A New Academic Policy for Policy for Programmes And Qualifications in Higher Education

January 2002

Preface

The Department of Education (DoE) requested the Council on Higher Education (CHE) late in 1999 to develop a new academic policy for higher education. Following extensive research and consultation, the CHE has submitted a proposed "New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education" to the DoE.

The DoE is publicly releasing this document for comment from higher education constituencies. Comments should reach the DoE by 15 March 2002 and should be sent to Ms S Boshoff, fax number (012) 323 7532, e-mail address boshoff.s@doe.gov.za

Following receipt of comments, the Minister will propose new policy to the CHE prior to finalisation. While the CHE has proposed a timetable for implementation, this is subject to review by the DoE.

The DoE hopes that this document will generate constructive debate in the higher education community and beyond.

Foreword

The National Plan for Higher Education 'provides the strategic framework for re-engineering the higher education system in the twenty-first century' (Minister of Education, 2001).

The *New Academic Policy* proposed in this Discussion Document aims to provide the academic planning framework to underpin this project. It also represents a further pillar in the process of constructing a higher education system which fulfils the goals of the *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997*.

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) was requested by the Department of Education (DoE) in late 1999 to take on the task of developing a new academic policy in consultation with key higher education stakeholders. To give effect to this project, the CHE established an Academic Policy Task Team comprising of members of the CHE and representatives of key national stakeholders, including the Department of Education (DoE) and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Two years of work and debate around what are often highly complex issues has brought the CHE to the point where it is happy to hand over its report to the DoE for publication as a Discussion Document.

The policies and guidelines proposed herein are by no means complete or final. The CHE itself has not examined the report of the Academic Policy Task Team for the purpose of advising the Minister of Education, a stage that will only come after the close of the public comment period. As a result CHE members are not bound by the proposals and regulations advanced in the report. Instead, the CHE's discussion of the report has been solely to ascertain whether it is ready to be handed over to the DoE for release as a Discussion Document. In this regard, the CHE believes that sufficient work has been done for a meaningful, structured, critical and vigorous debate on these proposals to now occur. With the benefit of inputs from all those concerned with higher education it should be possible to move forward to a point where policies and regulations can be adopted with a high degree of consensus.

The *New Academic Policy* document has been developed with due recognition of the authority of SAQA for policies and regulations related to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the registration of qualifications. There has also been a concerted attempt to ensure that there is a high level of congruency between the *New Academic Policy* document and the *Development of Level Descriptors for the National Qualifications Framework* document of SAQA - for example around level structures and the consequent qualification pegging arrangements.

Indeed, the CHE and SAQA documents will be released simultaneously and it is crucially important that they are read together. Both documents will provide for public comments until 28 February 2002. In the case of this *New Academic Policy* Discussion Document, as indicated in the *Preface* public comments must be forwarded to the DoE, Higher Education Branch. The

DoE will give due consideration to all comments received and thereafter prepare an Academic Policy document for consultation and eventual adoption.

There are a number of key issues that the CHE believes require further discussion and debate. These are:

1. **The number of levels allocated to higher education on the National Qualifications Framework and the related pegging of qualifications**

The South African Qualification Authority (SAQA) originally allocated 4 out of 8 levels on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) to higher education. However, the CHE Academic Policy Task Team was concerned that these could not adequately accommodate the full range of higher education offerings. Research on international comparisons reported on in Chapter 3 indicates that most other higher education qualifications frameworks consist of at least 6 levels. After lengthy consultation, SAQA has agreed to the CHE's Academic Policy Task Team's proposal that, given the four levels for higher education, sub-levels be used to accommodate the range of HE qualifications. SAQA has agreed to this and proposed that levels 5 to 7 be used for undergraduate qualifications and that the open-ended level 8 be split into 4 postgraduate levels. [The Advanced Bachelor's Degree is an anomaly in this arrangement, for although an undergraduate degree, it will sit at Level 8, Postgraduate sub-level 1].

However, there may well be other ways of addressing this problem that should be explored, such as increasing the number of levels on the NQF for higher education. Thus, for example, the Masters could be pegged at level 9 or 10 and the Doctorate a level 10 or 11. Alternatively, some stakeholders may believe that too many sub-levels have been created and that three postgraduate levels or sub-levels would suffice.

2. **The 'nested approach' to standard-setting for higher education qualifications on the NQF**

If this approach, proposed in Chapter 4 of the report, were to be adopted, the process of standard-setting would move from the generic to the specific. Standards would be set by policy for level descriptors and qualification descriptors. Sectoral Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) established under the auspices of South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA) and the Committee of Technikons Principals (CTP) would generate the generic variants of the qualification types, e.g. the BA, BSc, BCom and BSocSci for the General Bachelor's Degree and the BTech, BEng, LLB for the Career-focused Bachelor's Degree. This process could be completed for SAQA's full registration of qualifications in mid-2003. If this model were to be followed, then it would not be necessary for individual providers of qualification specialisations, which will sit under these more generic qualification standards, to submit these for full registration in 2003 (as was required for interim registration, mid-2000). This model of standard-setting would allow greater freedom and responsiveness on the part of providers than the original SAQA model and would lighten the bureaucratic burden on providers.

3. The classification of technikon qualifications

Traditional technikon qualifications have been described in this report as falling under the following generic qualification types: the Career-focused Certificate, Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Advanced Bachelor's Degree and Structured or Research Master's Degrees. Universities can also offer these qualifications. If the 'nested approach' mentioned above is adopted, then its logic implies that the B.Tech and MTech will, for example, be classified as *designated variants* of the Career-focused Advanced Bachelor's and Master's Degrees. It is important that the technikon community and its stakeholders respond to this proposal.

4. The meaningfulness and appropriateness for labour market needs and employment purposes of the proposed qualification types

This report proposes a number of new qualification types. Their meaningfulness and appropriateness for labour market needs and for employment purposes remains to be tested. Further discussion is invited in particular on the following new qualifications:

· *The General Diploma in the General Track* – this proposal for 240 credit (2 year) exit-point from the General Bachelor's Degree needs to be discussed and its relevance to labour market needs and for employment purposes needs to be tested.

· *The Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree* – this is a deliberate widening of the traditional category of professional qualifications to include innovative, career-focused and often Mode 2 type programmes such as an Advanced Bachelor of Tourism, Environmental Studies or International Relations.

· *The Professional Master's Degree* – this is proposed to be pegged at Level 8: PG2 because it requires no sustained research component (which is a requirement for Level 8: PG3). The CHE's Academic Policy Task Team suggests that most MBAs, LLMs and other professional degrees that do not have a research requirement should fall under this qualification type. (The DoE will have to indicate how it will approach the funding of these professional degrees).

· *The Postgraduate Diploma* – there was an unresolved debate within the CHE's Academic Policy Task Team as to whether this qualification type should sit in both tracks, the General and the Career-focused, or only in the latter. This debate involves the status and nature of the Honours degree and whether this degree should be the normal or an

exclusive   route   to   master's   level   study.

· *The Master's Diploma* – linked to the point above, is the issue of the naming of an exit-point from a Structured or Coursework Master's Degree. Traditionally this has been termed a Postgraduate Diploma. However, the Academic Policy Task Team has chosen to use this term at Level 8: PG1 and therefore proposes a new term for this kind of qualification at Level 8: PG2. The acceptability of this term plus the proposal that a Diploma can consist of only 120 credits (SAQA's regulations require 240 credits) should be further debated.

· *The range of Certificates to be offered in the Articulation Column* – the naming and more important, function and feasibility of these proposed qualifications requires further discussion.

In general, then, there are macro issues, such as the overall outcomes-based curriculum paradigm and the proposal for a two-track framework with an Articulation Column in between, and micro issues, such as those listed immediately above, that require comment, debate and resolution.

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Chief Executive Officer

Council on Higher Education

Pretoria, 16 November 2001

Acknowledgments

Introduction

In 1997 the *White Paper* described the inherited academic policies and qualifications structures for higher education thus:

> Separate and parallel qualification structures for universities, technikons and colleges have hindered articulation and transfer between institutions and programmes, both horizontally and vertically. The impermeability of multi-year degree and diploma programmes is a further obstacle to mobility and progression. This is clearly untenable in the light of the new National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the programme-based approach to higher education, which is premised on enhancing horizontal and vertical mobility through flexible entry and exit qualifications (*White Paper*, 1997: 2.65).

The *White Paper* went on to propose a single qualifications framework for higher education:

The Ministry endorses the principle that a single qualifications framework should be developed for all higher education qualifications in line with the NQF. In principle, the framework should comprise a laddered set of qualifications at higher education certificate, diploma and degree levels, including intermediate exit qualifications within multi-year qualifications. In addition, all higher education programmes, national or institutional, should be registered on the NQF, minimally at the exit level of whole qualifications (*White Paper,* 1997: 2.66).

Since then, higher education institutions have had to operate in a difficult, transitional policy context, for on the one hand they have had to comply with the new academic policy requirements laid down by SAQA for the interim registration of qualifications on the NQF, whilst on the other, the approval and accreditation of new programmes has had to be conducted on the basis of the existing pre-1994 academic policies. At the same time, SAQA's Standards Generating Bodies have begun to design new higher education qualifications in circumstances that amount to an academic policy vacuum, and without the guidance of a unified qualifications framework for higher education. A new academic policy for South African higher education is therefore long overdue.

Background to the Development of this Policy Report

The Council on Higher Education established an Academic Policy Task Team (APTT) in 2000 in order to provide advice to the Minister of Education on the processes of registration and accreditation of higher education qualifications and programmes in the context of the NQF. The Academic Policy Task Team is broadly representative of the key role-players in the higher education sector and has earnestly sought to consult with the different role-players throughout its work.

Overview of the Report

The report consists of eight chapters and five appendices. Chapters do not need to be read sequentially. Chapter 1 outlines the purpose and the scope of the report. Chapters 2 and 3 provide the background and context for the report as required by the conventions of scholarship. However, those readers who wish to get to the heart of the report are advised to proceed from Chapter 1 directly to Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Chapter 4 is preceded by a 'Reader's Guide to the Higher Education Qualifications Framework' to facilitate a quick reading and understanding of the report's central proposals. Chapter 7 is a commentary on some of the implementation challenges currently facing higher education practitioners. This chapter can also be omitted by those readers wanting only the central proposals. A time frame for the implementation of the New Academic Policy is suggested at the end of Chapter 8. The appendices address a number of specific concerns and include a list of acronyms and a glossary of terms.

In summary:

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Chapter 1 outlines the purpose and scope of the report.

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Chapter 2 describes the inherited pre-1994 academic policies and critiques them as causing unnecessary fragmentation and lack of coordination in the higher education system and as being out of step with current realities.

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Chapter 3 describes the global and national contexts that have shaped the development of this document and to which the New Academic Policy attempts to respond.

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Chapter 4 provides a description and rationale for a new qualifications framework for South African higher education.

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Chapter 5 provides a set of pilot level descriptors for the NQF. These were developed collaboratively with input from SAUVCA, the CTP and SAQA.

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Chapter 6 provides detailed qualification descriptors for each of the qualifications recognized on the higher education qualifications framework. It also provides principles for the consistent naming of higher education qualifications and maps out systematically the articulation possibilities between them.

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Chapter 7 does not describe policy *per se*, but is rather a commentary on a range of curriculum development issues and challenges that are related to the implementation of the new academic policy and to the new higher education policy context in general.

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Chapter 8 outlines an implementation time frame for the new academic policy.

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Appendix I provides an amended set of qualifications for educators to align the Norms and Standards for Educators policy with this one.

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Appendix II provides a list of consistent translations of the qualification types into Afrikaans. (In time translations into other official South African languages may become necessary).

Appendix III contains a list of acronyms

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Appendix IV contains a glossary of terms.

Chapter 1

Purpose and Scope of the New Academic Policy

The purpose of the proposed NAP on higher education programmes and qualifications is to give effect to the policy guidelines set out in this regard in the *White Paper*, in the *Higher Education Act*, and in the *National Plan.*

In particular the NAP is intended to achieve the following:

·   To provide a detailed framework for the development and provision of higher education programmes and qualifications within a single, coordinated higher education sector which gives effect to the goals for higher education as set out in the *White Paper* and in the *National Plan.*

·   To provide a coherent and comprehensive policy framework for the provision of higher education programmes and qualifications which will shape and supplement the policies and practices of SAQA and the CHE's HEQC with respect to the registration of qualifications, and the accreditation and evaluation of programmes.

·   To provide guidance to higher education institutions as they develop appropriate programme mixes in accordance with their institutional missions and three-year rolling plans.

·   To provide for the effective and efficient utilisation of public resources expended on higher education by minimising wasteful overlap and duplication of programmes and qualifications.

This policy applies to all programmes offered by public and private institutions falling within the ambit of the *Higher Education Act* and which lead to the award of qualifications registered on Levels 5 to 8 on SAQA's NQF.

The framework and guidelines set out in the proposed NAP take into account the existing processes of registration, accreditation and funding of higher education programmes and qualifications. In this sense the New Academic Policy involves:

·   The SAQA as responsible for developing the NQF through the registration of qualifications on the framework (standards generation) and for the quality assurance of these standards;

·   The HEQC as responsible for the accreditation of providers to offer NQF-registered qualifications and for the accreditation and evaluation of higher education programmes, within SAQA's quality assurance framework;

·   The DoE as the state funder of public higher education programmes, for which registration of qualifications on the NQF and accreditation of providers to offer particular programmes by the HEQC are pre-conditions for earning teaching subsidies.

Until now the processes of registration, accreditation and funding have been handled by the Interim Joint Committee (IJC) which is convened by the CHE and includes representatives from the HEQC, the DoE and SAQA. The policies on which the Interim Joint Committee relies to determine the accreditation and approval of programmes and qualifications – namely NATED 02–116 (89/01) (for universities) and NATED 02–150 (97/01) (for technikons)- are out-dated and out of step with the transformation agendas of the *White Paper*, the *National Plan* and with SAQA's regulations for the registration of qualifications1[1]. Once finalised and approved, the proposed New Academic Policy will replace both NATED policy documents and will provide the basis for the registration, accreditation and funding of all higher education qualifications and programmes – it will apply to universities, technikons and colleges in both the public and private sectors.

Chapter 2

Policy Background

In this chapter we describe the inherited pre-1994 legislative and academic policy context and explain why it is no longer appropriate.

The existing policies for the regulation of higher education programmes and qualifications are contained in 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).*

These policy documents were conceptualised within the apartheid framework. The acts that gave effect to the policies distinguished higher education institutions in terms of the kind of qualifications they offered, i.e. universities, technikons and colleges of education, nursing and agriculture, and in terms of the student body they catered for i.e. blacks (Africans), whites, coloureds and Indians. Furthermore, political and managerial responsibility for the various higher education institutions was apportioned to a number of different government departments organised according to the then applicable racial classifications.

Over and above state legislation, universities (specifically those designated for whites) were established and, at least partly, regulated in terms of their respective private acts. In contrast, technikons and colleges were established and regulated in terms of overall 'umbrella' legislation. For technikons this 'umbrella' legislation was nationally-based while for colleges it was provincially-based.

Despite the fact that most of this legislation has been repealed by the *Higher Education Act*, the inherited policies governing higher education programmes and qualifications are derived from a legislative context that was marked by fragmentation, lack of cohesion, and with clear boundaries separating universities, technikons and colleges.

This legislation set out the terms governing the offering of programmes and qualifications for each of the three types of institutions thus:

·   Universities were to concentrate on the teaching and research of the basic fundamental principles of science, *inter alia*, with a view to the provision of high-level person power.

·   Technikons were to concentrate on the application of scientific principles to practical problems and to technology, thus preparing learners for the practice, promotion and transfer of technology within a particular vocation or industry.

·   The colleges were examples of so-called *single purpose institutions* and were to provide specific vocational education and training.

The philosophical basis for this differentiation in institutional focus rests to a large degree on the *Main Report of the Commission of Inquiry into Universities* (Van Wyk de Vries Report, 1974) which upheld the view that society could be divided into a number of different 'spheres of relationships'. These 'spheres of relationships' were assumed to be independent of one another and to have unique characteristics. In these terms then, the university sector was to constitute a 'sphere of relationship' in which the promotion and diffusion of basic or fundamental knowledge was essential. The technikons were to constitute a separate and independent 'sphere of relationship' in which the development, implementation and practical application of technology was to be emphasised. Colleges were to concentrate on developing the various competences, values and attitudes required for specific vocations.

This sector-based approach to the provision of programmes resulted in different approval mechanisms for new programmes and qualifications for each of the institutional types. The Universities and Technikons Advisory Council (AUT) was responsible for approving the offering of new programmes by universities, and it used the criteria laid down in Report 116 to consider both the structure and content of new programmes, as well as the suitability of the applying university to offer them.

In the case of technikons, policy provided for a nationally applicable structure for programmes and qualifications based on subjects (although subject content could vary). The introduction of a new programme for technikons thus requires extensive pre-consultation within the technikon sector in order to reach agreement on a commonly acceptable structure for the programme concerned. A particular technikon is granted permission to offer an approved programme on the basis of an accreditation evaluation by the Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC).

For colleges of education the now defunct Committee for Teacher Education Policy (COTEP), together with the AUT, advised on the introduction of new programmes. Since the provision of teacher education was a provincial responsibility, provincial education authorities took decisions on which colleges were to provide what programmes and qualifications.

In order to ensure some form of co-ordination and cohesion in the higher education system, some of the pre-1994 policy documents emphasised the need for mechanisms and rules for the articulation of qualifications between institutions in the same sector, and between institutions in different sectors. In addition, it was conceded that 'grey areas', where the boundaries between in the different 'spheres of relationships' became blurred, were growing. Nonetheless, although some of the pre-1994 academic policy documents concede that such strict classifications, especially those based on the concept of distinctive and independent 'spheres of relationships', are no longer tenable, they remain based on a sectoral approach to the programmes and qualifications of higher education. In this approach the higher education system was divided into three sub-sectors, each with its own and supposedly unique programme focus. Decisions relating to the offering of new programmes were therefore taken largely independently within separate sectoral contexts for universities, technikons and colleges of education respectively. These decisions attempted to curtail any form of 'academic drift' between the various types of institutions and thus sought to preserve the distinct focus of each type of institution.

The historical development of our higher education system has meant that the assumptions on which policies were based did not necessarily match reality.

For universities, permission to offer programmes and qualifications was granted on a *laissez faire* basis with little in the way of system-wide goals, criteria or quality checks on which to base the decision. For universities the decision whether to offer or not a particular programme was largely a matter of institutional autonomy.

In contrast to some of our universities, which were established more than a hundred years ago, technikons were formally established only in the early 1980s. Inevitably this meant that universities, in response to educational and training needs in society, started offering programmes and their associated qualifications which, in policy terms, encroached on the technikon 'sphere of relationships'. This was particularly true in the case of training for the professional fields, and for the associated health professions in particular. In some cases, this trend was fuelled by professional boards which required a degree for purposes of professional registration. The fact that technikons were only allowed to start awarding degrees in the early 1990s meant that some forms of professional training, which would have fitted more naturally into the technikon qualification structure, had to be offered at universities.

Policy on teacher education, in particular, had to contend with an extremely 'mixed reality'. Historically, teacher education was offered both at colleges of education and at universities. Ironically, technikons, which were established with the specific purpose of focusing on vocational and industrial education and training, were only allowed to begin to offer teacher education from the early 1990s. Apart from their own teacher education programmes, many universities had formal collaborative agreements with colleges of education which stimulated a large measure of academic interchange between these two types of institution. This 'mixed reality' was further entrenched when, in the 1960s, all teacher education for secondary schools for whites was

assigned to universities; a model which gradually influenced teacher education for secondary schools for the other 'population groups' in the ensuing years. The recent initiative of incorporating most colleges of education into both universities and technikons has made it even more difficult to uphold the pre-1994 policy approaches, and a similar process is underway for colleges of agriculture and nursing.

In conclusion, the inherited system described above provided only a skeletal qualifications structure with little provision for articulation across the three 'spheres of relationships'. Furthermore, the academic policies governing programmes and qualifications have never adequately reflected the actual distribution of programmes at institutions. In fact there has always been a significant mismatch between policy and practice in the field of higher education. The incorporation of colleges of education into universities and technikons serves to make this mismatch even more pronounced.

Chapter 3

A Changing Context for Higher Education

In this chapter we explore briefly the changing global and national contexts which must shape a new academic policy and on which the policy, in turn, must impact.

3. 1 The Impact of Globalisation and the Knowledge Society on Higher Education

Globalisation is the term used to signal the re-structuring of capitalism on a global scale that began in the mid-1970s. The global economy is an economy with the capacity to work as a unit in real time on a planetary scale. It developed as a result of a convergence of a series of factors, of which the most important is the unprecedented development of information and communication technologies. Not only have these technologies made it possible to work in real time on a planetary scale, but they have also changed the organization of production. Information and communication technologies have put knowledge at the centre of the new economy.

This new emphasis on knowledge as a productive force has led social scientists to coin the term 'knowledge society' to describe one of the main characteristics of contemporary society. However, as Stehr (1994) points out, it is not just any knowledge which gives rise to the knowledge society, but specifically the application of theoretical, codified knowledge which allows the actor to generate a product or service or to transform the productive process, and in so doing, to add to knowledge in such a way that it has direct value-added to the economy. It is this immediately productive knowledge which has a performative force which has been commodified by the market and which is the key to winning the competitive edge in the global economy. Thus is it not only the production of new knowledge, but also the reproduction, application and contextualisation of the already existing scientific (social and natural) and technological knowledge, which gives rise to a 'class' of 'knowledge workers', or skilled experts who are able to apply knowledge to local contexts and problems. Higher education has a particularly important role in providing society with individuals trained in such a way that they can respond to the demands of knowledge-based occupations.

The demands made by globalisation on higher education institutions, however, go beyond the development of cognitive skills and competences in future knowledge workers. Higher education is also asked to prepare people for a work environment characterised by the replacement of hierarchical relations by team work, self-employment and contract work, which in turn demand greater flexibility, adaptability and risk-taking on the part of workers (Stehr, 1994).

One of the effects of globalisation on higher education is the changing relation between society and institutions of higher learning. Higher education institutions are expected to be far more responsive to societal needs at a concrete instrumental level. Whereas previously, higher education was allowed to impose its own definitions of knowledge on society, society is now demanding that higher education provides more instrumental definitions of knowledge and more

operational knowledge products. Globally, higher education is now expected to focus on the employability of its graduates and to contribute, at least in part, to national economic development.

In terms of the curriculum, many higher education institutions in developed countries have responded to the globalisation agenda and to the need to educate for an uncertain or unknown employment future, by emphasising lifelong learning and the teaching and learning of generic skills, competence or 'generic capacity' (Bowden and Marton, 1999), - all defined, more or less, as the ability of the learner to put generic knowledge and skills into action. In South Africa, SAQA has responded to global trends by insisting that *critical cross-field outcomes*2[1] are infused into all qualifications at all levels on the NQF, and that these are demonstrated by learners in *integrated assessment* tasks. (For further discussion see 3.3 below and Chapter 7, 7.4 and 7.6).

3.2 International Qualifications Frameworks

In response to the increasing globalisation and marketisation of education, some countries have developed national qualifications frameworks as a means of standardising and making explicit the products or outcomes of education systems, and of enhancing the marketability and mobility of their graduates. Formal national qualifications frameworks, or systems for the national registration of qualifications, have thus been developed (or are in the process of being developed) in a number of other countries. A shared characteristic of these developments is the need to make the meaning of qualifications more transparent and explicit. The expectation is that this will make it easier for higher education stakeholders (especially employers and students) to identify the nature and level of qualifications, to compare them and to identify more easily their articulation possibilities, both within and across national boundaries.

a) Europe
There are two documents of relevance for qualifications frameworks in Europe. The first is the Sorbonne Declaration signed by ministers of education from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom in May 1998. This declaration stresses the continuing role of universities in Europe and encourages the development of a 'European Area of Higher Education' as a means to promote citizens' mobility and employability and the continent's overall development.

A second development is the Bologna Declaration on the 'European Higher Education Area' signed by ministers of education of 29 countries. Whilst recognising and affirming the independence and autonomy of universities, the Bologna Declaration also calls for steps to ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge. Greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education is stated as a priority. The objectives stated in a 'Joint Declaration of the European Ministers of Education' in June 1999 include:

·   Adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees in order to promote European citizens' employability and the international competitiveness of the European higher education system.

·   Adoption of a qualifications system essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, (access to the second cycle requires the successful completion of first cycle

studies, lasting a minimum of three years; the programme of the first cycle should be relevant to the labour market; the second cycle should lead to a Master's and/or Doctoral degree).

· Establishment of a system of credits as means of promoting widespread student mobility.

The Bologna Declaration included an agreement by the ministers to review progress after two years. As a result, in May 2001 a further document was issued, 'Towards the European Higher Education Area – Communiqué of the Meeting of European Ministers of Higher Education in Prague'. In this Communiqué, ministers of education encouraged the development of a two-cycle qualifications framework based on credits. Together with mutually recognised quality assurance systems, such arrangements are seen as facilitating students' access to the European labour market and as enhancing the compatibility and competitiveness of European higher education. A second follow-up meeting will be held in 2003 to review progress and set directions and priorities for the next stages of the process towards a European Higher Education Area. The aim is to achieve these objectives within the first decade of the third millennium.

b) Countries with formal national qualifications frameworks

New Zealand

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) began its work on unit standards development through various advisory bodies during 1993-1994. Following the 1999 White Paper, *The National Qualifications Framework of the Future,* the Framework was expected to include *all* quality-assured qualifications described in a consistent way (and not only national qualifications based on unit standards). The NZQA classification system makes provision for 17 fields. The characteristics, entry requirements, outcomes, credit requirements and relationship with other qualifications are stated for each qualification. In March 1999 the Authority undertook a consultation process to develop consistent definitions and credit requirements for all degree and postgraduate qualifications. This resulted in the publication of a consultation document in February 2000 entitled the *National Registration of Qualifications*. Various reports containing submissions and analyses of submissions appeared during 2000 and 2001 and the process has not yet been completed at the time of writing (June 2001). To avoid confusion with New Zealand's National Qualifications Framework, the broader framework is to be called the *National Register of Quality Assured Qualifications*. Learning outcomes for whole qualifications are to be recorded centrally. Components of these qualifications, however, will not be recorded centrally but will need to be publicly available.

The proposed register of qualifications originally made provision for eight levels, but during the consultation process it has been expanded to ten, to reflect the increasing number and diversity of postgraduate qualifications. Post-secondary qualifications are registered at six levels. Qualifications that can be equated with achievement in the first year of degree studies or advanced trade or technician studies are registered at Level 5. Those qualifications that can be equated with achievement at the second year of degree studies or higher-level technician and para-professional studies are registered at Level 6. The Bachelor's degree is to be registered at Level 7, postgraduate diplomas and the Bachelor's degree with Honours at Level 8, the Master's degree at Level 9 and the Doctoral degree at Level 10.

The quantity of learning and assessment typically required in gaining a qualification is measured in terms of notional learning hours. Notional learning hours include direct contact time with teachers and trainers, time spent studying and doing assignments etc. and time spent on assessment. One credit is the equivalent of 10 notional hours. For funding purposes a full-time single year programme translates into 120 credits. When registering a qualification on the NZQF, any limitations or special provisions related to the recognition and transfer of credit from other qualifications must be stated. Students should expect credit transfer to apply automatically unless there are significant stated differences between qualifications.

Australia

The Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) was introduced Australia-wide on 1 January 1995 and was phased in over a five year period, with full implementation from 2000. The AQF is a unified system of twelve outcomes-based national qualifications in schools, vocational education and training and the higher education sector (mainly universities). As opposed to being integrated and based on unit standards, the AQF is sector-driven and based on qualifications. This means that the qualifications for the three sectors represented on the AQF – schooling, vocational education and training and higher education are placed in parallel columns alongside each other rather than being integrated on a single framework. Nine broad bands are distinguished under the AQF for the higher education sector (running parallel with the Vocational Education and Training sector on the first four levels). In November 2000 the AQF Advisory Board issued a discussion paper entitled *Review of the AQF Guidelines for the Bachelor Degree and Postgraduate Qualifications*. In this document new guidelines were proposed for the following qualifications in higher education: the bachelor's degree, the bachelor's honours degree, the graduate certificate, the graduate diploma, the master's degree and the doctoral degree. The guidelines for these qualifications provide information on the following elements: purpose of the qualification, context, learning outcomes (including information on the authority to determine these), responsibility for assessment, pathways to the qualification, authority to issue the qualification and the certification issued. This is an attempt to establish a consistent set of guidelines and descriptions for all Australian higher education qualifications.

The United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom qualifications frameworks for higher education have been developed for (a) Scotland and (b) England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The two frameworks share many common principles and components. They are also qualifications rather than unit standards-based frameworks, and the process of integrating vocational qualifications onto these frameworks is only beginning. At the postgraduate levels, the two higher education frameworks have common structures, qualification titles and qualification descriptors. Below the postgraduate levels, the Honours degree levels are considered to be in broad alignment. Below the Honours level, the frameworks reflect the particular features of the different educational contexts. To reflect the similarities at postgraduate levels, the two frameworks have shared labels as follows: D (Doctorates), M (Master's), H (Honours). Below these levels, the frameworks have individual numbering systems.

In Scotland the higher education framework is part of a wider framework recommended by the Garrick Committee in 1997. This committee recommended that the main awarding bodies in Scotland should together consider and adopt an integrated framework that covers qualifications

from schooling to postgraduate level and which is based on credits. This comprehensive Scottish Credit and Qualification Framework (SCQF) provides for twelve levels including the six Scottish Higher Education (SHE) levels. (SCQF Level 7 = SHE Level 1 and SCQF Level 12 = SHE Level 6.) Like the New Zealand National Qualifications Framework, SCQF credits are a measure of the volume of learning, with one credit being defined as the volume of outcomes achieved in a notional learning time of ten hours.

The higher education band of the SCQF was published in January 2001. In ascending order the qualifications specified are the Certificate of Higher Education (SHE Level 1), the Diploma of Higher Education (SHE Level 2), the Bachelor's degree (SHE Level 3), the Honours degree (SHE Level H), the Master's degree (SHE Level M) and the Doctoral degree (SHE Level D). For each qualification, qualification descriptors are provided in an outcomes-based format, specifying what successful candidates 'have demonstrated,' 'will be able to (do)' and what 'qualities and transferable skills necessary for employment' they will have. These descriptions are brief and it is easy to grasp the differences between the qualifications on each of the six levels and to follow the logic of their progression.

A distinction is drawn between qualification descriptors and level descriptors. A level is a broad, general concept and, within the SCQF, any one level can be the location of many different types of qualifications from different types of awarding bodies. In terms of the overall level of outcome, these qualifications are broadly comparable but, for example, could range from a degree, to a professional body award, to a vocational qualification. The SCQF level descriptors attempt to describe each level in terms of general outcomes characteristically associated with the level. They provide a shared reference point for relating the full range of different types of qualifications in Scotland. The higher education qualification descriptors give a description of the particular range and nature of outcome of the qualifications awarded by higher education institutions.

The framework for England, Wales and Northern Ireland (EWNI) was also published in January 2001. The higher education qualifications awarded by universities and colleges in England, Wales and Northern Ireland are pegged at five levels. In ascending order, these are the Certificate, Intermediate, Honours, Masters and Doctoral levels. The EWNI framework document uses the same format for qualification descriptors as that of the Scottish framework.

In the following table a broad general impression of higher education qualifications as they are used in five different countries'/regions' frameworks is presented. The situation is too complex to capture it with accuracy in a table such as this. It is important to emphasise that this table does not claim to present a detailed comparison between the qualifications in the adjacent boxes; thus an exact equivalence or even comparability cannot be claimed to exist. (This is indicated by the double lines between the columns in the Table below.) Nevertheless, it remains useful to make such broad and rough comparisons in order to ensure that the proposals in this report are aligned with international trends.

Table Showing Comparative Qualifications Frameworks

South African NQF (CHE's proposals)	England, Wales, Northern Ireland (QAA)	Scotland (QAA)	New Zealand (proposed)	Australian Qualifications Framework
(FETC Level 4)		SCQF Levels 1-6, National Qualifications	(Levels 1 – 4, Certificates and National Certificates)	Certificates I – IV, Vocational & Senior Secondary Certificate of Education
Foundation Certificate Certificate 120 credits NQF Level 5	Certificate Level	Certificate of Higher Education Level 7 SHE 1	Diploma Level 5	Diploma (Higher Education and Vocational) AQF Level 5
Diploma 240 credits NQF Level 6	Intermediate Level Ordinary (non-Honours) Degrees, Foundation Degree, Diplomas of HE, Higher Diplomas	Diploma of Higher Education Level 8 SHE 2	Advanced/ Higher Diploma Level 6	Advanced Diploma (Higher Education and Vocational Education) AQF Level 5
Graduate Certificate 120 credits Bachelor's Degree	Honours Level The largest group of HE qualifications, takes	Ordinary Degree Level 9 SHE 3	Bachelor's Degree Level 7	Bachelor's Degree AQF Level 6

360 credits NQF Level 7	**three years** full-time, leading to a Bachelor's Degree with Honours			
Postgraduate Certificate / Diploma 120 credits Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree 480 credits Honours Degree 120 credits NQF Level 8: PG1		Honours degree (4 years) Level 10 SHE H	Graduate Cert / Diploma, Postgraduate Cert / Diploma, Bachelor's Degree with Honours Level 8	Graduate Certificate / Diploma, Bachelor's Degree with Honours AQF Level 7
Master's Certificate / Diploma 120 credits Professional Master's 180 credits Structured Master's, Research Master's 180 credits	Master's Level	Postgraduate Diploma and Certificate, Master's Degree Level 11 SHE M	Master's Degree Level 9	Master's Degree AQF Level 8

NQF Level 8:PG2 & 3				
Professional Doctorate Doctor of Philosophy 360 credits NQF Level 8: PG4	Doctoral Level	Doctorat es Level 12 SHE D	Doctoral Degree Level 10	Doctoral Degree AQF Level 9

Despite the crudeness of the table presented above, it does suggest that the qualifications framework proposed in this report for South African higher education qualifications is more or less aligned with other existing national frameworks, most of which allocate five or six levels to higher education qualifications.

c) A Comparison of Higher Education Qualifications in the SADC region

Formal national qualifications frameworks do not yet exist in the SADC countries (except in South Africa). A broad comparison of the duration of study and the names of undergraduate degree qualifications yields the following results:

	SA	Angola	Botswana	Lesotho	Mozambique	Swaziland	Zambia	Zimbabwe
	1+3, 3 +1 or 2+2	3 + 2	4	2 + 2	2/3 + 2	2 + 2	2 + 2	3
2 years	Diploma			Diploma	Bachelerato		Diploma	
3 years	Bachelor's	Bachelor's			Bachelerato			Bachelor's
4 years	Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's, Bachelor of Technology, Honours		Bachelor's	Bachelor's		Bachelor's	Bachelor's	
5 years	Postgraduate Diploma	Licenciado			Licenciado			

This table suggests that the proposed qualifications framework for South African higher education could serve as a basis for developing articulation arrangements with higher education institutions higher education institutions in the SADC region.

3.3 The Post-Apartheid Legislative and Policy Context for South African Higher Education

As we have seen in 3.1 above, the global context in which higher education operates is marked by the increasing instrumentalisation and marketisation of higher education. However, at a national level, the post-apartheid context demands that South African higher education addresses not only the challenges raised by globalisation, but also those arising from the developmental imperatives of equity, redress and reconstruction which derived from the country's history. These two challenges are evident in the post-apartheid higher education policy documents.

A post-apartheid policy and legislative context for higher education was broadly outlined in the *National Commission on Higher Education Report: A Framework for Transformation'* (NCHE) (1996) and consolidated in the DoE's *White Paper* (July 1997), followed by the *Higher Education Act (1997)* which established the Council on Higher Education and the Higher Education Quality Committee.

The National Commission on Higher Education (1996)

The NCHE stressed the need for increased participation, increased co-operation and partnerships and the need for greater responsiveness of the higher education system. With respect to academic planning and the curriculum, the NCHE Report dealt only with macro issues, emphasizing the need to shift to a programmes-based (as opposed to institution-based) definition of higher education which was to be realized through a new funding formula. The NCHE gave its support to the integration of education and training through a national qualifications framework on which it suggested all higher education qualifications should be registered. It also supported the establishment of a developmentally focused quality assurance system for higher education and promoted resource-based education and the funding of academic development.

White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997)

The *White Paper* built on the NCHE's recommendations by emphasising the need for higher education to become more responsive to the nation's social and economic needs. It suggested that this could be attained through a single, national, coordinated system driven by state steering mechanisms such as planning, funding, co-operative governance and quality assurance. Institutional planning was to be done in the context of a *National Plan* and to be based on the programme as the unit of academic planning. The *White Paper* stated its belief that a planned, coherent, programmes-based higher education system would achieve the following reforms:

It will promote diversification of the access, curriculum and qualification structure, with programmes developed and articulated within the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), encouraging an open and flexible system based on credit accumulation and multiple entry and

exit points for learners. This will remove obstacles which unnecessarily limit learners' access to programmes, and enable proper academic recognition to be given for prior learning achieved, thus permitting greater horizontal and vertical mobility by learners in the higher education system (*White Paper,* 1997: 2.6).

The *White Paper* thus echoed the NCHE's support for a national qualifications framework on which all higher education qualifications should be registered. Overall, the *White Paper* set out a comprehensive and ambitious vision for the transformation of the South African public higher education system. This report seeks to promote and help realise that vision. The New Academic Policy will contribute to realizing the following goals spelt out in the *White Paper*:

· *the promotion of lifelong learning*: by facilitating the development of a single qualifications framework, and learner mobility through articulation routes; and by encouraging the development of career-oriented programmes including one or two-year certificate and diploma programmes, the recognition of prior learning, flexible learning systems and the development of graduates with generic skills for a global economy;

· *equity and social redress*: by facilitating increased access - in order to ensure that the student body reflects the demographic realities of the broader society -, and by encouraging the offering of academic development programmes and extended curricula, together with an expanded range of, and increased enrolments in, postgraduate programmes;

· *improved quality of academic provision*: by providing a basis from which the HEQC can establish academic standards for its quality assurance work;

· *responsiveness to social needs and the development of social responsibility*: by encouraging the development of a diversity of programmes which are responsive to national and regional contexts, and by facilitating the development of experiential learning and service learning programmes or modules.

The Higher Education Act (1997)

The *Higher Education Act* provides for the orderly entry of private providers into the higher education terrain. It requires private providers of higher education to register with the DoE and to meet certain conditions in doing so. These conditions include registration of their qualifications on the NQF through SAQA, and the accreditation of their programmes by the HEQC. This means that the academic policy presented in this report will apply to both public and (registered) private higher education providers.

The South African Qualifications Authority and the National Qualifications Framework

SAQA was established through the *South African Qualifications Authority Act* of 1995 to oversee the development and implementation of the NQF. The NQF was intended to transform education and training in South Africa by creating a single, integrated national education and training framework; by making it easier for learners to enter the system and to move and progress within it; by improving the quality of education and training; and by enabling learners to develop to their full potential, thereby supporting the social and economic development of the country as a whole.

The NQF is essentially a quality assurance system in which the development and registration of standards and qualifications is carried out by Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) reporting to National Standards Bodies (NSBs), while the quality assurance is looked after by Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs) that carry out their function in co-operation with providers and moderating bodies.

SAQA issued the *Regulations for NSBs* in March, 1998, which simultaneously established the main parameters of the NQF itself. The latter has eight levels (of which Levels 5-8 are dedicated to the Higher Education Band of the framework), in 12 organising fields:

Field 01: Agriculture and Nature Conservation

Field 02: Culture and Arts

Field 03: Business, Commerce and Management Studies

Field 04: Communication Studies and Language

Field 05: Education, Training and Development

Field 06: Manufacturing, Engineering and Technology

Field 07: Human and Social Studies

Field 08: Law and Military Science and Security

Field 09: Health Sciences and Social Sciences

Field 10: Physical, Mathematical, Computer and Life Sciences

Field 11: Services

Field 12: Physical Planning and Construction

The *Regulations* specify the requirements that must be met for any particular proposed set of learning outcomes of a programme to be accepted as a qualification, namely that they should:

·   represent a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose or purposes, and which is intended to provide qualifying learners with applied competence and a basis for further learning;

·   add value to the qualifying learner in terms of enrichment of the person through the provision of status, recognition, credentials and licensing; enhancement of marketability and employability; and opening-up of access routes to additional education and training;

·   provide benefits to society and the economy through enhancing citizenship, increasing social and economic productivity, providing specifically skilled/professional people and transforming and redressing legacies of inequity;

·   comply with the objectives of the National Qualifications Framework;

·   have both specific and critical cross-field outcomes which promote life-long learning;

·   where applicable, be internationally comparable;

·   incorporate integrated assessment appropriately to ensure that the purpose of the qualification is achieved, and use for such assessment a range of formative and summative assessment methods such as portfolios, simulations, work-place assessments, written and oral examinations;

·   indicate in the rules governing the award of the qualification that the qualification may be achieved in whole or in part through the recognition of prior learning, which concept includes, but is not limited to, learning outcomes achieved through formal, informal and non-formal learning and work experience.

All qualifications must include critical cross-field outcomes (sometimes called generic outcomes):

· identifying and solving problems in which responses display that responsible decisions using critical and creative thinking have been made;

· working effectively with others as a member of a team, group, organisation, community;

· organising and managing oneself and one's activities responsibly and effectively;

· collecting, analysing, organising and critically evaluating information;

· communicating effectively using visual, mathematical and/or language skills in the modes of oral and/or written persuasion;

· using science and technology effectively and critically, showing responsibility towards the environment and health of others;

· demonstrating an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation;

· contributing to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the society at large, by making it the underlying intention of any programme of learning to make an individual aware of the importance of reflecting on, and exploring, a variety of strategies to learn more effectively; participating as responsible citizens in the life of local, national and global communities; being culturally and aesthetically sensitive across a range of social contexts; exploring education and career opportunities; and developing entrepreneurial opportunities.

The original conception of the NQF was one where a 'universe' of many thousands of unit standards would be registered across 12 fields of activity, with each standard registered on the NQF being quality assured at the unit level. Qualifications would be prescribed combinations of registered unit standards and would not be quality-assured at the 'whole' level. It was envisaged that there would be one National Standards Body drawn from stakeholders in Education and Training for each of the 12 fields, that each NSB would designate the official sub-fields and would then establish Standards Generating Bodies in each sub-field to write unit standards and to propose qualifications. (Unit standards would be 'borrowed' from other fields in order to fulfil the purpose of particular qualifications.) At the quality assurance level, the original idea was for there to be at least one ETQA operating in each of the three bands of the Education and Training system, namely the Higher Education, Further Education and General Education bands.

A remarkable feature of the *SAQA Act* was that the NQF was to be brought into being as an evolutionary project under the guidance of SAQA, working co-operatively and consultatively with relevant stakeholders. This means that, from time to time the Authority lays down legal requirements as regulations.

During the evolution of the NQF, SAQA has allowed the original conception to be considerably modified. Amongst the most important changes is the acceptance that qualifications can be registered on the NQF that are not based on unit standards, but instead have specified exit outcomes, with integrative formative and summative assessment of the whole qualification. Effectively, this means that there can be more than one qualification of a particular kind, since there can be both unit standard-based versions and those not so designed, as well as hybrid forms.

The second 'modification' of the NQF conception was that NSBs can recognise as well as establish SGBs, and that, as a result, there can be more than one SGB in a given sub-field. In addition, such SGBs can be recognised as being provider-specific, sectoral or national.

In the original model of quality assurance there was to have been one ETQA for each band. (The HEQC has been given this umbrella function for the Higher Education and Training Band.) However, the original model has become more complex, with Professional Councils and Boards becoming candidates to function as ETQAs, and, since the passage of the *Skills Development Act*, the creation of many Sectoral Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) which will all, by law, be ETQAs, many of which will operate in the Higher Education Band.

There can be no doubt that these and other modifications of the original NQF conception, while being essential for the system to span General, Further and Higher Education bands, have rendered the NQF much more complicated. Considerable confusion has arisen because the *SAQA Act* itself, and especially the subsequent regulations, have reflected both the original model as well as the modifications introduced after 1995.

It is true, nevertheless, that basic elements of the NQF remain which impact on higher education academic planning and curriculum design, namely that all qualifications must be NQF-aligned (i.e. registered at a particular level and in a particular field(s) and comprising a certain number of credits), must have purpose statements and specified outcomes (both field-specific and critical cross-field), and must be assessed validly according to assessment criteria which serve the purpose of the qualification. In addition, Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) must be explicitly provided for in the description of qualifications to be registered. (For further discussion see Chapter 7).

SAQA has permitted over 5000 existing qualifications in the Higher Education Band, which were lodged with SAQA in the prescribed NQF-aligned format in mid-2000, to become interim-registered; which means that they have registration status until mid-2003. It is clear that many of the curriculum changes required to achieve the learning outcomes stated for interim registration still have to be put into place; but the interim-registration process has at least provided a basis for the quality assurance of higher education qualifications and for the systemic changes necessary to work towards an outcomes-based system.

New guidelines have since been issued by SAQA which are essential for maintaining the good order of the system: qualifications that are interim-registered may be renewed in full registration mode after mid-2003, if they have a good quality assurance record, are considered useful in the system and have not been replaced through the work of the SGBs. (The judgment as to whether or not this is the case will have to be exercised by SAQA's NSBs.)

The *NSB Regulations* promulgated in 1998 also introduced a credit system for the NQF where one credit represents 10 notional hours of active learning. With respect to qualifications, a total of 120 or more credits are required for the registration of any qualification, with a minimum of 72 credits being obtained at or above the level at which the qualification is registered, and the number and levels of credits constituting the balance having also to be specified. Given that 120 credits is estimated to be one full-time academic year's worth of study, and the proliferation of 'short courses' required by adult learners for lifelong learning, continuous professional development, information and communication technology up-grading, etc., it is important that SAQA makes provision for the registration of qualifications consisting of fewer than 120 credits, provided certain requirements are met and provided the qualification in question complies with the objectives of the NQF.

The *Regulations* have also established three national qualifications, first a National Certificate at any level of the NQF with a minimum of 120 credits, of which 72 or more must be at the level at which the certificate is registered; second, a National Diploma with a minimum of 240 credits, of which at least 72 must be at Level 53[2] or above, and, third, a National First Degree with a

minimum of 360 credits, of which at least 72 must be at Level 64[3] or above. The *Regulations* specify that the number of credits required for three types of learning should also be specified for qualifications registered at Levels 5-8. These are <u>fundamental learning</u> (learning which forms the grounding or basis needed to undertake the education, training or further learning required in the obtaining of the qualification concerned), <u>core learning</u> (the compulsory learning required in situations contextually relevant to the particular qualification), and <u>elective learning</u> (a selection of additional credits from which a choice may be made to ensure that the purpose of the qualification is achieved). The feasibility of this requirement for qualifications not based on unit standards is still to be tested.

In the latter half of the 1990s, despite the lack of a detailed policy framework, many higher education institutions responded to the government's policy goals outlined above and took the initiative by attempting to reform their own curricula in line with the goals suggested by the NCHE Report, *White Paper* and SAQA's requirements for interim registration. However, as none of these policy documents deal with the micro-detail of academic planning and curriculum development, these reforms have occurred in an idiosyncratic and uneven manner across the higher education sector. Furthermore, this curriculum reform movement has had to take place within the constraints of the old pre-1994 academic policy frameworks, namely the NATED Report 116 (99/02) for universities and the NATED Report 150 (97/01) for technikons. Despite the Interim Joint Committee's commitment to interpreting these policies flexibly in its accreditation and approval processes until a new academic policy is in place, the lack of an academic policy appropriate to the new policy context has hindered the smooth implementation of the post-1994 higher education curriculum reform movement.

Norms and Standards for Educators 2000

A new policy, 'Norms and Standards for Educators' (*Government Gazette* No. 20844, February, 2000) has been approved to govern all teacher educator programmes and qualifications. As the Norms and Standards for Educators report came into effect before this over-arching academic policy for higher education, educator qualifications will need to align with the framework presented here. Whilst it will not be difficult to align the various qualifications for educators with those on the new higher education qualifications framework, the nomenclature used in the 'Norms and Standards' document will have to be changed to become consistent with that laid down here, for example, the Postgraduate Certificate (PGCE) will need to be re-named a Graduate Certificate in Education (GradCE) and the BEd (Hons) will need to be re-named an Advanced Bachelor of Education. These decisions have been made by the DoE in consultation with the CHE and the SGB for Educators of Schooling (see Appendix I for a framework for Educator Qualifications).

The National Plan for Higher Education 2001

The *National Plan* seeks to address the implementation vacuum that was left after the publication of the *White Paper* in 1997 by outlining an implementation framework for achieving the latter's vision and goals. It also brings to a close the consultative process which began with the establishment of the NCHE in 1995 and has continued through to the publication and deliberations around the CHE's report *Towards a New Higher Education Landscape: Meeting the Equity, Quality and Social Development Imperatives of South Africa in the 21st Century* (2000). The *National Plan* states its goals as the achievement of the transformation objectives set out in the *White Paper*, ensuring coherence of provision of higher education at a national level, ensuring that there is accountability for the expenditure of pubic funds and that limited resources are used effectively and efficiently; and that the quality of academic programmes is improved across the system (*National Plan*, 2001:6). To this end it establishes indicative targets for the size and shape of the system in terms of growth and participation rates, graduation rates, procedures for planned institutional programme mixes and equity and research goals. It stresses that increased participation rates should be a long-term goal (to be achieved over the next 10–15 years) whilst efficiency improvements should be the short-term focus (for the next 5 years). To achieve improved graduation rates, the DoE is prepared to fund academic development programmes as an integral part of the new Funding Framework. This has important implications for a new qualifications framework for higher education (see Chapter 4). The *National Plan* also promotes the diversification of the type and range of programmes offered in the system and this is to be linked to the diversification of institutional missions and plans. Finally, the *National Plan* establishes a National Working Group to make specific recommendations by the end of 2001 on the restructuring of the institutional landscape and it warns that regional rationalisations of programme development and delivery will be required.

It is hoped that NAP will contribute to the implementation of the *National Plan* by facilitating the achievement of the following listed outcomes:

· *increased participation rates:* by creating opportunities to access qualifications and articulation qualifications at the point of entry to both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes;

· *increased graduate outputs:* by creating a flexible qualifications framework which can accommodate extended curricula and a variety of placement options for students;

· *a broadened social base of students:* by supporting a lower common admissions requirement and by facilitating the recognition of prior learning in the articulation column of the framework;

· *increased recruitment of students from SADC countries*: by providing for a variety of placement options at entry points to programmes and by providing a range of articulation options;

·   *enhanced cognitive skills of graduates*: by providing for the option of a 480 credit Career-focused Bachelor's degree which will give learners more time to develop the required skills;

·   *diversity through mission and programme differentiation:* by providing for two tracks on the framework and a wide range of qualifications with articulated entry and exit points;

·   *programme and infra-structural collaboration*: by establishing a common qualifications framework and academic planning guidelines across all sectors of the higher education system.

Thus, with NAP the CHE seeks to fill the academic planning vacuum created by the post-1994 policy context. The report aims to provide a detailed academic planning framework for the design and specification of qualifications and the programmes that deliver them, for an integrated higher education sector. It seeks to do so in a manner that is consistent with the principles and goals of higher education policy, the regulatory context provided by SAQA and the HEQC requirements for the accreditation and evaluation of programmes.

3.4 The Tensions Involved in Developing a Responsive Academic Policy

We have noted above that for developing countries such as ours the provision of quality public higher education remains the key to our participation in the global economy and the knowledge society. However, the impact of the globalisation agenda in the South African higher education context raises one of the key debates that has underpinned post-1994 higher education policy-making, namely what Badat (1999) has called the 'permanent or intractable tension' between the dual imperatives of development (to participate in a global economy) and equity (the need for higher education to become a means of social redress and equity). This tension was noted in the *White Paper*,

The South African economy is confronted with the formidable challenge of integrating itself into the competitive arena of international production and finance….

Simultaneously, the nation is confronted with the challenge of reconstructing domestic social and economic relations to eradicate and redress the inequitable patterns of ownership, wealth and social and economic practices that were shaped by segregation and apartheid (*White Paper* , 1997: 1.9, 1.10).

Badat explains the challenge that this tension poses for policy-making thus:

For political and social reasons it is crucial to pursue both equity and development goals. The way to resolve the equity-development paradox is to recognise the competing, yet important, claims of both equity (redress of social structural inequalities) and development (socio-economic, political … and human resource development to effect this). Further, the challenge for higher education is to find policies and strategies which, in the context of existing conditions, can satisfy both imperatives, can *balance* equality goals and development goals. (Badat, 1999:4)

Clustered around the development trajectory are trends such as the shift to a more instrumentalist view of higher education which emphasises the need to contribute to a nation's economic productivity, for example by producing employable graduates or globally competitive 'knowledge workers' with 'generic' skills. Also linked to this trajectory is the shift towards Mode 2 knowledge production, the development of more open systems of education, the marketisation of higher education and an emphasis on offering programmes which are more applied and interdisciplinary in their purpose and focus.

Issues such as the massification of higher education and its assertion as a public good which develops citizens for participation in a democracy are clustered around the equity trajectory. In the South African context, the pedagogical concern that under-prepared undergraduate students need first to develop cognitive and conceptual foundations in one discipline, before being in a position to tackle interdisciplinary, Mode 2 types of knowledge, links the equity trajectory with the need to nurture and protect general formative education and the disciplines.5[4] In our context, the equity trajectory also involves addressing the issue of the role of local or indigenous knowledge in the curriculum, and of developing curricula which engage with local issues and problems.

This tension between development and equity policy goals is also evident in the *National Plan*. On the one hand it demands enhanced cognitive skills for graduates and increased outputs and efficiency of the system, whilst on the other it requires a broadening of the social base of students, increased participation in higher education and the offering of academic programmes. In fact, the *National Plan* fails to hold the two goals in balance and, presumably for pragmatic reasons, seems to opt for prioritising the efficiency (and development) goal in the short-term because 'the overall effectiveness and efficiency of the system is in doubt' (*National Plan*, 2001: 6). The *National Plan* suggests that the equity goals of increased participation are only attainable in the medium to long-term.

The reasons for the *National Plan*'s dominant concern with improving the efficiency and outputs of the system in the short-term may well lie in the fact that South Africa's entry into the global economy puts its government in a double bind. South Africa's entry into the global economy has been driven by a structural adjustment macro-economic policy, Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR), which has entailed, *inter alia,* government cutbacks on social spending and the removal of protectionist barriers to trade. These have had short-term effects that may well have militated against the increase of higher education participation rates. For example,

reasons often quoted for the recent decline in student numbers in public higher education include the drop in the average South African's spending power, loss of jobs in the primary and manufacturing sectors, limited financial aid from the state for low income students, a decrease in the unit of resource of the government's subsidisation of public higher education, a decrease in the number of school-leavers eligible for higher education entry (until 2000), and competition from private providers. Thus, while South Africa's entry into the global market requires the development of a highly skilled workforce, the short-term effects of entering that global economy appear to have rendered the nation less able to produce that workforce, and therefore there is pressure on the higher education system to do more with less.

Whilst it is not the task of an academic policy to solve such intractable tensions, it should strive to lay down a regulatory framework which does not promote either goal at the expense of the other, and which provides the conditions for such tensions to be worked through in a single, co-ordinated but diversified system.

Chapter 4

A Framework for Qualifications of Higher Education in South Africa

4.1 Introduction

This chapter and the two that follow it lay down the broad parameters within which higher education *qualifications* and the *programmes* that deliver them should be constructed, using a qualifications framework as the device for doing so. In terms of the *Higher Education Act*, public higher education institutions are recognised by statute as qualification-awarding bodies. However, this right is to be exercised within national goals, plans and frameworks as determined by the DoE, SAQA and the CHE/HEQC. The purpose of aligning all South African qualifications on a single qualifications framework is to give coherence to a single, co-ordinated higher education system, thus facilitating the *articulation of qualifications*, the *transfer of credit* and mobility and flexibility across the system. A standardised qualifications framework should also help streamline national, regional and institutional planning processes and facilitate the quality assurance tasks of the HEQC. However, it must be stressed that within these standardised parameters, programme diversity and innovation are to be encouraged. Individual institutions and providers of programmes should design their educational offerings to realise their different visions, missions and plans and to meet the varying needs of the clients, communities and regions that they serve. Thus the goal of the qualifications framework should be to facilitate the comparability of qualifications across the system without impeding diversity and innovation, and to set standardised parameters without allowing this to lead to uniformity of provision.

Users of this qualifications framework should understand it as an attempt to build an integrated and co-ordinated system for the programmes and qualifications offered in higher education in which learner progression and mobility is facilitated. As stated in Chapter 3, one of the purposes of the NQF is to facilitate the articulation of qualifications on the framework. This involves clear statements of qualifications' entry and exit requirements. It also involves the recognition and transfer of credit between qualifications. The mechanisms that a qualifications framework provides for doing this are *levels* and *level descriptors,* the level-pegging and credit-rating of recognised *qualification types*, the description of these in *qualification descriptors* (see Chapter 6), the recognition of *designated variants* of these qualification types (see Chapter 6) and finally through the specification of *exit-level outcomes* for particular *qualification specialisations* (see diagram below).

Whilst the framework aims to facilitate articulation, this does not mean that learners should assume that progression and admission to specific programmes is ever guaranteed. Under the *Higher Education Act* it remains the right and responsibility of higher education institutions to determine their own admission requirements and the entry requirements for particular programmes. Providers also remain responsible for the quality of their provision and for the quality of the qualifications they award. This framework is not intended to undermine these rights and responsibilities, but to provide a common framework within which these can be exercised in a coherent, transparent and consistent manner. In using the framework for academic planning, institutions are urged to exploit the possibilities and flexibility that it offers to design programmes that cater for both intra- and inter-institutional collaboration, the articulation of qualifications and the transfer of credit.

Given the DoE's insistence in the *National Plan* that for planning purposes for the next 5 years, universities and technikons continue to be treated as distinct types of institution, this qualifications framework has been deliberately designed to cater for both the short-term transitional period (the next 5 years) and for the long-term. It has built-in flexibility so that the same framework can cater for the present configuration of qualifications, a transitional period (2 rounds of rolling plans, i.e. until the end of 2005), and also for a longer-term vision, which we suggest could begin to be implemented from the beginning of 2003 (see Chapter 8). This is a difficult task and some anomalies will exist, particularly in the short-term, for example, in the transitional phase, the comparability of qualifications between the two sectors will not necessarily be achieved, whilst the coherence and marketability of new exit qualifications still needs to be tested.

4.2 Characteristics of the Qualifications Framework for Higher Education

A new qualifications framework for higher education should demonstrate the following characteristics:

·   It should comply with the new policy and legislative context for higher education, i.e. with the *White Paper*, the *Higher Education Act*, the *National Plan* and with the regulations and structures already laid down by SAQA for the design and implementation of the national qualifications framework. (See Chapter 3, 3.3).

·   It should facilitate the provision of programmes that will produce graduates who can compete in a global economy and knowledge society in contextually appropriate ways. It should also be sufficiently flexible to allow individual institutions and providers to pursue their own curriculum goals with creativity and innovation, taking cognisance of the redress and equity imperatives in South Africa, the person power needs of the country and the increasing need for specialisation. It should also encourage the development of new qualifications (types and specialisations) as the need arises.

·   It should be compatible with international qualification frameworks to ensure international recognition and comparability of standards. (See Chapter 3, 3.2).

·   It should be acceptable, as far as possible, to all stakeholders of the higher education system, including students, academic staff and their sectoral organisations, private providers, professional bodies, industry and commerce, employers, the public sector and relevant government agencies.

- It should be clear, easy to understand and user-friendly for all higher education clients and stakeholders, enabling them to understand the learning achievements represented by different qualifications and the relationships between them. It should allow students to plan and map their educational progress.

- It should facilitate the gradual integration of a previously divided, trinary higher education system (universities, technikons and colleges), by providing broad guidelines and a common discourse for the design and specification of all qualifications and programmes in the system, ensuring the necessary standardisation, coherence, consistency and rationalisation to enable the long-term development of a high quality, single, co-ordinated and articulated system.

- It should facilitate qualification articulation across the higher education system by clarifying the nature of its different qualifications and the relationships between them, their entry and exit points and progression routes based on a common credit-rating system, a set of levels and level descriptors, a set of qualification types and qualification descriptors and consistent nomenclature for the variants and specialisations within these.

- It should facilitate and improve the quality of academic and curriculum planning and standards generation by individual providers and institutions, professional bodies and by SAQA, SGBs and NSBs in the NQF system.

- It should articulate with the rest of the NQF and in particular with the curriculum goals and qualification structures of the Further Education and Training sector to ensure that access to higher education is widened.

- It should encourage lifelong learning by catering for flexible, more open, multi-mode delivery systems and by making provision for the recognition of prior learning, for multiple entry and exit points and for intermediate exit qualifications from multi-year qualifications.

- It should provide guidance to internal and external quality assurance agencies for the consistent and reliable evaluation, accreditation and approval of qualification standards and the programmes that deliver them.

- It should be phased in within a reasonable timeframe which takes into account the labour intensive nature of curriculum re-structuring and the needs and interests of students already in the system.

4.3 Definitions of a Qualification and a Programme in an Outcomes- and Programmes-based System

A *qualification* is the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by an accredited provider.6[1] In the outcomes-based approach intrinsic to the NQF, a *qualification* signifies and formally certifies the demonstrated achievement by a learner of a planned and purposeful combination of learning outcomes, at a specified level of performance. (See Chapter 3, 3.3). SAQA has stipulated that the learning outcomes of all South African qualifications should include critical cross-field or generic skills as well as discipline, domain-specific or specialised knowledge, skills and reflexivity. SAQA's format for qualification specification minimally includes the title and purpose of the qualification, its NQF level, credits, rules of combination for its learning components (*modules* or *unit standards*), exit-level outcomes and associated assessment criteria, entry requirements, forms of *integrated assessment* (to ensure that learners synthesize the learning from the various modules) and recognition of prior learning and moderation arrangements.

A *programme*7[2] is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to one or more qualifications; and in an outcomes-based system, a programme is designed to enable learners to achieve pre-specified exit level outcomes. It is the purpose of the programme which gives rise to its learning outcomes and structure. In an outcomes-based system, a programme can be defined as a purposeful and coherent combination of units of learning (modules or unit standards) expressed in an outcomes-based format that lead to one or more qualifications, which serve a general academic or a professional, career-focused purpose. Programmes should have a developmental design and multiple and integrated assessments to ensure that learners not only advance their knowledge, but also integrate the knowledge and skills learnt from the constituent modules. A programme should have recognised entry and exit points and should be constructed from *core modules* (compulsory for all students on a programme) and *elective modules* (a group of modules from which a choice must be made in order to achieve the purpose of the qualification and the required number of credits)8[3]. Programmes may be general-formative, professional, career-focused, trans-, inter- or multi-disciplinary in nature. In keeping with the DoE's encouragement of regional collaboration (see *National Plan*), it should be noted that a programme can also be designed and offered on an inter-institutional basis.

In an outcomes- and programmes-based approach to curriculum design, the traditional approach to the higher education curriculum, namely apprenticeship in a single discipline, is not assumed. Instead, disciplinary knowledge and skills are to be selected to serve the purpose of the programme and to provide the knowledge and skills required for the development of *applied competence* (SAQA's ideal output which integrates education and training) and/or of an institution's particular definition of 'graduateness'. This does not mean that the development of disciplinary depth will not be required in most programmes, but it does mean that the tradition of one (or two) disciplinary major(s) per qualification will not necessarily hold. Whilst all programmes should still develop some depth of learning based on sequential learning in a

particular area of specialisation or career focus, the degree of depth (and breadth) of a programme will depend on its purpose and its exit-level outcomes.

By way of introduction, it is important to note that to date in South African higher education, the curriculum focus has been on the broad option of qualifications, which are awarded on the completion of large, planned and coherent units of learning leading to whole qualifications, with a staged or developmental design (i.e. programmes) and not on *unit standards*. But it is permissible for higher education qualifications to be based on prescribed combinations of unit standards that are individually specified and registered on the NQF,9[4] provided that these unit standards combine to form a planned and purposeful qualification and provided that the learning outcomes are assessed in an integrated manner. Public higher education institutions may also offer 'stand alone' unit standards for specific market niches, but unless a learner combines these to make up a registered qualification, these will not be funded by the DoE.10[5] Apart from this 'market niche' enterprise involving short courses and unit standards, the main business of higher education involves the awarding of 'whole qualifications' of at least 120 credits of learning (i.e. the equivalent of two traditional full-time semesters).11[6] The qualifications awarded by institutions of higher education involve more than the completion of discrete units of learning and the accumulation of credit: learning in higher education should be developmental, focused and integrative, the whole being more than the sum of its parts. Qualifications based on unit standards must therefore also be designed to produce this integrated and cumulative effect (e.g. through a requirement for 'capstone' unit standards or modules, and through integrated assessment). This policy document is therefore concerned with qualifications (both those that are, and those that are not, based on unit standards) but not with unit standards *per se*.

4.4 Describing Learning on a Qualifications Framework

SAQA's conceptualisation of a National Qualifications Framework is based on an outcomes-based philosophy of education, which focuses on the outputs as opposed to the inputs and processes of an education system. This means that the value, or currency of the system is based on measures of learner attainment demonstrated in assessment as the achievement of specified learning outcomes, irrespective of the nature of the learning inputs or their mode of delivery. The framework is thus a mechanism for making explicit the nature, level and volume of learning outputs represented by particular qualifications. Only that learning which has been assessed (usually against specified learning outcomes and assessment criteria) can be measured and accredited on a qualifications framework.

Learner attainment is measured in two ways on the NQF: qualitatively (what quality or level of complexity of learning is demanded by a particular qualification or its set of exit level learning outcomes?); and also quantitatively (what is the volume of learning achieved or how long does it normally or *notionally* take the average student to attain this set of learning outcomes?). As mentioned in Chapter 3, 3.3, the NQF system caters for the latter by allocating one *credit* on the NQF for 10 *notional study hours* (a quantitative measure). It caters for the former by pegging unit standards and qualifications and their minimum credit values to particular levels on the NQF (a qualitative measure). These levels are defined by level descriptors (see Chapter 5), which are qualitative descriptions of learning captured in generic form. It is important to note that the SAQA

outcomes-based system prioritises qualitative measures of learning over quantitative measures. In other words, progress on the NQF is not directly linked to time served in the education system or to the number of credits attained, but rather to the level or complexity of the learning outcomes attained, irrespective of how long it takes a learner to achieve these, provided that a prescribed minimum number of credits (notional hours of learning) have been 'clocked up'.

This report advocates a 'nested approach' to the specification of qualifications and to the generation of standards, which means that descriptions of learning move from the general and generic to the specialised and specific, with the more specific standards or qualifications always meeting the requirements of the more generic within which they are nested or framed (see diagram below). This means that the NQF *levels* and their set of *level descriptors* form the outer and most generic shell or layer of qualification specification. Pegged to these are recognised *qualification types*, described by *qualification descriptors* that specify the level of the qualification type, its minimum credit rating and its purpose and characteristics. To sit at a particular NQF level, a qualification type must meet the generic competences described in the level descriptor for the level concerned, e.g. a General Bachelor's degree must meet the competences described in the level descriptor for Level 7. These basic qualification types should be used as points of departure for the design of more specialised qualifications and the programmes that deliver them. The next layer of qualification specialisation nested within the qualification type is the *designated variant*, e.g. a General Bachelor *of Science*. These designated variants only apply to full degrees (and not to Certificates or Diplomas) and are captured in the nomenclature of the degree. There is a prescribed set of designated variants for the degrees in the General Track of the framework,12[7] but variants are open-ended in the Career-focused Track (see Chapter 6).13[8] The learning outcomes of a designated variant should meet the more generic specifications laid down for the qualification type of which they are a variant, e.g. a Bachelor of Science must comply with the more general requirements for a General Bachelor's degree. The last and most specific layer of qualification specification, on which most programmes are based, is termed the *qualification specialisation*, which is reflected in the qualification's *qualifier*, e.g. a Bachelor of Science *in Geology.* This means that the learning outcomes and specifications for a BSc (Geology) meet the learning demands and specifications laid down for a BSc and in addition, include specialised learning outcomes related to the field of Geology. The generic requirements specified in the level descriptors and qualification descriptors are thus realised through their re-contextualisation and re-description in the learning outcomes of specific programmes and qualifications nested within them.

This *nested approach* to standards generation and qualification specification will make the design of specialised and/or provider-specific qualifications relatively straightforward, whilst at the same time ensuring articulation possibilities between qualifications that are framed or nested within the same generic or umbrella qualification. This report lays down the outer or generic layers of the process, namely the level descriptors and the qualification descriptors (specifications for each recognised qualification type). Higher education sectoral bodies (SAUVCA and CTP) are currently engaged in a standards generating project for the key high-volume designated variants in the system. Once these are available, an institution wishing to design a Bachelor of Science in Geology will simply have to write the learning outcomes for this particular specialisation and locate them within the learning outcomes already provided by the relevant designated variant

(the BSc) and in so doing, will simultaneously meet the requirements for a General Bachelor's degree and for a Level 7 qualification. Agreement across the higher education system to use a common credit-rating system, a common set of level descriptors, qualification types and designated variants (where applicable) in designing further specialisations will facilitate the recognition and articulation of qualifications across the system. This will also help clarify the distinctiveness of different qualification types pegged at the same level on the NQF. The adoption of such a system will also facilitate the development of a clear and consistent typology and nomenclature for qualifications across the system. It will also provide a starting point for internal and external programme review and accreditation processes. Importantly, the lack of systemic specification at the level of qualification specialisation means that there will continue to be considerable provider discretion as to how the outcomes of a particular qualification and programme are defined, interpreted, taught, learnt and assessed at institutional level.

Apart from 'stand-alone' unit standards or short-courses, the meaning and use of unit standards in higher education will only become evident once they are clustered under a particular whole qualification as constituent parts of a programme. The level and credit-rating of a unit standard in higher education will thus usually be determined on the basis of its contribution to a particular programme and qualification.

Diagram Showing a Nested Approach to Standards-Generation and Qualification Specification

LEVEL (level descriptor) e.g. <u>Level 7</u>
QUALIFICATION TYPE (qualification descriptor) e.g. <u>General Bachelor's Degree</u>
DESIGNATED VARIANT (designator) e.g. Bachelor <u>of Science</u>
QUALIFICATION SPECIALISATION (qualifier)

e.g. Bachelor of Science <u>in Geology</u>

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│                                                                           │
│  LEVEL (level descriptor) e.g. Level 7                                    │
│                                                                           │
│   ┌────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐     │
│   │                                                                  │     │
│   │  QUALIFICATION TYPE (qualification descriptor) e.g. General      │     │
│   │  Bachelor's Degree                                               │     │
│   │                                                                  │     │
│   │   ┌──────────────────────────────────────────────────────┐      │     │
│   │   │                                                        │      │     │
│   │   │  DESIGNATED VARIANT (designator) e.g. Bachelor of      │      │     │
│   │   │  Science                                               │      │     │
│   │   │                                                        │      │     │
│   │   │   ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐          │      │     │
│   │   │   │                                          │          │      │     │
│   │   │   │  QUALIFICATION SPECIALISATION (qualifier)│          │      │     │
│   │   │   │  e.g. Bachelor of Science in Geology     │          │      │     │
│   │   │   │                                          │          │      │     │
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4.4.1 Credits

As explained above, credits provide a measure of the volume of learning as quantified by the number of notional study hours required for achieving the learning outcomes specified for a particular qualification. Credit is awarded regardless of the mode of delivery of learning, provided the attainment of the learning outcomes is demonstrated through appropriate assessment.14[9] A qualification can be defined in terms of the *total minimum number of credits* required for the qualification as a whole, and in terms of the *minimum number of credits required at its specified exit level* on a qualifications framework; thus establishing minimum expectations in terms of the volume (and level of complexity) of learning required for a particular qualification. The credit ratings specified on the framework are minimum ratings. Depending on their missions, plans and purposes, some institutions and/or specific programmes will offer qualifications with credit ratings well above the suggested minimum. For example, a comprehensive professional degree such as the MBChB may require a volume of learning represented by 600 to 720 credits, but as it is a first

professional degree - an Advanced Bachelor's Degree (see below) - the complexity of learning required remains at Level 8: PG1 on the framework. By comparison, a highly specialised, career-focused qualification such as a Bachelor of Technology (Optometry) worth only 480 credits would also be an Advanced Bachelor's degree pegged at Level 8: PG1. This suggests that at any level on the NQF, whilst the complexity of learning attained remains comparable, the volume of learning may vary considerably, depending on the different purposes of the qualifications concerned. <u>Thus, the volume of learning or credit rating should not be used to determine the level at which a particular qualification sits on the NQF</u>.15[10]

If a full-time equivalent taught (i.e. time-tabled coursework) academic year is calculated at 30 weeks and the average full-time equivalent student is expected to work a 40-hour week, then, on the SAQA credit-rating system of 10 notional study hours per credit, the minimum number of credits per taught/ coursework academic year is 120.16[11] However, in keeping with the UK system, <u>it is proposed that for research-based programmes and qualifications the academic year be calculated at 45 weeks, giving a minimum credit rating of 180 credits per academic year for Master's and Doctoral programmes.</u>17[12]

4.4.2 Level Descriptors

As indicated above, level descriptors are the most outer shell or layer of qualification specification and as such attempt to describe the nature of generic learning achievement, its complexity and relative demand at each level of a qualifications framework. Level descriptors are thus broad generic qualitative statements against which more specific learning outcomes can be compared and located. Sets of level descriptors can be used in a general way to determine the pegging of qualification types on a framework, but because they describe learning across domains and learning pathways, level descriptors are, by definition, general and indicative, which means that they can never be prescriptive or fully comprehensive. They simply serve to provide a shared understanding of the education and training advancement achieved at each level. Thus it is important to understand that the NQF levels and their level descriptors serve only as general reference points for more specific curriculum decisions. These levels of learning need to be re-described more specifically for different qualification types, variants and specialisations and recontextualised in the learning outcomes for particular programmes and qualifications. They are nevertheless essential for the articulation and progression functions of the NQF. (See Chapter 5 for a proposed set of level descriptors).

4.4.3 Qualification Descriptors

Qualification descriptors attempt to capture the specifications (i.e. level and credit-rating) and the purpose and characteristics of the qualification types recognised on the framework. This description provides an accurate and consistent description of a qualification which enables it to be compared with other qualifications in the system. All qualifications using the same qualification type (and where appropriate, designated variant) in their titles should be pegged at the same level and share common minimum credit ratings. Recognised qualification types for the South African higher education system are specified in the table below. (For more detail see Chapter 6, 6.2).

As mentioned above, the high-volume, most popular designated variants are currently being designed by sectoral Standards Generating Bodies in a joint SAUVCA-CTP project, which is recognised by SAQA. Qualification specialisations and the programmes that deliver them should be designed by individual providers using the three outer layers, the level descriptors, qualification descriptors, and where appropriate, the designated variants of these, as parameters within which to nest the design of particular qualifications and programmes.

4.5 A Qualifications Framework for Higher Education

4.5   A Qualifications Framework for Higher Education

` NQF Levels	HE Sub-levels	(Cumulative min totals) & min credits per qualification	General Vertical articulation		Articulation Horizontal & diagonal articulation	Career-focused Vertical articulation	
8	PG 4	(1020) 360	Doctor of Philosophy (360 @ PG4)			Doctor of Philosophy, Professional Doctorate (360 @ PG4)	
8	PG 3	(660) 180	Research Master's Degree (120 @ PG3)	Structured Master's Degree (60 @ PG3)		Research Master's Degree (120 @ PG3)	Structured Master's Degree (60 @ PG3)
8	PG 2	(600) 180/ 120		Master's Diploma (120 @ PG2)	Master's Certificate (72 @ PG2) (articulation credits)	Master's Diploma (120 @ PG2)	Professional Master's Degree (180 @ PG2)
8	PG 1	(480) 480/ 120	Bachelor Honours Degree (120 @ PG1)	General Postgraduate Diploma	Postgraduate Certificate (72 @ PG1)	Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree, [e.g.B Tech] (120 @ PG1)	Career-focused Postgraduate

Level		Credits	General	Articulation	Career-focused
			(120 @ PG1)	(articulation credits)	Diploma (120 @ PG1)
7		(360) 360/ 120	General Bachelor's Degree (120 @ 7)	Graduate Certificate (72 @ 7) (articulation credits)	Career-focused Bachelor's Degree (120 @ 7)
6		(240) 240	General Diploma (90 @ 6)	(articulation credits)	Career-focused Diploma (90 @ 6)
5		(120) 120		Foundation Certificate (72 @ 5)	Career-focused Certificate (72 @ 5)
4		(120) 120	FETC (72 @ 4)	Bridging Certificate (72 @ 4)	FETC (72 @ 4)

Notes: Brackets under each qualification indicate the minimum number of credits required at the NQF level at which the qualification is pegged.

The Certificates specified in the Articulation column are not intended to replace the option of learners acquiring only the articulation credits necessary for entry into mainstream qualifications.

4.6 An Explanation of the Qualifications Framework for Higher Education

4.6.1 The Use of the Four Levels Allocated to Higher Education on the NQF

SAQA has assigned 4 levels, Levels 5–8, on the NQF to the Higher Education and Training Band, with Level 8 being open-ended.18[13] Traditionally, higher education qualifications have been structured according to years of study in roughly a 7/8-year structure. After consultations between SAQA and the CHE on the need for more levels on the NQF for HE, SAQA has proposed that our current qualifications can best be accommodated on the framework by dedicating Levels 5, 6 and 7 to undergraduate study (i.e. the norm of the first 3 years for full-time students), and by using the open-ended Level 8 to accommodate postgraduate study. An anomaly in this arrangement is the 480 credit Advanced Bachelor's Degree (normally 4 years), which, although an undergraduate degree, is pegged alongside the postgraduate qualifications at Level 8: PG1. Given the proposal that the minimum for one full-time academic year's worth of coursework study be 120 credits (1 200 notional study hours) and 180 credits (1 800 notional study hours) for research-based study, it makes sense to allocate a minimum of 120 credits per level to Levels 5 – 8: PG2. Levels 8: PG3 and 4 are based on the 180 credit academic year.

Thus undergraduate Certificates (a minimum of 120 credits) are pegged at Level 5, undergraduate Diplomas (240 credits) are pegged at Level 6, first Bachelor's Degrees (360 credits) and the Graduate Certificate (120 credits) are pegged at Level 7, Advanced Bachelor's Degrees including the Bachelor of Technology (480 credits) are pegged at Level 8 postgraduate sub-level 1 (PG1), as are the Honours Degree, the Postgraduate Diploma and the Postgraduate Certificate, each requiring a minimum of 120 credits after the completion of a 360 credit Bachelor's Degree. Level 8, postgraduate sub-level 2 (PG2) allows a minimum credit-rating of 120 credits because here are pegged those Master's level qualifications that do not require an extended piece of independent research, such as the Master's Certificate and Diploma (120 credits) and some Professional Master's Degrees that do not require a proper research undertaking. (However, the latter do require the normal minimum of 180 credits for a Master's Degree). The research component of Master's Degrees is pegged at Level 8 postgraduate sub-level 3 (PG3), with the Structured Master's requiring a minimum of 60 credits at this level and the Research Master's requiring 120. Doctoral Degrees, requiring a minimum of 360 credits (2 x 180), demand a qualitatively higher level of research than Master's Degrees and are thus accommodated by creating a Level 8: PG4 for which a separate level descriptor has been written. The table below sums up this pragmatic allocation of credits and pegging of qualifications to levels and sub-levels in the Higher Education and Training Band of the NQF.

NQF Levels & HE Sub-levels	Minimum credits at level	Qualifications (total minimum credits)
8: PG4	360	Doctoral Degrees (360)
8: PG3	120 / 60	Master's Degrees (180)
8: PG2	180	Professional Master's (180),
	120	Master's Diploma (120)
	72	Master's Certificate (120)
8: PG1	120	Advanced Bachelor's (480),
	120	Honours, Postgraduate Diploma (120)
	72	Postgraduate Certificate (120)
7	120	Bachelor's Degrees (360)
	72	Graduate Certificate (120)
6	120	Diplomas (240)
5	120	Certificates (120)

4.6.2 Two Distinctive but Articulated Learning Pathways

The qualifications framework for higher education places all mainstream higher education qualifications in two learning pathways or tracks: a *General Track* (termed formative in the *National Plan*) and a *Career-focused Track* (termed career-orientated in the *National Plan*). These are separated by a central column entitled *Articulation Column: horizontal and diagonal articulation* (see below) which is designed to facilitate meaningful articulation between qualifications in the two tracks.

The *General Track* contains those qualifications which traditionally have been offered only by universities and which are based on academic, discipline-based and theory-driven definitions of learning. Traditionally, these qualifications require a sequentially developed depth of knowledge and skill in at least one discipline, with comparative knowledge and conceptual breadth developed through the study of cognate disciplines. In terms of qualification specification and programme design, there is generally more flexibility in the *General Track*. For example, qualification specification may deliberately not go further than the designated variant (e.g. a BA or BSc), thus allowing greater student choice of specialisation (traditionally one or two majors) and considerable flexibility with respect to elective modules. In the *General Track*, the issues and problems that learners address tend to be defined from within the disciplines. Graduates with general qualifications tend to have developed strong academic skills, making them eligible for a wide range of careers. This applies to postgraduate study as well, meaning that graduates from the *General Track* are usually eligible for entry into a number of more specialised postgraduate programmes.

The *Career-focused Track* contains those qualifications which have traditionally been offered by technikons and also the professional qualifications traditionally offered by universities. However, the term 'career-focused' is used rather than the terms 'technological' or 'professional', in order to broaden the category to include those specialised programmes which have a specific career focus, but are not necessarily linked to a professional or statutory body.19[14] Qualifications in this track are based on vocational, career-based or professional definitions of learning, giving them a more applied, practical and market-orientated focus. The issues and problems that learners address in the *Career-focused Track* tend to be defined from within the professional, industrial or employment context. Graduates with career-focused qualifications will have been prepared to enter specific careers, professions or areas of application. For this reason, with respect to postgraduate study, a graduate with a career-focused qualification is likely to have less flexibility than those in the *General Track*, should s/he wish to change direction or track.

It is proposed below that the distinction between the two tracks, and the assignment of a qualification to a particular track, be reflected in the nomenclature of the qualification (see Chapter 6). However, in keeping with the *National Plan*'s call to produce graduates with the skills and competences required to participate in the 21st century, all programmes, irrespective of the track in which their qualifications are registered, should ensure that graduates have gained sufficient theoretical depth to be able to adapt their knowledge to new situations, and that they have a foundation of contextualised generic skills on which to draw for continuous professional development and lifelong learning. (The latter is discussed further in Chapter 7, 7.5).

The two tracks do not coincide with institutional types, signifying that, although the system is moving away from institutional differentiation, it wants to encourage diversity at the level of the programme. In a healthy, diversified system, different foci and degrees of disciplinarity, specialisation, vocationalisation and application should exist across the programmes of all types of institutions.20[15] However, the different functions of the two tracks need to be clearly understood in order to maintain a balance between the different qualification types and their

purposes and specialisations, and to allow the public higher education system to protect disciplinary/pure/formative/Mode 1 type learning in the *General Track* from competition with the more interdisciplinary/applied/market-driven/lucrative Mode 2 type learning in the *Career-focused Track*. The three columns in the framework thus represent an attempt to manage the transition from a trinary to a future unitary system and to manage the global trend towards the marketisation of higher education, by trying to maintain a balance in the system between intrinsically-driven and extrinsically-driven qualifications.

In the *National Plan*, the DoE has taken a cautious position on the integration of the two sectors in the higher education system, stating that, for planning purposes for at least the next five years, technikons and universities will continue to have differentiated missions, with technikons offering primarily career-focused programmes to Diploma level,21[16] and universities offering programmes in both tracks up to Level 8 (*National Plan*, 2001: 4.3.2). This suggests that the distinction between the two tracks will certainly continue in the short-to medium-term. Whether and when they collapse into a single track in the long-term remains an open question. All the same, the qualifications framework has been designed with the long-term vision of a unitary but diversified system in mind, and so, although different in function and purpose and therefore not equivalent, qualifications pegged at the same level and requiring similar credit-ratings are considered to be at least comparable. The basic typology of qualifications is therefore similar in both tracks, with differences arising from designated variation and qualification specialisation which are to be reflected in the nomenclature.

4.6.3 The Articulation Column

A unique feature of the South African higher education qualifications framework is the middle shaded *Articulation Column*, which provides for *horizontal and diagonal articulation.* This feature is designed to build flexibility into a framework that would otherwise remain too rigid and crude to accommodate the vast variety of programmes and qualifications offered across the Higher Education and Training Band. Horizontal and diagonal articulation are proposed as a mechanism to facilitate meaningful articulation between qualifications in the two different tracks. Its purpose is to facilitate learner mobility and progression along the framework as efficiently as possible. It can also be used to admit into the system those learners who do not meet the full entry requirements for their target programmes. It is also likely to be the 'space' in the system where the recognition of prior learning can most easily be implemented. The horizontal and diagonal articulation mechanism is thus proposed to cater for the learning needs of those whose past learning experiences have not adequately prepared them for a chosen programme, without forcing them to 'go back to the beginning again'.

An example of the use of qualifications in the articulation column follows. If a learner wishes to change from the *General* to the *Career-focused Track* after his/her first degree at Level 7, s/he may be required to first move horizontally on the framework and attain a Graduate Certificate at Level 7 before being permitted to register for an Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's degree or Postgraduate Diploma. Alternatively, depending on the nature of his/ her previous degree and on his/her level of attainment, s/he may be permitted to move diagonally on the framework and register for a Postgraduate Certificate at Level 8: PG1 in order to gain entry thereafter to a Master's programme at Level 8: PG2 and 3 in the *Career-focused Track*. Alternatively, the learner

may not hold a recognised formal degree but may have considerable appropriate experience. His/her prior learning may be assessed against the learning outcomes for a Graduate or Postgraduate Certificate and if successful, s/he may gain entry to a Level 8: PG1 or 2 programme. Generally, horizontal articulation requirements mean that the learner is required to undertake further learning at the same level as his/her highest qualification in order to meet the entry requirements of a target programme. Diagonal articulation requirements generally mean that the learner may proceed to the next level, but will be required to undertake additional enrichment learning in the target area prior to being admitted to a new programme. In some cases, where a learner is better prepared than others, s/he may be required to attain only a certain number of credits in the target area (i.e. register for one or two modules or unit standards rather than a whole qualification in the *Articulation Column*) prior to being admitted to the target programme. In such cases, if the learning load is not too onerous, s/he may be allowed to register simultaneously for the enrichment learning in the *Articulation Column* and for the target programme. The use of the *Articulation Column* in these ways applies equally to both tracks on the framework.

It is important to understand that the pegging of two qualifications at the same NQF level does not mean that they are equal or even equivalent; it simply means that the programmes leading to these qualifications engage with comparable levels of complexity of learning. This is why the concept of horizontal and diagonal articulation is necessary to facilitate articulation between programmes and qualifications that may differ widely in the nature and scope of required content (foundational competence), skill (practical competence) and requirements for reflexive competence. Provided entry requirements and exit points for particular learning programmes and their qualifications are clearly stated, and provided assessment methods are valid and reliable, then transparent decisions can be made by learners, their curriculum advisors and institutional gate-keepers about what further learning is required before a learner's exit level learning articulates with the entry requirement of a target programme, and vertical progression on the framework can be resumed.

Whilst the framework provides general guidelines and parameters, specific articulation requirements will always be determined by the receiving institution on the basis of publicly declared entry requirements for particular programmes and qualifications. (This is already a requirement for the registration of qualifications with SAQA). A key to ensuring the articulation of qualifications in the Higher Education and Training Band, and to exploiting the flexibility of this framework in practice, will be the clear and public statement of entry and exit requirements for programmes, both in terms of credits at particular levels, and in some cases in particular disciplines/fields, and in terms of statements of learning outcomes, against which learning (both formal and experiential or non-formal) can be assessed and weighted.

As stated in the example above, the *Articulation Column* can be used as a space where learners achieve 'articulation credits' in transit between two programmes, or it can be used to attain whole qualifications. The whole qualifications offered in the *Articulation Column* are all certificates requiring a minimum of 120 credits in all, with only 72 credits at the level at which they are pegged, thus meeting SAQA's minimum requirements for whole qualifications.

However, it is proposed that SAQA consider recognising and registering Certificates of only 60 credits (one semester's worth of full-time study) in the *Articulation Column* for the following reasons: firstly, this would speed up the articulation process for experienced and/ or adult learners who can benefit from short, intensive periods of study; secondly it is in keeping with international practice for Certificates to be one semester long; thirdly, this will allow providers to offer short, focused programmes that meet the specific in-service or up-grading needs of adult learners.22[17]

As a generalisation, it is likely that the curricula of the Bridging and Foundation Certificates at Levels 4 and 5 will be more formative and general, focussing on disciplinary content and academic and generic skills (which could for example, be run on a Faculty-wide basis) in order to prepare learners for higher education study. On the other hand, the curricula of the Graduate, Postgraduate and Master's Certificates are likely to be more specialised and focused, in order to ground learners in new professions or careers, up-grade their current knowledge and skills, or provide them with research training and a methodological grounding for postgraduate study.

Note: The *SAQA Regulations* allow a certificate to be offered at any level on the NQF. In theory, this means that if accredited to do so, providers could be permitted to offer the Certificates placed in the Articulation Column of the framework in the mainstream *General* and *Career-focused Tracks* as well.

4.6.4 Minimum Credit-Ratings at Qualification Exit Level

The *SAQA Regulations* (March 1998, 8.2, 8.3) stipulate that only 72 of 120 credits (60%) need to be attained at the exit level at which a qualification is pegged. But given that in the Higher Education and Training Band on the NQF, each level already represents a broad band of learning achievement, it does not make sense to allow the remaining 40% of the total minimum credits for a qualification to be carried up from the level below. Apart from its application to the Certificates in the *Articulation Column* and at Level 5, this ruling is considered too lenient for higher education and could result in a lowering of the quality of higher education qualifications. For the purposes of curriculum design, administrative norms and government subsidy, fixed minimum credit-ratings for each qualification will need to be linked to full-time equivalent years of study. Thus the following guidelines are suggested for the minimum number of credits required at the exit level at which a qualification type is pegged:

Exit Level	Qualification Type	Minimum Credits at Exit Level (Total minimum credits)
5	Career-focused Certificate	72 (of 120)
6	General and Career-focused Diploma	90 (of 240)
7	General and Career-focused Bachelor's Degree	120 (of 360)
8: PG1	Bachelor of Technology, Advanced Bachelor's Degree Honours Degree, General & Career-focused Postgraduate Diploma	120 (of 480) 120 (of 120)
8: PG2	Master's Diploma Professional Master's Degree	120 (of 120) 180 (of 180)
8: PG3	Structured Master's Degree	60 (of 180)
8: PG3	Research Master's Degree	120 (of 180)
8: PG4	Doctor of Philosophy, Professional Doctorate	360 (of 360)
4, 5, 6, 7, 8: PG1, 8: PG2	All Certificates in the Articulation Column	72 (of 120)

4.6.5 The Use of Entry and Exit Points on the Qualifications Framework

The purpose and characteristics of each qualification type and its articulation possibilities are outlined in the qualification descriptors in Chapter 6. More general issues relating to the use of entry and exit points on the framework are dealt with here.

Firstly, it should not be assumed that the full range of exit qualifications and their associated articulation possibilities shown on the framework will necessarily be applicable to every programme and field of study. Exit qualifications should be determined by the meaningfulness and usefulness of the learning achieved; determined, where relevant, in consultation with the industry, employer or professional body concerned. Exit qualifications should be permitted in a programme only where the exit level outcomes clearly lead on to another programme of study and/or career pathways that are recognised by the labour market.

Secondly, <u>as a learner progresses up the NQF in a particular programme, for as long as s/he remains registered in that programme s/he should not be awarded the exit qualifications *en route* to his/ her target qualification</u>. The exception to this ruling is where a student chooses, or is obliged, to exit the programme prematurely. In such cases, provided the assessment and credit requirements have been met, a student may be awarded an exit qualification. On returning to the system at a later date, the student may use the exit qualification to gain entry into the next qualification or level, at the discretion of the receiving institution. In cases such as these, where an exit qualification is used as a 'drop-out' point for a student who fails to complete the qualification above, <u>it is important that the student is properly re-assessed at the lower level and is required to demonstrate positively the attainment of the exit level outcomes for the lower qualification concerned</u>. Given the different purposes, foci and characteristics of different qualifications, this may often require the candidate to re-work and re-present his/her learning in order to attain different learning outcomes and to meet different assessment criteria.

Thirdly, <u>a student may not use the same credits for two different qualifications</u>. For example, if a student requires a Postgraduate Diploma in order to meet the entry requirements of a Structured Master's programme, s/he may not use those same credits (again) towards the coursework credits for the Master's programme.

4.6.6 The Credit-rating of Research Components

A range of Master's (and Doctoral degrees) are permitted on the framework to cater for an expanding market, where increasingly Master's degrees are required for senior managerial or professional positions. Whilst acknowledging that the higher up the framework one goes, the more problematic it becomes to work out a realistic norm for study hours spent, particularly on research dissertations and theses, the research components of research degrees have been credit-rated, simply as a guide to academic staff and students. In the quest for standardisation, some may be tempted to try to link credits directly to research products, e.g. 100 pages of a research report = 60 credits. However, this has been resisted as overly prescriptive and this should rather be determined by academic experts in the discipline/field concerned.

The following credit ratings have been prescribed for the different-sized research components of Master's and Doctoral degrees:

NQF Level	Qualification	Credit-rating for research component
8: PG2	Professional Master's Degree	-
8: PG3	Structured Master's Degree	60
8: PG3	Research Master's Degree	120
8: PG4	Professional Doctor's Degree	360
8: PG4	Doctor of Philosophy	360

Chapter 5

Level Descriptors for Higher Education

5.1 Introduction

The level descriptors proposed in this chapter are the product of the efforts of a joint working group convened by SAQA, and consisting of members from the following organisations: SAQA, CHE, SAUVCA and CTP. The level descriptors contained in this chapter are proposed simply as a working draft for use in higher education. SAQA is simultaneously working on a Level Descriptors Discussion Document for the whole of the NQF which is to be released for public comment shortly. After the comment period, SAQA will produce a final version for the South African NQF. The CHE and SAQA have agreed that this Chapter and the SAQA Level Descriptor Discussion Document should be compatible and should be based on the same levels and qualifications-pegging arrangements for higher education. Thus level descriptors for higher education have been written to accommodate the pegging of qualifications suggested in the previous chapter, where Levels 5 - 7 are used for undergraduate qualifications, and Level 8 is sub-divided into 4 postgraduate sub-levels. In this Chapter a composite level descriptor is provided for Level 8, as well as separate descriptors for each of the four postgraduate sub-levels.

A comprehensive definition of level descriptors is given in Chapter 4, 4.4.2. Following the 'nested approach' to standard-setting, level descriptors should be understood as guides, indicating a broadly acceptable level of learning, skills and learner autonomy for a particular level on the NQF. Generic level descriptors are not standards or qualifications and should not be used directly as learning outcomes or assessment criteria. They operate at a more abstract level, with an advisory rather than prescriptive status. They should therefore be used as a conceptualising and organising tool to frame the description and specification of qualification types and their variants and specialisations, and to guide the writing of specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria at the qualification, programme and modular level (where the teaching and learning takes place). But we should not expect a particular qualification (and certainly not a single unit standard) to deliver the precise capabilities described for the level at which it is registered in a manner that can be directly linked to its particular learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Instead the capabilities described for a level should be understood as an abstracted, broad threshold of learning which only applies in a re-contextualised form to the particular qualification specialisations registered at that level. It will always require professional and curriculum expertise to interpret and contextualise generic level descriptors in particular educational, training and/or disciplinary contexts.

5.2 Descriptor categories

In its attempt to integrate education and training, SAQA has developed the concept of 'applied competence' which has three separate components: foundational, practical and reflexive competence. The description of learning used in the level descriptors which follow retains the concept in its integrated form to avoid an over-complicated format. A further category has been

added which does not seem to be catered for in the concept of 'applied competence', namely 'autonomy of learning'. Both concepts are defined below:

Applied Competence: According to the 'Norms and Standards for Educators' (*Government Gazette* No.20844, Feb.2000: 10*)*

Applied competence is the overarching term for three interconnected kinds of competence. Practical competence is the demonstrated ability, in an authentic context, to consider a range of possibilities for action, make considered decisions about which possibility to follow, and to perform the chosen action. It is grounded in foundational competence where the learner demonstrates an understanding of the knowledge and thinking that underpins the action taken: and integrated through reflexive competence in which the learner demonstrates ability to integrate or connect performances and decision-making with understanding and with an ability to adapt to change and unforeseen circumstances and to explain the reasons behind these adaptations.

Autonomy of Learning is a learner's capacity for lifelong learning, i.e. the extent to which a learner can undertake action for learning independently, the extent to which a learner takes responsibility for his/her own learning and the extent to which a learner is self-reflexive about, and can evaluate the quality of, his/her learning, and eventually that of others. Progression in this category of learning is from dependence on other-regulation to full self-regulation, and from close supervision to creative, self-directed learning and the ability to supervise the learning of others.

5.3 Draft Level Descriptors for Higher Education

NQF Level	Applied Competence	Autonomy of Learning
	Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:	
4	a. a foundational knowledge of some areas in one or more subjects/disciplines; b. a basic understanding of some of a discipline/field's fundamental terms, rules, concepts and principles; c. an ability to interpret and apply some of a discipline/field's essential operational symbols, procedures and techniques d. an ability to use a range of given procedures and techniques to solve routine formulaic problems; e. basic information-gathering, analysis and presentation skills; f. an ability to communicate and present information clearly and reliably following prescribed formats and conventions;	g. a capacity to begin to take responsibility for their learning within a structured and managed environment; an ability to evaluate their performance against given criteria.
5	a. a solid, outline knowledge of some main areas of one or more disciplines/fields; b. a sound understanding of a discipline's/field's key terms, rules, concepts, established principles and theories; c. an ability to interpret and apply a discipline/ field's operational symbols, procedures, operations and techniques; d. an ability to select and use a range of procedures and techniques to solve routine problems; e. effective information-gathering, analysing and presentation skills; f. an ability to present and communicate information coherently and reliably using the basic convention and formats of an academic/professional discourse;	g. a capacity to take responsibility for their learning within a structured learning environment; an ability to evaluate their learning and to identify their strengths and weaknesses.

NQF Level	Applied Competence	Autonomy of Learning
	Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification or unit standard at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate	
6	a. a solid knowledge base in the main areas of at least one discipline/ field; b. an informed understanding of one or more discipline's/ field's key terms, rules, concepts, established principles and theories; some awareness of how the discipline/ field relates to cognate areas; c. selection and application of a discipline/ field's central procedures, operations and techniques; d. an ability to solve well-defined but unfamiliar problems using correct procedures and appropriate evidence; e. a critical analysis and synthesis of information; presentation of information using information technology skills effectively; f. an ability to present and communicate information coherently and reliably, using academic/professional discourse conventions and formats appropriately;	g. a capacity to evaluate their learning and identify their learning needs within a structured learning environment; a capacity to take the initiative to address these needs.
7	a. a well-rounded and systematic knowledge base in one or more disciplines/fields and a detailed knowledge of some specialist areas; b. an informed understanding of one or more discipline's/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; c. effective selection and application of a discipline/ field's essential procedures, operations and techniques; an	g. a capacity to operate in variable and unfamiliar learning contexts, requiring responsibility and initiative; a capacity to self-evaluate and identify and address own learning needs; an ability to interact effectively

	understanding of the central methods of enquiry in a discipline/field; a knowledge of at least one other discipline's/field's mode of enquiry; d. an ability to deal with unfamiliar concrete and abstract problems and issues using evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments; e. well-developed information retrieval skills; critical analysis and synthesis of quantitative and/or qualitative data; presentation skills following prescribed formats, using IT skills effectively; f. an ability to present and communicate information and opinions in well-structured arguments, showing an awareness of audience and using academic/professional discourse appropriately;	in a learning group.

NQF Level	Applied Competence	Autonomy of Learning
Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:		
8	a. a comprehensive and systematic knowledge of one or more disciplines/fields with depth, specialisation and up-to-date knowledge in some areas; b. an informed and critical understanding of the theory and research methodology of one or more disciplines/fields and an understanding of how these relate to research problems in the field; an ability to relate theory to practice and *visa versa* and an ability to think epistemologically; c. an ability to select and apply research methods effectively and to undertake a research project in an area of specialisation; d. an ability to deal with complex problems using the intellectual, research and technological resources and tools	g. a capacity to operate in complex, unfamiliar contexts, requiring personal responsibility and initiative; a capacity to accurately self-evaluate and take responsibility for continuing professional/ academic development; a capacity to manage learning tasks

| | | | independently, professionally and ethically; a capacity to critically evaluate own and others' work with justification. |

provided by a discipline/ profession;

e. effective information retrieval and processing skills; an ability to engage critically with current research and scholarship in an area of specialisation;

f. an ability to present and communicate academic/ professional work effectively, using the full resources of an academic/professional discourse appropriately;

5.3.1 Draft Sub-level Descriptors for Level 8

NQF Level & Sub-level		Applied Competence	Autonomy of Learning
Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:			
8	PG1	a. a comprehensive and systematic knowledge base in one or more disciplines/fields and a depth of knowledge in some specialist areas, informed by current developments in the field; b. an informed and critical understanding of the principles and theories of one or more disciplines/fields and of emerging issues and debates in an area of specialisation; acceptance of the provisional nature of knowledge and of the boundaries and limitations of a discipline/field; c. effective application of a discipline/field's basic methods of enquiry, research and technology;	g. a capacity to operate in unfamiliar contexts, requiring personal responsibility and initiative; a capacity to accurately self-evaluate and take responsibility for continuing professional/ academic development; a capacity to maintain professional working relationships; an awareness of the

		d. an ability to identify, analyse and deal with concrete and abstract problems using evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments; e. an ability to identify information needs and retrieve information accordingly; critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation of quantitative and/or qualitative data; an ability to engage with journal articles, scholarly reviews and primary sources; f. an ability to present and communicate academic/ professional work effectively, catering for a range of audiences and using academic/professional discourse appropriately;	social and ethical implications of applying knowledge to particular contexts.

NQF Level & Sub-level	Applied Competence	Autonomy of Learning
	Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:	

8	PG2	a. a comprehensive and systematic knowledge base in a discipline / field and a depth of knowledge in some areas of specialisation; 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; 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; 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; 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; 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;	g. a capacity to operate effectively in complex, ill-defined contexts; a capacity to self-evaluate exercising personal responsibility and initiative; a capacity to manage learning tasks autonomously, professionally and ethically; a capacity to continue to learn independently for continuing academic/ professional development.

NQF Level & Sub-level		Applied Competence	Autonomy of Learning
		Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:	
8	PG3	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; 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 *visa versa* and to think epistemologically; 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; 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; e. advanced information retrieval and processing skills; identification, critical analysis, synthesis and independent evaluation of quantitative and/or qualitative data; an ability to	g. a capacity to operate effectively in complex, ill defined contexts; a capacity to critically self-evaluate and continue to learn independently for continuing professional development; a capacity to manage learning tasks autonomously professionally and ethically; a capacity to critically evaluate own and others' work with justification.

		undertake a study of the literature and current research in an area of specialisation under supervision;
		f. an ability to present effectively 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;

NQF Level & Sub-level	Applied Competence	Autonomy of Learning
	Typically, a programme leading to the award of a qualification at this level aims to develop learners who demonstrate:	
8 PG4	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; 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;	g. a capacity to operate autonomously in specialised, complex, ill-defined and unpredictable contexts; intellectual independence and research leadership through managing advanced research and development in a field professionally and ethically; a capacity to

		c. substantial, independent research and advanced scholarship resulting in the (re) interpretation and expansion of knowledge which is judged publishable by peers; 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; 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; 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;	critically evaluate own and others' work on the basis of independent criteria.

5.4 Notes for the Use of Level Descriptors

·   The level descriptors should be understood as cumulative, i.e. each level subsumes the levels of learning achievement below it.

·   The descriptions for Autonomy of Learning do not necessarily apply to adult learners who may require a separate Autonomy of Learning column, particularly at Levels 1 - 5.

- Although level descriptors represent the most outer and generic layer of qualification specification and standard setting, they do provide a crude, qualitative mechanism for facilitating the articulation of credit and qualifications on the NQF. In the higher education sector this function will be particularly important in the attempt to integrate the university, technikon and college sectors. Furthermore, higher education provision is increasingly being offered outside these institutions' campuses. Generic level descriptors can act as a starting point for curriculum planning and quality assurance for providers within and without formal education e.g. for employers offering work-based modules/unit standards.

- Generic level descriptors need to be complemented by qualification descriptors which aim to describe in more detail the specific purposes and characteristics of the learning undertaken for different qualifications. Qualification descriptors assist particularly in distinguishing between the learning achieved for different qualifications pegged at the same level on the NQF. Reference to qualification descriptors is particularly important because qualifications with different purposes and credit values may be registered at the same NQF level. Generic level descriptors can be usefully integrated and re-described in the learning outcomes for different designated variants and specialisations of qualification types. It would also be helpful for practitioners if a taxonomy of learning outcomes, or assessment criteria bands, were to be developed for each area variant and specialisation, to describe different levels of achievement within an NQF Level - e.g. from excellent (1st class) to fully proficient (upper 2nd) to proficient (lower 2nd) to adequately competent (3rd class).

- By providing broad guidelines for learning achievement, level descriptors can be used as benchmarks, or minimum quality thresholds, against which specific qualifications can be quality assured.

- Governments and employers are calling on education providers to develop generic transferable skills in learners. The writing of generic level descriptors is one attempt to describe these and this may help facilitate the development and integration of generic skills into specific curricula (but see Chapter 7, 7.4 for further discussion).

- Any attempt at writing level descriptors should be understood as provisional and subject to application in practice. This should be understood as a dynamic, iterative process in which practitioners have the opportunity to feed back their experience of application into an on-going process of revision.

The qualification types proposed to be recognised in the South African higher education system are pegged on the qualifications framework in Chapter 4. In this chapter in section 6.2. a qualification descriptor has been written for each proposed qualification type. This list of qualification types should be regularly reviewed and up-dated. These qualification types are protected terms, which means that the terms may be used only if the qualifications concerned comply with the specifications prescribed in the relevant qualification descriptor. Providers in both the private and public higher education systems may offer programmes and qualifications based on these qualification types and their descriptors, only if they have been registered and accredited by the relevant authorities to do so. A necessary condition for the Higher Education Quality Committee's granting of accreditation to offer a programme leading to a recognised qualification will be the meeting of the relevant qualification descriptor for each qualification type listed below.

6.1 Principles for Nomenclature

6.1.1. Type

A *qualification type* is the first name given to a qualification. It usually comprises a noun preceded by one or two adjectives that signify its track on the framework and its level of accomplishment. For example, the terms *General* and *Career-focused* are the adjectives used to distinguish qualification types in the two tracks, whilst the terms *Bachelor's*, *Master's* and *Doctor's* are all adjectives used to indicate the level of the qualification, they all precede the noun *Degree.* Likewise, the terms *Bridging, Foundation, Graduate, Postgraduate* and *Master's* precede the nouns *Certificate* and *Diploma* to indicate their level. Thus a *General Bachelor's Degree,* a *Career-focused Postgraduate Diploma* and a *Graduate Certificate* are examples of qualification types.

6.1.2. Designator

All qualification types which are degrees, i.e. Bachelor's, Master's and Doctor's degrees, have designated variants of the degree type. These are indicated by a *designator,* the second name given to a degree, to indicate its broad area of focus. <u>Designators are only used with degrees and all degrees must have a designator; designators are not used for certificates and diplomas.</u> The linking word between the qualification type and the designator is *of,* e.g. Bachelor *of* Social Science, Master *of* Technology, Doctor *of* Philosophy. When abbreviated the 'of' is dropped, e.g. B SocSci, M Tech, etc. The use of qualification designators is confined to a prescribed list in the traditional General Track on the qualifications framework, but it is open-ended in the Career-focused Track in order to accommodate innovation and new market trends. The only designators which may be used in the General Track are *of Arts, of Science, of Social Science* and *of Commerce*. Designators used in the Career-focused Track signify a professional or vocational area of focus, e.g. *of Engineering, of Technology, of Education, of Social Work, of Nursing, of Agriculture*, etc. The use of designators in the Career-focused Track is open-ended, but the use of new designators in the Career-focused Track will need to be approved by the HEQC through its

accreditation process. All groups of qualifications using a designator may indicate an even further level of specialisation through the use of a *qualifier*.

6.1.3. Qualifier

In degree type qualifications that must use a designator after the qualification type, e.g. *of Arts, of Engineering*, a qualifier may be used as the third name of the qualification to indicate an even more specific area of specialisation than that indicated by the designator, e.g. a Bachelor of Arts *in Linguistics* abbreviated to BA *(Linguistics)*, a Bachelor of Engineering *in Electronics*, BEng *(Electronics)*. The linking word between the qualification type or its designator and the qualifier is always *in*. When abbreviated, the *in* is dropped and the qualifier is placed in brackets. In the case of certificates and diplomas, where there is no designator, the qualifier follows immediately after the qualification type, e.g. a Postgraduate Diploma *in Drama* abbreviated to PG Dip (Drama). If it is important to indicate an even further area of specialisation for a Certificate or Diploma, this may be done by adding a colon and a second qualifier after the first, e.g. a 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, should be in the field of specialisation, e.g. in a 480 credit Advanced Bachelor's Degree pegged at Level 8: PG1, at least 240 (of 480) credits should be attained in the area of named specialisation, of which at least 60 (of 120) should be at Level 8: PG1; for example a BEng (Mechanical Engineering) would require a minimum of 240 credits in Mechanical Engineering, with at least 60 of these pegged at Level 8: PG1. The same ruling applies to the use of a second qualifier; for example, in order to be awarded a Postgraduate Diploma in Drama: Performance, worth 120 credits pegged at Level 8: PG1, at least 60 credits at Level 8: PG1 should be attained in the specialised area of dramatic performance. Provided these specifications are met, the use of qualifiers is optional and open-ended; there is no prescribed list of qualifiers. This means that providers may determine and apply to use whatever qualifier they think best reflects the specialisation of a particular qualification.

An example of the use of qualification types, designators and qualifiers in each of the General and Career-focused tracks follows. A theory-driven, science-based, general programme with a focus in agriculture would typically offer a 360 credit Bachelor's Degree at Level 7 in the General Track, and would therefore use the designator *of Science*. If the qualification includes sufficient learning outcomes and credits in the area of specialisation, thus meeting the requirements for using a qualifier, the provider could indicate the specialisation in agriculture by naming the qualification Bachelor *of Science in Agriculture*, abbreviated to *BSc (Agric)*. At Level 8: PG1, the same programme could offer a *Bachelor of Science Honours in Agriculture* abbreviated to *BScHons (Agric)*. However, a more applied programme in the Career-focused Track could offer at Level 7 a 360 credit *Career-focused Bachelor of Agriculture*, and at Level 8: PG1 a 480 credit *Advanced Career-focused Bachelor of Agriculture*, using the term *Agriculture* rather than *Science* as the designator. If it were deemed desirable to indicate further specialisation, and the regulations for doing so were met, then a *qualifier* could be added giving the title *Bachelor* or *Advanced Bachelor of Agriculture in Soil Science*, abbreviated to *BAgric (Soil Science)* or *AdvBAgric (Soil Science)*.

6.1.4. Language

The use of English on all certificates awarded to students is obligatory. However, providers may choose to include on the certificate, translations of the English into any other official South African language or Latin. A set of consistent translations of the qualification types into Afrikaans may be found in Appendix II.

6.2 Qualification Descriptors for Recognised Qualification Types

In this section each recognised qualification type on the qualifications framework for higher education is described and specified. It is important to note that the requirements laid down for admission and articulation are only general guidelines. Each institution has the statutory right to determine its own admission requirements, and likewise, those responsible for teaching and administering particular academic programmes will want to tailor these general guidelines to meet the specific requirements of particular programmes, faculty and institutional missions and goals and so forth. In each case admission requirements are spelt out in terms of recognised formal qualifications, i.e. formal learning accredited on the South African NQF. In most cases the words 'or equivalent' should be added to accommodate the concern to encourage the recognition of prior learning. It is assumed here that the recognition of prior (experiential) learning, either for admission or for accreditation, is a matter for providers to determine on the basis of their capacity to assess individual learners against the exit level learning outcomes and assessment criteria specified for particular qualifications. By providing a standardised qualifications framework, level descriptors and the qualification descriptors below, this report should facilitate this demanding process.

6.2.1 Bridging Certificate

Type Specifications

NQF Level 4

Articulation Column

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 4: 72

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

Bridging Cert

Bridging Cert (Maths)

Purpose and Characteristics

Pegged at Level 4, this is a further education and training, rather than a higher education qualification. As it sits in the Further Education and Training Band and in the Articulation Column of the framework, this qualification follows the SAQA ruling for the minimum credits at exit level, requiring a minimum of only 72 credits at Level 4. Programmes leading to this qualification serve as bridges from Level 4 to Level 5, enabling learners to attain or complete Level 4 qualifications in order to meet the entry requirements for target Level 5 programmes in higher education. Learners who have attained an FETC, but in fields of learning not related to the programme for which entry is sought, may enrol for an appropriate Bridging Certificate. Learners who have completed some credits at Level 4 may enter a Bridging programme to complete a qualification in the target field. This qualification therefore plays a key role in widening access to higher education study. As they sit at Level 4, programmes leading to this qualification will not, by definition, be covered by state subsidy provision for higher education. However, it may be possible for higher education institutions to apply for earmarked funding to offer some of these programmes in key areas such as Maths, Science, Engineering and Technology. In other cases, Bridging programmes should be provided by technical colleges and private further education and training providers. Programmes leading to this qualification are normally intensive and tend to focus on building a knowledge base and discipline/field-specific skills in target areas, in preparation for higher education study. This qualification can also be used to facilitate the recognition of prior learning and so widen access to higher education. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 4 in contextualised form.

Admission Requirements

Entry

Appropriate Level 4 qualifications or unit standards (or equivalent, as assessed through the recognition of prior learning).

Mid-stream

Credits attained at Level 4, may be recognised and accredited for the purposes of attaining this qualification.

Articulation

Early Exit

Not applicable

Horizontal

Not applicable

Diagonal

Learners who successfully complete a Bridging Certificate will be admitted directly to an appropriate Level 5 higher education programme in either the General or Career-focused Tracks.

Vertical

Learners should be discouraged from moving from a Bridging Certificate to further academic development in a Foundation programme, as this could create serious inefficiencies in the system. Once enrolled in a Bridging programme, it would be preferable for students to remain there until they achieve the entry requirements for a mainstream Level 5 programme.

6.2.2 Foundation Certificate

Type Specifications

NQF Level 5

Articulation Column

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 5: 72

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

Foundation Cert

Foundation Cert (Commerce)

Purpose and Characteristics

The Foundation Certificate is a Level 5 qualification in the Articulation Column, designed to prepare students for success in further higher education studies. In the new Funding Framework's terms, it is the qualification usually awarded on successful completion of an *academic development programme*. This qualification contributes to the widening of access to higher education by enabling institutions of higher education to conditionally admit learners who do not fully meet the Level 4 admission requirements for direct entry into particular programmes at Level 5. This qualification can also be used to facilitate the recognition of prior learning. Programmes leading to this qualification typically develop in students a foundation of academic and generic skills to equip them for academic study and lifelong learning. Such programmes may be designed on a disciplinary or field-specific basis, or they may serve as preparation for a

grouping of cognate disciplines, e.g. for further study in any discipline in a particular faculty. These programmes thus serve to provide learners with the basic introductory knowledge, cognitive and conceptual tools and practical techniques to function successfully in their chosen field of further study. The development of key generic skills such as reading and writing academic texts, word processing, basic IT skills, numeracy and study skills should be integrated into the process of introducing students to a particular knowledge and conceptual base. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 5 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

Currently a Senior Certificate (or equivalent) that does not meet the regular entry requirements for admission to a diploma/degree programme in either track. In future, a FETC or equivalent that does not meet the regular entry requirements for admission to a target higher education programme.

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit

Not applicable

Horizontal

On completion of a Foundation Certificate, a student may be granted admission to the first 120 credits of an appropriate diploma/degree programme in either the General or Career-focused Tracks. Credits attained on the Foundation Certificate programme may be transferred and accredited on a Level 5 diploma/ degree programme. It is proposed that up to 25% of the credits earned on a Foundation programme (i.e. 30 credits) may be transferred to an appropriate mainstream undergraduate qualification, provided that the ruling that credits may not be used twice is observed (i.e. the same credits cannot be used to meet higher education entry requirements and to contribute towards an undergraduate qualification).

Diagonal

Not applicable

Vertical

Not applicable

6.2.3 Career-focused Certificate

Type Specifications

NQF Level 5

Career-focused Track only

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 5: 72

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

Cert (Tourism)

Cert (Tourism: Eco-tourism)

Purpose and Characteristics

The undergraduate Career-focused Certificate is a mid-way exit point from a Diploma programme and is offered only in the Career-focused Track. This qualification signifies that the learner has attained a basic level of knowledge and competence in a particular field or occupation and is capable of transferring this knowledge and skill to an occupation or role in the workplace. The focus of this qualification is on specific vocational training. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 5 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

Currently a Senior Certificate or equivalent. In the future, a relevant FETC or equivalent, such as an appropriate Bridging or Foundation Certificate.

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit

Not applicable

Horizontal

If a learner wishes to change direction or track, s/he will normally be required to repeat 120 credits of study at Level 5 in the new programme. In some cases (some of) the credits gained may be transferred to a new Level 5 programme.

Diagonal

In some cases, where a Certificate does not entirely meet the entry requirements for a target diploma or degree programme, a student may be required to take additional 'articulation credits' in the target area.

Vertical

Completion of the Certificate meets the entry requirement for admission to an appropriate Diploma at Level 6. However, a Certificate should not be awarded to students who progress directly on to Diploma studies. It should be awarded only to those who exit the system. If a student in possession of a Certificate later wishes to re-enter the system, then it should be recognised as meeting the entry requirements for an appropriate Diploma.23[1]

6.2.4 Career-focused Diploma

Type Specifications

NQF Level: 6

Career-focused Track

Minimum total credits: 240

Minimum credits at Level 6: 90

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

Dip (Real Estate)

Dip (Real Estate: Property Marketing)

Purpose and Characteristics

This qualification is offered in the Career-focused Track. It is typically a two-year full-time qualification (requiring a minimum of 240 credits). It can be awarded on completion of a stand-alone programme or as an exit qualification from a Career-focused degree 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. These Diploma programmes often include an experiential or simulated work experience component. Diplomates should be fully competent in the capabilities described for Level 6, which means that they should possess a sound knowledge base in a particular field/discipline and be able to apply their knowledge and skills to particular career or professional contexts. They should also be equipped for further, more specialised and intensive learning at Level 6. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 6 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

Currently a Senior Certificate. In future, a relevant FETC or equivalent, such as an appropriate Bridging or Foundation Certificate.

Mid-stream

The curriculum for a Diploma is normally designed as a 240-credit unit. This means that there is not usually a mid-stream entry point. However, in some programmes, students who have attained an appropriate Level 5 Certificate will be admitted mid-stream.

Articulation

Early exit

A student who drops out of this programme having attained a minimum of 120 credits may be awarded a Certificate where this exists, or in some cases a Foundation Certificate, provided that the learning outcomes for the qualification awarded have been attained.

Horizontal

Credits attained for this qualification may be recognised and transferred to a cognate Diploma programme at Level 6.

Diagonal

A student with an appropriate Diploma can be admitted to Level 6 study in a cognate Bachelor's Degree programme. If the student changes track, s/he may be required to attain additional credits in the Articulation Column.

Vertical

Meets the entry requirements for a Bachelor's programme at Level 6 in the same discipline or field.

6.2.5 General Diploma

Type Specifications

NQF Level: 6

General Track

Minimum total credits: 240

Minimum credits at Level 6: 90

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

Dip (Social Studies)

Dip (Social Studies: Community Development)

Purpose and Characteristics

This qualification is offered in the General Track. It is typically a two-year full-time qualification (requiring a minimum of 240 credits). It is usually offered as an exit qualification from a General degree programme. Programmes leading to this qualification tend to offer a broad, generic curriculum that aims to equip learners with a strong foundation in academic and generic skills for a wide range of employment possibilities. Diplomas offered in the General Track should be designed deliberately to produce employable graduates. Diplomates should be fully competent in the capabilities described for Level 6, which means that they should possess a sound knowledge base in a particular field/discipline and be able to apply their knowledge and skills to career or professional contexts. They should also be equipped for further, more specialised and intensive learning at Level 7. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 6 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

Currently a Senior Certificate with Matriculation Endorsement or Exemption (or equivalent). In future, a relevant Further Education and Training Certificate or equivalent, such as an appropriate Bridging or Foundation Certificate.

Mid-stream

Not applicable, although credits from relevant Level 5 qualifications may be recognised and transferred.

Articulation

Early exit

A student who drops out of this programme having attained a minimum of 120 credits may be awarded a Foundation Certificate, provided that the learning outcomes have been attained.

Horizontal

Credits attained for this qualification may be recognised and transferred to a cognate Diploma programme at Level 6.

Diagonal

A student with an appropriate Diploma can be admitted to Level 7 study in a cognate Bachelor's Degree programme. If the student changes track, s/he may be required to attain additional credits in the Articulation Column.

Vertical

Meets the entry requirements for a Bachelor's programme at Level 6 in the same discipline or field.

6.2.6 Career-focused Bachelor's Degree24[2]

Type Specifications

NQF Level: 7

Career-focused Track

Minimum total credits: 360

Minimum credits at Level 7: 120

Designators

Bachelor's Degrees in the Career-focused Track may not use the designators reserved for the General Track, i.e. *of Arts, of Science, of Social Science and of Commerce.* Instead, they should derive their designation from their area of focus, e.g. *Bachelor of Development Studies, Bachelor of Biotechnology, Bachelor of Agriculture*, etc. Provided accreditation is granted, the use of designators for Career-focused Bachelor's degrees is open-ended.

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum one

Abbreviations

BDevtStuds, BBiotech, BAgric

BDevtStuds (Demography), BAgric (Rural Resource Management)

Purpose and Characteristics

Requiring a minimum of 360 credits, this is normally a 3 year full-time programme. The purpose of the Career-focused Bachelor's Degree is to develop graduates who, in addition to demonstrating focused knowledge and skills required in a particular field, have also 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 graduates to enter a number of career paths and to apply their learning to particular employment contexts from the outset. Career-focused Bachelor's degrees also prepare learners for further in-depth study at Level 8. The learning outcomes specified for designated variants and specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 7 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

Currently a Senior Certificate with Matriculation Endorsement or Exemption, or equivalent, for universities, and a Senior Certificate for technikons. In future, a relevant FETC or equivalent, such as an appropriate Bridging or Foundation Certificate.

Mid-stream

The curriculum for a Career-focused Bachelor's is usually designed as a 360-credit unit, but in some programmes a relevant Diploma or Certificate will enable mid-stream entry.

Articulation

Early exit

In some cases, a student may exit this programme with a Diploma, provided 240 credits (with 90 at Level 6) have been attained, or with a Certificate, provided 120 credits (with 72 at Level 5) have been attained.

Horizontal

Entry to an appropriate Graduate Certificate which would allow access to the General Track thereafter.

Diagonal

Entry to a Postgraduate Certificate at Level 8: PG1 gives access to a range of options at Level 8 thereafter.

Vertical

Entry to a relevant Advanced Bachelor's Degree or Postgraduate Diploma programme at Level 8: PG1 in the Career-focused Track.

6.2.7 General Bachelor's Degree

Type Specifications

NQF Level: 6

General Track

Minimum total credits: 360

Minimum credits at Level 7: 120

Designators

The General Bachelor's Degree is offered only in the General Track, and to indicate this, providers must use one of the following designators in the qualification's title: Bachelor *of Arts*, Bachelor *of Social Science*, Bachelor *of Science*, Bachelor *of Commerce*.

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum one

Abbreviations

BA, BSc, BSocSci, BCom

BSc (Life Sciences), BA (Applied Linguistics)

Purpose and Characteristics

Requiring a minimum of 360 credits, this is normally a 3-year full-time programme. The purpose of the General Bachelor's Degree is to develop graduates who have benefited from a well-rounded, broad education and who can fully demonstrate the capabilities described in the Level 7 descriptor, including the demonstration of initiative and responsibility in an academic or professional context. A Bachelor's Degree programme in the General Track consists of at least

one major or cumulative specialisation, and some exposure to other disciplines. This means that graduates should have studied at least one discipline/field progressively throughout the programme to the point where they have attained some depth of knowledge and expertise in the area, as well as gaining a broad comparative knowledge. Graduates should be proficient in a range of generic and academic skills, as outlined in the Level 7 descriptor, which should be assessed integrally with the content of the major(s). General Bachelor's graduates should thus be prepared for either further disciplinary study at Level 8: PG1, or for flexible employment in a wide range of careers. The learning outcomes specified for designated variants and specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 7 in contextualised form.

Admission Requirements

Entry

Currently a Senior Certificate with Matriculation Endorsement or Exemption, or equivalent. In future, a relevant FETC or equivalent, such as an appropriate Bridging or Foundation Certificate.

Mid-stream

A student with a relevant Diploma from a cognate subject area may be admitted mid-stream into a Bachelor's Degree programme.

Articulation

Early exit:

Some General Bachelor's programmes will offer a Diploma as a 240-credit exit point at Level 6.

Horizontal

Completion of an appropriate Graduate Certificate allows access to Level 8: PG1 programmes in the Career-focused Track thereafter.

Diagonal

Entry to a Postgraduate Certificate or appropriate Postgraduate Diploma at Level 8: PG1 allows access to the Career-focused Track thereafter.

Vertical

Entry to a Bachelor's Honours Degree, usually in the area of specialisation or in the discipline taken as a major; or entry to a related Postgraduate Diploma in a new area of study in either track.

6.2.8 Graduate Certificate

Type specifications

NQF Level 7

Articulation Column

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 7: 72

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

Grad Cert (Higher Education)

Grad Cert (Art: Graphic Design)

Purpose and Characteristics

The Graduate Certificate is a 120-credit qualification in the Articulation Column. The programme leading to this qualification is usually a focused, introductory programme, designed to allow graduates to pursue study in a new area at Level 7. These often serve as initial qualifications for learners wanting to move into a new programme, track, profession or area of specialisation. A typical example would be a graduate with a BSc wishing to become a Science teacher, who registers for a Graduate Certificate in Education in order to attain a license to practise as a schoolteacher. Thus a key purpose of the Graduate Certificate is to enable graduates to change track and/or to prepare them to function competently in a new vocation or profession. A second purpose for these qualifications is to offer short in-service, or continuing professional development courses, such as those currently encouraged by the Department of Labour's National Skills Development programme. A further purpose served by these qualifications in the Articulation Column is the facilitation of the recognition of prior learning. It is against the learning outcomes of these qualifications, rather than the larger, more knowledge-based qualifications, that prior learning is likely to be assessed, allowing non-traditional learners access to the higher education system. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 7 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

A Bachelor's Degree or equivalent

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit

Not applicable

Horizontal

A Graduate Certificate allows a student to move across from Level 7 on the General Track into the Career-focused Track and *vice versa*.

Diagonal

A Graduate Certificate will normally meet the entry requirements for a related programme at Level 8: PG1.

Vertical

Not applicable

6.2.9 Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degrees

Type Specifications.

NQF Level: 8: PG1

Career-focused Track only

Minimum total credits: 480

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG1: 120

Designators

Advanced Bachelor's Degrees sit only in the Career-focused Track and so may not use the designators reserved for the General Track, i.e. *of Arts, of Science, of Social Science* and *of Commerce.* Instead, they derive their designation from their professional or career focus, e.g. *Bachelor of Engineering, Bachelor of Education, Bachelor of Laws, Bachelor of Technology, Bachelor of Industrial Chemistry, Bachelor of Journalism, Bachelor of Medicine and Bachelor of Surgery,* etc. Provided accreditation is granted, the use of designators for Career-focused Bachelor's degrees is open-ended.

Qualifiers
Optional and open-ended, maximum one

Abbreviations

BEng, BEd, LLB, BIndChem, BJourn, MBChB

BEng (Mechanical), BEd (Curriculum). BTech (Biotechnology)

Purpose and Characteristics

Advanced Bachelor's Degrees in the Career-focused Track require at least 480 credits, with a minimum of 120 at Level 8: PG1, normally a minimum of 4 years' full-time study. However, some professions such as Medicine and Architecture require a longer period of study, which is reflected in an increase in the number of credits required at Level 8: PG1, e.g. the MBChB requires a minimum total of between 600 and 720 credits, with 240 to 360 at Level 8: PG1. This qualification type includes, but is not limited to, most of the professional Bachelor's Degrees that are recognised by a professional or statutory body, usually as a license to practice a particular profession. It also includes the Bachelor of Technology and a range of other career-focused 480 credit degrees that are more focused and tightly structured than the Bachelor's Degrees in the General Track, but are not necessarily endorsed by a professional body.25[3] However, Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's degrees are usually designed in consultation with employer/professional bodies and demand from graduates a thorough grounding in the knowledge and skills of the profession or career concerned, and also an ability to apply these to professional or career contexts. Many of the programmes leading to this qualification require a practicum or work-based component. The Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree differs from the Bachelor's Honours Degree in the General Track, in that the research focus is applied rather than theoretical or disciplinary. This means that in terms of attaining the research-related capabilities listed in the Level 8: PG1 descriptor, students are typically required to undertake and produce a professional project and report, rather than a research paper. However, the Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree graduate should command an adequate theoretical knowledge base to enable him/her to continue his/her professional development and/or to pursue Master's Level 8 studies. The learning outcomes specified for designated variants and specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG1 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

Currently a Senior Certificate with Matriculation Endorsement or Exemption, or equivalent, for university entrance, and Senior Certificate for technikon entrance. In future, a relevant FETC or equivalent, such as an appropriate Bridging or Foundation Certificate.

Mid-stream

In some cases, a student with a relevant Career-focused Diploma or Career-focused Bachelor's Degree may be admitted mid-stream into an Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's degree programme.

Articulation

Early exit

Where these exit-points are designed into the programme, a student may exit with a Career-focused Bachelor's Degree, provided 360 credits (with 120 at Level 7) have been attained, or with a Diploma, provided 240 credits (with 90 at Level 6) have been attained.

Horizontal

Meets the entry requirements for a Postgraduate Certificate and a Postgraduate Diploma at Level 8: PG1.

Diagonal

Meets the entry requirements for the Master's Certificate, the completion of which allows access to Level 8 programmes in the General Track.

Vertical

Provided programme specific entry requirements are met, entry to a relevant Master's Degree at Level 8 in the Career-focused Track.

6.2.9b Bachelor of Technology

Note: The Bachelor of Technology is not a *qualification type* in its own right, it is rather a *designated variant* of the Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree. It is included here as an example of a *designated variant*.

Specifications

NQF Level: 8: PG1

Career-focused Track

Minimum total credits: 480

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG1: 120

Designators

of Technology

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

 BTech (Tourism Management)

BTech (Engineering: Electrical)

Purpose and Characteristics

Requiring a minimum of 480 credits, this is normally a four year full-time programme, developed in response to specific professional and labour market needs; it is generally developed in partnership with relevant professional bodies or industry. The purpose of this qualification is to develop graduates who, in addition to acquiring specialised knowledge and skills required in a particular field, have also gained experience in applying such knowledge and skills in a workplace context. The Bachelor of Technology typically consists of two majors that represent progressive and cumulative specialisation in a particular field. It also develops in graduates generic, higher order transferable skills, preparing learners for employment in a particular vocation, profession or career, with an emphasis on managerial skills, creative technology applications, original thinking and judgement. The inclusion of an applied research component enables the graduate to contribute to the development of the career field. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this designated variant will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG1 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

Currently a Senior Certificate. In future, a relevant FETC or equivalent, such as an appropriate Bridging or Foundation Certificate.

Mid-stream

Relevant Career-focused Certificates, Diplomas, Degrees and Articulation Certificates may provide mid-stream entry, but this will depend on the nature of the target programme.

Articulation

Early exit

The curriculum for a Bachelor of Technology is usually designed as a 480-credit unit, but it may be designed to provide for exit qualifications at Certificate (120 credits), Diploma (240 credits) and Career-focused Bachelor's Degree (360 credits) exit-points. Not all Bachelor of Technology degrees will offer these exit-points, which are context-specific to each programme.

Horizontal

Meets the entry requirements for a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma at Level 8: PG1.

Diagonal

Entry to a related Master's Certificate, Master's Diploma, Professional Master's or Structured Master's Degree.

Vertical

Meets entry requirements for a Master of Technology Degree programme (either the Research or Structured form) at Level 8 in the Career-focused Track.

6.2.10 Bachelor Honours Degree

Type Specifications.

NQF Level: 8: PG1

General Track only

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG1: 120

Designators

The Bachelor Honours Degree is offered only in the General Track, and to indicate this, providers must use one of the following designators in the qualification's title: Bachelor *of Arts* Honours, Bachelor *of Social Science* Honours, Bachelor *of Science* Honours, Bachelor *of Commerce* Honours*.*

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum one

Abbreviations

BAHons, BScHons, BSocSciHons, BComHons

BScHons (Life Sciences), BAHons (Applied Linguistics)

Purpose and Characteristics

The Bachelor Honours Degree is offered only in the General Track and requires a cumulative total minimum of 480 credits with a minimum of 120 credits at Level 8: PG1. This qualification typically follows a General Bachelor's Degree, and serves to consolidate and deepen the student's expertise in a particular discipline, and to develop his/her research capacity in the methodology and techniques of that discipline. In some cases, a Bachelor Honours Degree carries recognition by an appropriate professional or statutory body. Traditionally, the Honours Degree has been recognised as meeting the entry requirements and research preparation requirements for Research Master's studies. All Bachelor Honours Degree programmes should include conducting and reporting research or scholarship under supervision, usually worth 20-30 credits. The learning outcomes specified for designated variants and specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG1 in contextualised form.

Admission Requirements

Entry

An appropriate General Bachelor's Degree or Graduate Certificate and, in exceptional cases, an appropriate or Career-focused Bachelor's Degree

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit:

Not applicable

Horizontal

Entry to a Postgraduate Certificate or Postgraduate Diploma

Diagonal

Meets the entry requirements for a Master's Certificate or Master's Diploma in other fields.

Vertical

Meets the entry requirements for an appropriate Research or Structured Master's Degree. In exceptional cases, high achieving students may be permitted to proceed directly to doctoral study, provided they first complete the research training offered in an appropriate Master's Certificate or Master's Diploma.

6.2.11 Career-focused Postgraduate Diploma

Type Specifications.

NQF Level: 8: PG1

Career-focused Track only

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG1: 120

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

PG Dip (Taxation)

PG Dip (Communication: Digital Media)

Purpose and Characteristics

The Career-focused Postgraduate Diploma is offered in the Career-focused Track and requires a total minimum of 120 credits, with a minimum of 120 at Level 8: PG1. This qualification follows a Career-focused Bachelor's Degree, but unlike the Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree, it is a 'stand-alone' qualification, allowing entry to students from a range of relevant Bachelor's Degrees. The Career-focused Postgraduate Diploma usually provides an intensive, focused and applied specialisation, which either meets the requirements of a specific niche in the labour market, or provides access to further postgraduate study at Level 8. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG1 in contextualised form.

Admission Requirements

Entry

An appropriate Career-focused Bachelor's Degree or Graduate Certificate and, in exceptional cases, an appropriate or General Bachelor's Degree

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit:

Not applicable

Horizontal

Entry to a Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma or related Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree

Diagonal

Meets the entry requirements for a Master's Certificate or Master's Diploma in other fields.

Vertical

Meets the entry requirements for an appropriate Research, Structured or Professional Master's Degree.

6.2.12 General Postgraduate Diploma

Type Specifications.

NQF Level: 8: PG1

General Track only

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG1: 120

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

PG Dip (Cultural Studies)

PG Dip (Applied Linguistics)

Purpose and Characteristics

The General Postgraduate Diploma is offered in the General Track and requires a total minimum of 120 credits with a minimum of 120 at Level 8: PG1. This qualification is a 'stand-alone' qualification, following a General Bachelor's Degree, but unlike the Bachelor's Honours Degree which requires sustained specialisation in a particular discipline, it allows entry to students from a range of relevant undergraduate Bachelor's Degrees. In the General Track, the Postgraduate Diploma usually provides learners with a particular focus and a more specialised knowledge base than that gained in the General Bachelor's Degree. It also prepares learners for continued postgraduate study at Level 8. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG1 in contextualised form.

Admission Requirements

Entry

An appropriate General Bachelor's Degree or Graduate Certificate and, in exceptional cases, an appropriate Career-focused Bachelor's Degree

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit:

Not applicable

Horizontal

Entry to a Postgraduate Certificate, Postgraduate Diploma or related Honours Bachelor's Degree

Diagonal

Meets the entry requirements for a Master's Certificate or Master's Diploma in other fields.

Vertical

Meets the entry requirements for an appropriate Research, Structured or Professional Master's Degree.

6.2.13 Postgraduate Certificate

Type specifications

NQF Level: 8: PG1

Articulation Column

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG1: 72

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

PG Cert

PG Cert (Social Science Research Methods), PG Cert (Applied Linguistics: Translation), PG Cert (Information Management: E-Commerce)

Purpose and Characteristics

The Postgraduate Certificate is a 120-credit qualification at Level 8: PG1 in the Articulation Column. Programmes offering these qualifications usually provide the student with a systematic survey of current thinking, practice and research methods in an area of specialisation. Such programmes serve a number of different purposes: they offer a specialized package for graduates wishing to change track into a particular profession or career, or to gain admission to a Master's programme in a different field from that of their undergraduate degree; they offer qualifications in continuing professional development now encouraged by the Department of Labour's National Skills Development Plan; opportunities for the recognition of prior learning and an opportunity for focused research training. The latter is critical in meeting the National Plan's goals of increased postgraduate outputs, as the Postgraduate Certificate provides a curriculum space for non-traditional or under-prepared students to meet the entry requirements for research degrees at Level 8 and to prepare themselves to succeed at postgraduate studies. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG1 in contextualised form, probably with an emphasis on competences b), c) and e).

Admission requirements

Entry

A Bachelor's Degree, a Graduate Certificate or any Level 8: PG1 qualification

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit

Not applicable

Horizontal

Entry to a related programme at Level 8: PG1, allowing a change of direction

Diagonal

Meets the entry requirements for related programmes at Level 8.

Vertical

Not applicable

6.2.14 Master's Certificate

Type specifications

NQF Level 8: PG2

Articulation Column

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG2: 72

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

Master's Cert (Agricultural Instrumentation)

Master's Cert (Labour Law)

Purpose and Characteristics

The Master's Certificate is a 120-credit qualification at Level 8: PG2 in the Articulation Column. Programmes leading to this qualification provide an opportunity to offer a short, focused study at an advanced level in a discrete area of specialisation, usually for the purposes of continuous professional development or up-grading, e.g. to up-date practising professionals on the implications of new legislation or new technologies. The qualification may also be used to enhance Level 8: PG1 qualifications in order to meet the entry requirements of a target Level 8 programme. Thus the Master's Certificate will normally be used as a specialised 'stand-alone' qualification, or as focused preparation for Level 8 studies. Research preparation will normally have been done at Level 8: PG1 and, where necessary, enhanced through the completion of a Postgraduate Certificate. However, the Master's Certificate can also be used to offer additional, more specialised research training. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG2 in contextualised form, probably with an emphasis on competences b), c) and e).

Admission requirements

Entry

Any Level 8: PG1 qualification

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit

Not applicable

Horizontal

Entry to a related programme at Level 8, allowing a change of direction

Diagonal

Meets the entry requirements for related programmes at Level 8.

Vertical

Not applicable

6.2.15 Master's Diploma

Type specifications

NQF Level 8: PG2

General and Career-focused tracks

Minimum total credits: 120

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG2: 120

Designators

Not applicable

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum two

Abbreviations

M Dip (Organisational & Management Systems)

M Dip (Historical Studies)

M Dip (Agriculture: Rural Resource Management)

Purpose and Characteristics

The Master's Diploma is a 120-credit qualification at Level 8: PG2, offered in both tracks. It may serve as a 'stand-alone' qualification which provides advanced continuous development, upgrading and reflection for professionals, without requiring a sustained research project. Alternatively, it may be designed as an exit-point from a Structured Master's Degree, awarded to a student who completes a minimum of 120 credits' coursework, but fails to complete the research component. This qualification builds on prior Level 8: PG1 qualifications and so demands a high level of theoretical engagement and intellectual independence. The learning outcomes specified for specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG2 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

An appropriate Level 8: PG1 qualification or a Master's Certificate

Mid-stream

In exceptional cases credits from a Master's Certificate may be transferred to a Master's Diploma.

Articulation

Early exit

If the learning outcomes are met and 72 credits attained, a Master's Certificate may be awarded.

Horizontal

Meets the entry requirements for admission to a related Master's programme.

Diagonal

Entry to the research component of a related Structured Master's programme

Vertical

Entry to the research component of the same Structured Master's programme

6.2.16 Professional Master's Degree

Type specifications

NQF Level 8: PG2

Career-focused Track only

Minimum total credits: 180

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG2: 180

Designators

Provided accreditation is granted, the use of designators in the Career-focused Track is open-ended; designators are derived from the area of professional focus or specialisation

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum one

Abbreviations

MEd, MBA, MAcc, MMed, LLM

MAcc (Taxation), LLM (Business Law)

Purpose and Characteristics

The Professional Master's Degree exists only in the Career-focused Track. It requires at least 180 credits at Level 8: PG2 and normally requires two year's part-time study. Many Professional Master's degrees are recognised by a professional or statutory body as a license to practise in a particular specialisation, or as a qualification for a managerial position in the profession. The purpose of this qualification is to provide advanced, specialised, professional training for already practising professionals. Programmes leading to this qualification do not require a sustained research output, but rather a series of demanding assignments and projects related to the student's professional/work context. The research required is therefore of an applied or *praxis* nature, rather than purely theoretical or disciplinary. The learning outcomes specified for designated variants and specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG2 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

A relevant Level 8: PG1 qualification, usually an Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree or a Bachelor's Degree and a relevant Postgraduate Diploma or Certificate

Mid-stream

Not normally applicable; in exceptional cases, credits from a relevant Master's Diploma may be transferred towards this degree.

Articulation

Early exit

Where an exit-point is catered for, a Master's Diploma or Master's Certificate may be awarded, provided a minimum of 120 credits have been attained and the relevant learning outcomes achieved.

Horizontal

Entry to a related Master's programme

Diagonal

Entry to the research component of a related Structured Master's Degree may be permitted.

Vertical

Meets the entry requirements for a Professional Doctorate in the Career-focused Track, but not necessarily for a PhD.

6.2.17 Structured Master's Degree

Type specifications

NQF Level 8: PG3

General and Career-focused Tracks

Minimum total credits: 180

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG3: 60

Designators

In the General Track only the following designators are permissible: Master *of Arts*, Master *of Science*, Master of *Social Science*, Master *of Commerce*

In the Career-focused Track a range of professional or career-related designators, including the Master *of Technology*, are in use and further usage is open-ended, subject to accreditation.

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum one. It is common practice for Structured Master's Degrees to use a qualifier to signify the area of specialisation, whilst Research Masters tend not to use a qualifier, as the area of specialisation is often too specific to be meaningful to the general public. Providers should use a qualifier with the Structured Master's as a means of distinguishing between a Research and Structured Master's Degree.

Abbreviations

MA (Politics, Philosophy & Economics), MTech (Chemical Engineering), MEng (Chemical), MTh (Biblical Studies)

Purpose and Characteristics

The Structured Master's Degree requires 180 credits at Level 8 and can be achieved in one year's full-time study, although it is more often achieved in two years' part-time study. It sits in both the General and the Career-focused Tracks. The Master of Technology is a designated variant of the Structured Master's in the Career-focused Track. A Structured Master's Degree requires a minimum of 60 credits research, written up in a research dissertation or thesis (at Level 8: PG3), with the remaining minimum 120 credits earned through the completion of advanced coursework (at Level 8: PG2). It thus provides the opportunity to study a range of themes in a discipline, field or interdisciplinary area by means of a structured taught curriculum and formally organized tuition. The Structured Master's usually prepares graduates for advanced and specialised professional employment. It also prepares students for further study in their area of specialisation at Level 8: PG4. The learning outcomes specified for designated variants and specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG3 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

An appropriate Level 8: PG1 qualification, usually a relevant Bachelor's Honours Degree, Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's Degree, Postgraduate Diploma, or, in some cases, a Postgraduate Certificate

Mid-stream

An appropriate Master's Diploma may be recognised and accredited on a Structured Master's programme.

Articulation

Early exit

A student who completes at least 120 credits of coursework on a Structured Master's programme may exit with a Master's Diploma at Level 8: PG2.

Horizontal

A related Master's programme

Diagonal

At the discretion of the provider, a student may be permitted to change track or area of specialisation and register for a Doctorate in a different field, but this will normally be permitted only after the completion of an appropriate Master's Certificate.

Vertical

Entry to a relevant Doctor's Degree at Level 8: PG4

6.2.18 Research Master's Degree

Type specifications

NQF Level 8: PG3

General and Career-focused Tracks

Minimum total credits: 180

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG3: 120

Designators

In the General Track only the following designators are permissible: Master *of Arts*, Master *of Science*, Master of *Social Science*, Master *of Commerce*

In the Career-focused Track a range of professional or career-related designators are in use, including the Master *of Technology*, and further usage is open-ended, subject to accreditation.

Qualifiers

It is advisable not to use a qualifier for a Research Master's because the area of specialisation is often too specific to be meaningful to the general public. Providers should not use a qualifier for a Research Master's Degree as a means of distinguishing it from a Structured Master's Degree.

Abbreviations

MA, MSc, MTech, MArch, MEd, MEng, LLM

Purpose and Characteristics

The Research Master's Degree sits in both the General and the Career-focused tracks. It requires a minimum of 180 credits, of which a minimum of 120 must be earned at Level 8: PG3 through the completion of a single, in-depth research project, culminating in the production and acceptance of a thesis or dissertation. The remaining 60 credits may be earned through extending the length of the thesis or dissertation, or through the completion of coursework or research training modules. The purpose of the Research Master's is to educate and train researchers who can contribute to the development of knowledge at an advanced level. Graduates from the Research Master's should be able to undertake rigorous research and to communicate the results by means of a thesis or dissertation which meets internationally acceptable standards. The learning outcomes specified for designated variants and specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG3 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

An appropriate Level 8: PG1 qualification, usually a relevant Bachelor's Honours Degree in the General Track and an Advanced Career-focused Bachelor's degree in the Career-focused Track. Alternatively, an appropriate Postgraduate Certificate may be recognised as meeting the entry requirements.

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit

Not applicable

Horizontal

A related Level 8: PG3 programme

Diagonal

At the discretion of the provider, a student may be permitted to change track or area of specialisation and register for a Doctorate in a different field, but this will normally be permitted only after the completion of an appropriate Master's Certificate.

Vertical

Entry to a PhD or related Doctor's Degree at Level 8: PG4

6.2.19 Professional Doctor's Degree

Type specifications

NQF Level 8: PG4

Career-focused Track only

Minimum total credits: 360

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG4: 360

Designators

In the Career-focused Track a range of professional or career-related designators are in use and further usage is open-ended, subject to accreditation.

Qualifiers

Optional and open-ended, maximum one; it is common practice for Professional Doctorates to use a qualifier to signify the area of specialisation, and providers are encouraged to do so in order to distinguish the Professional Doctorate from the Doctor of Philosophy.

Abbreviations

DPsych (Clinical), DCom (Accounting), DEd (Educational Management), LLD (Constitutional Law)

Purpose and Characteristics

The Professional Doctor's Degree exists only in the Career-focused Track. It requires 360 credits at Level 8: PG4, with a minimum of 180 credits earned through the completion of one or more research reports or dissertations which are of a quality that satisfy peer-review and merit publication in reputable international scientific/academic/professional journals. The purpose of this qualification is to provide high-level advanced, specialised, professional training for already practising professionals. The research required is of an applied or *praxis* nature, rather than purely theoretical or disciplinary. The learning outcomes specified for designated variants and specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG4 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

Entry

An appropriate Master's Degree, usually a Professional or Structured Master's Degree

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit

Not applicable

Horizontal

A related Doctor's Degree

Diagonal

Not applicable

Vertical

Senior Doctorate

6.2.20 Doctor of Philosophy

Type specifications

NQF Level 8: PG4

General and Career-focused Tracks

Minimum total credits: 360

Minimum credits at Level 8: PG4: 360

Designators

The designator *of Philosophy* is used in both the General and the Career-focused Track.

Qualifiers

Doctor's of Philosophy tend not to use a qualifier, as the area of specialisation is often too specific to be meaningful to the general public; providers should not use a qualifier for the PhD as a means of distinguishing it from the Professional Doctorate.

Abbreviations

PhD or DPhil in either track

Purpose and Characteristics

The Doctor of Philosophy is the traditional doctoral degree consisting *in toto* of research at the most advanced academic level, with the research results being presented in a doctoral thesis/dissertation with a minimum credit value of 360 at Level 8: PG4. This degree usually requires a minimum of three years' full-time study to complete. The Degree can be earned in either the General or the Career-focused Track and the nature of the research undertaken will differ accordingly, with pure or discipline-based research being undertaken in the former, and applied research being undertaken in the latter. A key characteristic of this qualification is the requirement that a significant, original and substantial contribution be made at the frontiers of a discipline or field, and that a high level of research capability be demonstrated through peer-reviewed publication of international standard. A graduate should be able to supervise and evaluate the research of others in the area of specialisation concerned. The learning outcomes specified for designated variants and specialisations of this qualification type will meet the competences described in the descriptor for Level 8: PG4 in contextualised form.

Admission requirements

 Entry

An appropriate Master's Degree

Mid-stream

Not applicable

Articulation

Early exit

Not applicable

Horizontal

A related Doctor's Degree

Diagonal

Not applicable

Vertical

Senior Doctorate

Chapter 7

Issues Related to Academic Policy

This chapter does not propose policy *per se*, instead it attempts to engage with a number of implementation challenges and issues currently facing those who design, teach and administer academic programmes. These challenges are not originated by the New Academic Policy. They have been raised by the policy as well as the practices that have constituted the context of higher education since 1994. Where appropriate, this chapter points out how the New Academic Policy might relate to the issues under discussion.

7.1 Admissions and the Widening of Access

Currently the admission requirements for higher education are as follows:

Admission to Universities

To register for degree study at a public university in South Africa a learner needs to be in possession of a Senior Certificate with a matriculation endorsement, a certificate of complete or conditional matriculation exemption, or needs to be awarded graduate status. The ministerially approved regulations published in terms of the provisions of Section 74 of the *Higher Education Act*, as amended, set out the criteria and rules under which the various types of certificates of endorsement, complete and conditional exemption may be granted. The administration of this admissions policy is undertaken on behalf of the universities by the Matriculation Board of SAUVCA. The rules governing both endorsement and exemption status are extremely complex, especially in terms of the required combinations of Grade 12 subjects. Some universities also offer initial diplomas, e.g. in the case of teacher education. For these programmes, students may be admitted to a university with only a Senior Certificate.

Universities are also allowed to set additional admission requirements for specific programmes over and above the minimum mentioned above. This is established practice for professional degrees, especially for the health professions. In most cases this has been due to infrastructural limitations and to agreements between the universities and the professional board/council in question. In those programmes where mathematics and science feature strongly, it is common practice for universities to specify minimum Grade 12 performance levels in these subjects. More recently, as universities have developed more focused programmes in response to demands for greater relevance and responsiveness, this practice has become more widespread. An increasing number of universities are now also specifying additional minimum requirements for language.

During the 1990s, exceptions to this admissions policy were allowed and the number of students admitted by exception is on the increase due to the misfit between the policy, the government's strong equity agenda and the reality that the number of students exiting the schooling system

with matriculation endorsement or exemption is on the decline. The Joint Statute of the Universities allows the Matriculation Board to issue a certificate of conditional exemption 'to a person who, in the opinion of the senate of a university, has demonstrated, in a selection process appointed by that senate, that he or she is suitable for admission to bachelor's degree studies, which certificate shall be valid for admission to that university only'. This practice, known as Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption, has been used with increasing frequency in the past few years as universities have responded to falling student numbers and the inadequate matriculated throughput from the schooling system. Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption could be viewed as a form of recognising prior learning, in that the university concerned admits students who do not meet the statutory admission requirements, provides them with an academic development programme (a form of appropriate prior learning) and then assesses and recognises this prior learning as the equivalent of a Senior Certificate with Endorsement/Exemption. Under the New Academic Policy, this practice will be streamlined through the recognition and subsidy of Foundation programmes and Certificates which will be designed to articulate with, and to provide access to, a range of higher education programmes.

Also under the Senate Discretional Conditional Exemption concession, some universities have recently instituted institution-specific entrance tests for prospective students. In most cases, all students with a Senior Certificate below a certain aggregate are required to write these tests. The results are normally used to assist university administrators make alternative admissions and placement decisions. This development is due largely to the now widely accepted fact that the Senior Certificate is only a good predictor of academic performance for those students with the top range of scores. Admissions based solely on Senior Certificate results for those with lower range scores are therefore believed to exclude unfairly many students with academic potential. However, it is undesirable in the long-term to allow a system of dual testing to develop (whereby students are required to write both a school-leaving and a university entrance exam). Ideally, we need to develop one form of assessment which can serve both purposes.

Admission to Technikons

As is the case for universities, admission requirements for study at a technikon are determined in the Joint Statute for Technikons by the CTP. At present a learner must be in possession of a Senior Certificate to be eligible to enrol for technikon study. Technikons are also empowered to set additional admission requirements for specific programmes. Once again, programmes which involve the study of mathematics and science often have such additional requirements. Contrary to universities, technikons do not distinguish between admission requirements for diploma and degree study. This is because the admission requirement for the Bachelor of Technology Degree is currently an appropriate National Diploma or equivalent (a Career-focused Bachelor's Degree under the New Academic Policy). Since admission to a National Diploma requires only a pass in the Senior Certificate there was no need to introduce a different admission requirement for degree study at the technikons.

Obviously, the fact that current academic policy allows for lower admissions requirements for the technikon sector than for the university sector poses a problem for the alignment and articulation of qualifications from the two sectors on a common qualifications framework. The New Academic Policy seeks to overcome this difficulty by introducing the *Articulation Column*, (see Chapter 4)

which prevents the assumption of automatic progression and provides a 'curriculum space' for additional learning to be completed prior to further progression on the framework. Furthermore, the framework is based on the assumption that a common minimum statutory admissions requirement, the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) will be developed for all higher education sectors in the future.

The basis for this development has been laid in the new legislative and policy context. The *White Paper* commits government to promoting equity of access to higher education and to increased and broadened participation in higher education, specifically in terms of race and gender. Based on this commitment, the *White Paper* proposes a FETC to replace the present Senior Certificate, as the minimum statutory requirement for entry into all higher education programmes. In addition, the *White Paper* strongly supports the development of criteria and mechanisms to recognize prior learning with a view to admitting non-traditional students to higher education institutions.

The *Higher Education Act* does not specify a minimum admissions requirement for study in higher education. While providing for the continuation of present admission arrangements to public higher education institutions as administered by the Matriculation Board of SAUVCA and by the CTP, it also re-affirms the right of public higher education institutions to determine their own admissions policies subject to the provisions of the act. This includes the right to determine entrance requirements for particular programmes, student numbers for particular programmes and the manner of their selection. Institutions are obliged to publish their admissions policies. The act also requires that 'the admissions policy of a public higher education institution must provide for the redress of past inequalities'. The *Higher Education Act* does not attempt to set a legislative framework for admission to private higher education institutions. It is assumed, however, that in applying for registration with the registrar of private higher education institutions, information concerning admission requirements will have to be furnished.

As mentioned above, the public statement of admissions requirements is also required for the registration of qualifications with SAQA, applicable to both the private and the public sectors. For each qualification submitted for registration, SAQA requires a statement of the 'learning assumed to be in place' before learning for the qualification commences. Recently, in its *FETC Policy Document* (April, 2001), SAQA proposes the abolition of the Higher/Standard Grade distinction made in the current Senior Certificate exam and recommends that a simple pass in the FETC should be the statutory minimum requirement for admission to all institutions in the higher education sector. SAQA regards the endorsement/exemption requirement on the Senior Certificate for admission to universities as an obstacle to widening access. But, whilst SAQA is against the imposition of an additional overlay (or coarse sieve) on the proposed FETC, SAQA is obliged to recognize the right of individual higher education institutions, granted in the *Higher Education Act*, to impose additional entry requirements (a fine sieve) at the level of particular programmes (on condition that these are publicly and transparently stated). SAQA has proposed that the FETC serve three purposes:

· preparation for meaningful participation in society;

·   preparation for the workplace;

·   preparation for higher education study.

There is now general acceptance that these three purposes will not be met in a single assessment. There are likely to be multiple FETCs one of which will have an academic focus, designed to articulate with higher education entry requirements.

In the *National Plan*, the DoE makes more explicit its position on access, already outlined in the *White Paper*. It suggests that the current participation rate of 15% of the 20–24 year old cohort is too low and that, as a middle income country, South Africa should boast a participation rate of at least 20%. However, the *National Plan* recognizes that it will be difficult to increase the annual intake of new students in the short-to medium-term (*National Plan*, 2001: 22), because of the chronic mismatch in output from the schooling system and the entry requirements of higher education. This fact is also recognized by SAQA in its FETC Discussion document, which notes that:

In 1999 only 12% of all Grade 12 candidates who offered the Senior Certificate qualified for entry to universities, i.e. achieved the Senior Certificate with a matriculation endorsement. This percentage does not take into account the high drop-out rates lower down in the system. When these are considered, it is closer to 6% of learners who should be in the school-leaving cohort who gained a Senior Certificate with exemption. A closer consideration of that cohort indicates that less than 2% of learners had Mathematics (either at functional, standard or higher grade) within their qualifying subject package (*SAQA FETC Policy Document*, April, 2001: 11-12).

Likewise, the DoE notes that in 2000, less than 20 000 school-leavers obtained a Higher Grade Senior Certificate pass in Mathematics (*National Plan*, 2001: 20). Given these realities, the *National Plan* sets a very modest target for the higher education system with respect to increasing participation rates, suggesting that the increase to 20% occur over the next 10–15 years. In terms of head-counts, first-time intakes per annum will need to increase from 120 000 to 188 000 (*National Plan*, 2001: 22).

The *National Plan* also wants the social base from which students are drawn to be broadened. It suggests that this can be achieved if higher education institutions:

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