is permissible.

### Abbreviations

MA, MA (Linguistics), MSc, MPhil, MArch, MEd, MEng, LLM, MBA, MMed (Cardiology)

### Purpose and characteristics

The primary purposes of a Master's Degree are to educate and train researchers who can contribute to the development of knowledge at an advanced level, or prepare graduates for advanced and specialised professional employment. A Master's Degree must have a significant research component.

A Master's Degree may be earned in either of two ways: (1) by completing a single advanced research project, culminating in the production and acceptance of a thesis, or (2) by successfully completing a coursework programme requiring a high level of theoretical engagement and intellectual independence and a research project. In the latter case the credits earned at level 9 must at least be equally divided between high level coursework and a research project, written up as a dissertation or thesis.

Master's graduates should be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively; make sound judgements using data and information at their disposal and 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 at a professional or equivalent level, and continue to advance their knowledge, understanding and skills.

**Minimum admission requirements**

The minimum admission requirement is an appropriate Level 8 qualification, being a relevant Bachelor Honours Degree or an appropriate Postgraduate Diploma. In certain circumstances a Bachelor's Degree may be recognised as meeting the minimum entry requirements.

**Progression**

Completion of a Master's Degree meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to a cognate Doctoral Degree at level 10, usually in the area of specialisation in the Master's Degree. A qualification may not be awarded for early exit from a Master's Degree.

## **Doctoral Degree**

### **Type specifications**

NQF Level 10

Minimum total credits: 360

Minimum credits at Level 10: 360

### **Designators**

The designator *of Philosophy* is typically used for doctoral degrees. However, other designators may be used to denote the area of study or the name of the discipline, such as DEd for Doctor of Education.

### **Qualifiers**

Where appropriate only one specific qualifier is permissible.

### **Abbreviations**

PhD, DEd

### **Purpose and characteristics**

A Doctoral Degree requires a candidate to undertake research at the most advanced academic level, culminating in the production, defence and acceptance of a thesis. Course work may be included as preparation or value addition to the research, but does not contribute to the credit value of the qualification. The defining characteristic of this qualification is that the candidate is required to demonstrate high level research capability and make a significant and original academic contribution at the frontiers of a discipline or field. The work must be of a quality to satisfy peer review and merit publication. The degree may be earned through pure discipline-based or multidisciplinary research or applied research. This degree usually requires a minimum of three years' full-time study post the Master's Degree. A graduate should be able to supervise and evaluate the research of others in the area of specialisation concerned.

### **Minimum admission requirements**

The minimum admission requirement is an appropriate Master's degree.

### **Progression**

A Doctoral Degree is the highest qualification awarded within this framework. A qualification may not be awarded for early exit from a Doctoral Degree.

## APPENDIX 3

### DRAFT LEVEL DESCRIPTORS<sup>1</sup>

NQF level	Applied competence	Autonomy of learning
<i>Typically, a learning programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level should develop learners who demonstrate:</i>		
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a fundamental knowledge base in the main areas of one or more fields or disciplines;<sup>2</sup></li> <li>b. an informed understanding of the important terms, rules, concepts, principles and theories in one or more fields or disciplines;</li> <li>c. an understanding of the organisation or operating environment as a system within a wider context and in relation to the society;</li> <li>d. an ability to effectively apply essential methods, procedures and techniques of the field or discipline;</li> <li>e. an ability to interpret, convert and evaluate text<sup>3</sup> and operational symbols or representations</li> <li>f. an ability to use their knowledge to solve well-defined problems both routine and unfamiliar within a familiar context;</li> <li>g. an ability to adjust an application of a solution within relevant parameters to meet the needs of changes in the problem or operating context;</li> <li>h. an ability to evaluate the change using relevant evidence;<sup>4</sup></li> <li>i. efficient information-gathering, analysis and synthesis, and evaluation skills;</li> <li>j. presentation skills using appropriate technologies;</li> <li>k. an ability to communicate information coherently using basic conventions of an academic / professional<sup>5</sup> discourse reliably in writing and verbally;</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>l. a capacity to take responsibility for their own learning within a supervised environment;</li> <li>m. an ability to take decisions about and responsibility for their own actions</li> <li>n. an ability to evaluate their own performance against given criteria</li> </ul>

<sup>1</sup> The draft level descriptors have been developed by SAQA and are included with SAQA's permission.

<sup>2</sup> The purpose of the qualification will determine whether one or more fields is covered

<sup>3</sup> Text includes operation manuals, written instructions etc.

<sup>4</sup> This could include health and safety requirements, operational procedures etc.

<sup>5</sup> "Professional" incorporates what has traditionally been known as "vocational".

NQF level	Applied competence	Autonomy of learning
<i>Typically, a learning programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:</i>		
6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a solid knowledge base in at least one discipline/field</li> <li>b. a sound understanding of one or more discipline/field's key terms, rules, concepts, established principles and theories; some awareness of how the discipline/field relates to cognate areas</li> <li>c. effective selection and application of the central procedures operations and techniques of a discipline/field</li> <li>d. an ability to solve well-defined but unfamiliar problems using correct procedures and appropriate evidence</li> <li>e. a critical analysis and synthesis of information; presentation of information using basic information technology</li> <li>f. an ability to present and communicate information reliably and coherently, using academic/professional discourse conventions and formats appropriately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g. a capacity to evaluate their own learning and identify their learning needs within a structured learning environment</li> <li>h. a capacity to take the initiative to address these needs</li> <li>i. a capacity to assist others with identifying learning needs</li> </ul>

NQF level	Applied competence	Autonomy of learning
<b><i>Typically, a learning programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level should develop learners who demonstrate:</i></b>		
7	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a well-rounded and systematic knowledge base in one or more disciplines/fields and a detailed knowledge of some specialist areas</li> <li>b. a coherent and critical understanding of one or more discipline/field's terms, rules, concepts, principles and theories; an ability to map new knowledge onto a given body of theory; an acceptance of a multiplicity of 'right' answers</li> <li>c. effective selection and application of the essential procedures, operations and techniques of a discipline/field; an understanding of the central methods of enquiry and research in a discipline/field; a knowledge of at least one other discipline field's mode of enquiry</li> <li>d. an ability to deal with unfamiliar concrete and abstract problems and issues using evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments</li> <li>e. well-developed information retrieval skills; critical analysis and synthesis of quantitative and/or qualitative data; presentation skills following prescribed formats, using IT skills appropriately</li> <li>f. an ability to present and communicate information and their own ideas and opinions in well-structured arguments, showing an awareness of audience and using academic/professional discourse appropriately</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g. a capacity to operate in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts, requiring responsibility and initiative</li> <li>h. a capacity to accurately self-evaluate and identify and address own learning needs</li> <li>i. an ability to interact effectively in a learning group</li> </ul>

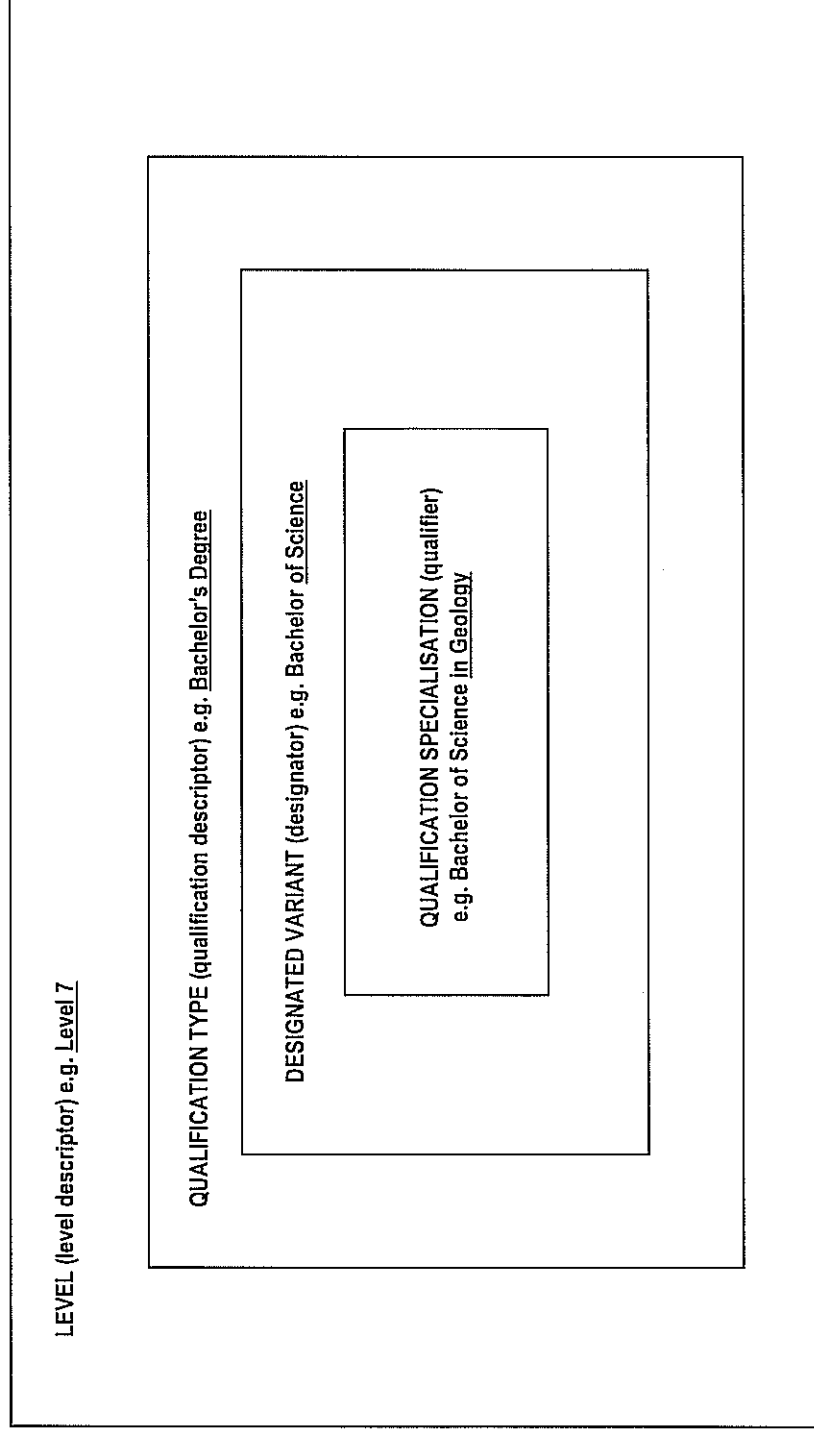
NQF level	Applied competence	Autonomy of learning
<p><i>Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:</i></p>		
<p><b>8</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a comprehensive and systematic knowledge base in a discipline/field and a depth of knowledge in some areas of specialisation</li> <li>b. a coherent and critical understanding of the principles and theories of a discipline/field; an ability to critique current research and advanced scholarship in an area of specialisation; an ability to make sound theoretical judgements based on evidence and an ability to think epistemologically</li> <li>c. an understanding of a range of research methods, techniques and technologies and an ability to select these appropriately for a particular research problem in an area of specialisation</li> <li>d. an ability to identify, analyse and deal with complex and/or real world problems and issues using evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments</li> <li>e. efficient and effective information retrieval and processing skills; the identification, critical analysis, synthesis and independent evaluation of quantitative and/or qualitative data; an ability to engage with current research and scholarly or professional literature in a discipline/field</li> <li>f. an ability to present and communicate academic professional work effectively, catering for a range of audiences by using a range of different genres appropriate to the context</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g. a capacity to operate effectively in complex, ill-defined contexts</li> <li>h. a capacity to self-evaluate exercising personal responsibility and initiative</li> <li>i. a capacity to manage learning tasks autonomously, professionally and ethically</li> <li>j. a capacity to continue to learn independently for continuing academic/professional development</li> </ul>

NQF level	Applied competence	Autonomy of learning
<p><b><i>Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:</i></b></p>		
<p><b>9</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. a comprehensive and systematic knowledge base in a discipline/field with specialist knowledge in an area at the forefront of the discipline/field or area of professional practice</li> <li>b. a coherent and critical understanding of the theory, research methodologies and techniques relevant to a discipline/field; an ability to rigorously critique and evaluate current research and participate in scholarly debates in an area of specialisation; an ability to relate theory to practice and <i>vice versa</i> and to think epistemologically</li> <li>c. mastery of the application of research methods, techniques and technologies appropriate to an area of specialisation; an ability to undertake a research project and write up a research dissertation under supervision</li> <li>d. an ability to identify, analyse and deal with complex and/or real world problems and issues drawing systematically and creatively on the theory, research methods and literature of a discipline/field</li> <li>e. advanced information retrieval and processing skills; identification, critical analysis, synthesis and independent evaluation of quantitative and/or qualitative data; an ability to undertake a study of the literature and current research in an area of specialisation under supervision</li> <li>f. an ability to effectively present and communicate the results of research to specialist and non-specialist audiences using the resources of an academic/professional discourse; the production of a dissertation or research report which meets the standards of scholarly/professional writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g. a capacity to operate effectively in complex, ill defined contexts</li> <li>h. a capacity to critically self-evaluate and continue to learn independently for continuing professional development</li> <li>i. a capacity to manage learning tasks autonomously professionally and ethically</li> <li>j. a capacity to critically evaluate own and others' work with justification</li> </ul>

NQF level	Applied competence	Autonomy of learning
<p><b><i>Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:</i></b></p>		
<p><b>10</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. A comprehensive and systemic grasp of a discipline/field's body of knowledge with expertise and specialist knowledge in an area at the forefront of the discipline, field or professional practice</li> <li>b. a critical understanding of the most advanced research methodologies, techniques and technologies in a discipline/field; an ability to participate in scholarly debates at the cutting edge of an area of specialisation; an ability to apply knowledge, theory and research methods creatively to complex practical, theoretical and epistemological problems</li> <li>c. substantial, independent research and advanced scholarship resulting in the (re) interpretation and expansion of knowledge which is judged publishable by peers</li> <li>d. an ability to identify, conceptualise, design and implement research projects that address complex, ill-defined problems at the cutting edge of a discipline/field</li> <li>e. advanced information retrieval and processing skills; an ability to independently undertake a study and evaluation of the literature and current research in an area of specialisation</li> <li>f. an ability to effectively present and communicate the results of research and opinion to specialist and non-specialist audiences using the full resources of an academic/professional discourse; the production of a thesis which meets international standards of scholarly/professional writing</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>g. a capacity to operate autonomously in specialised, complex, ill-defined and unpredictable contexts</li> <li>h. intellectual independence and research leadership through managing advanced research and development in a field professionally and ethically</li> <li>i. a capacity to critically evaluate own and others' work on the basis of independent criteria</li> </ul>

# APPENDIX 4

## DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF A NESTED APPROACH TO QUALIFICATION SPECIFICATION



# APPENDIX 5

## DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

