



The South African NQF (National Qualifications Framework) regulatory history

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) receives many queries relating to the verification of UJ qualifications. A brief history is set out below.

Background

UJ is a merged institution, incorporating the qualifications of the old Rand Afrikaans Universiteit (RAU) (established in 1967) and the Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR) (established in 1903). Numerous qualifications that graduates obtained and which now fall into the UJ mandate were thus originally offered by either RAU or TWR. The records and offerings of both of these institutions were taken into UJ with its legal establishment in 2005.

The South African Qualifications Authority

The history of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in South Africa is relatively brief. Its establishment dates back to the promulgation of the *Higher Education Act 101 of 1997* ("the *HE Act*"). The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), responsible for the NQF, was itself established just prior to this, by the *South African Qualifications Authority Act 58 of 1995*, an act that was repealed with the promulgation of the *National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008*. In terms of both acts, SAQA oversees the development and implementation of the NQF.

The National Qualifications Framework and whole qualifications

The NQF sets out the framework for all qualifications in South Africa. Subsequent to the promulgation of the relevant legislation, all education and training in South Africa must comply with this framework. However, there are numerous qualifications which were offered prior to the operation of the NQF and the HEQSF which were not subject to these requirements. It is important to note that these qualifications **retain their legitimacy and equivalence** to qualifications on the current framework. Some programme were 'aligned' to the new framework and were 'aligned and deemed accredited' by the HEQC. Other programmes, such as the BTech, MTech, and DTech (the 'NATED qualifications') were phased but still remain equivalent to programmes on the NQF.

South Africa has had two NQFs – an eight level NQF (in operation from the year 2000), and a ten level NQF (in operation from 2008). These timelines determine whether qualification would have been, or will now be on the NQF. Qualifications from both frameworks are reflected on the SAQA website.

Note:

- If the qualification was **completed prior to 2008** (10-level NQF) **or 2000** (8-level NQF) (in other words prior to the **promulgation** of either NQF) they **will not appear on the NQF**. This is not a concern as

institutions will be able to verify student achievements, and SAQA will, if needed, be able to verify equivalence.

- Qualifications in this category may **not have credits** or **NQF levels** attached to them.
- Modules will **not have credits** or **NQF levels** attached to them.
- Students whose studies **began before the Acts** came into force and who completed their qualifications in the period after the Acts were **promulgated** but **before** they were **implemented**, may also **not** find their qualifications on the NQF. For example, the BTech, MTech and DTech degrees, as well as other degrees with a variety of unregulated names, may not appear on the NQF.

The qualification nomenclature (naming), credit and level requirements have only been set since the 2008 promulgation of the Higher Education Sub-framework (HEQSF) in 2008. It is important to note that there will be qualifications with names different to those used now. For example, a National Diploma which was aligned to the HEQSF, will now be called a Diploma. All institutions were required to align to the new frameworks. Programmes that could not be aligned were phased out.

What is essential to note is that this does not undermine the value of the qualification, or its equivalence to qualifications on either the old or new NQFs.

NB: A Bachelor's degree obtained in the 1970s or 1980s from RAU, for example, is equivalent in status to a bachelor's degree obtained from UJ in 2008 or 2021 and is equivalent to a Bachelor's degree on either the 8-level NQF (on level 6) or the 10-level NQF (on level 7).
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Short learning programmes

At no time have short learning programmes (SLPs) or higher education part qualifications been reflected on the NQF, as they do not lead to **whole qualifications**. In terms of the SAQA guidelines and the *SAQA Act*, only whole higher education qualifications are registered on the HEQSF, the sub-framework of the NQF. For this reason, and since the promulgation of the *NQF Act*, institutions are **not permitted** to use the names of full qualifications in SLPs.

The CHE communicated this to institutions as early as 2001, however the proscription on names was enacted in the *Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework* (GG 38116), published in terms of the *HE Act*. In terms of the HEQSF, no short learning programme may be called by a name that appears in the HEQSF (for example, higher certificate, diploma, advanced certificate). For this reason, and to ensure that there is no ambiguity between SLPs and full qualifications, UJ has amended all SLP names to comply with the legislation.

In addition, the CHE issued instructions relating to the requirements for SLPs. It is not permitted to assign credits and levels to SLPs *unless they are modules* taken directly from fully accredited programmes and offered in exactly the same way as those modules in all respects. As credits and levels do not apply to SLPs not linked to a qualification, credits and levels have been removed from all non-credit bearing SLPs in keeping with the HEQSF. This does not affect their value, and they remain recognised as part of the recognition of prior learning processes.

SUMMARY

- **Verification of qualifications achieved prior to the promulgation of the NQF**

As indicated above, not all qualifications are reflected on the NQF depending on the date of registration and/or completion. In cases where qualifications are not on the NQF, the University in question is legally authorised to provide verification of the achievement of the qualification.

- **Verification of qualifications achieved post the promulgation of the NQF**

Qualifications accredited and registered in terms of the HEQSF are reflected on the NQF, and their achievement may be verified with SAQA.

- **Verification of short learning programmes completed**

The management of the quality of the short learning programme is delegated from the Council on Higher Education (CHE) to higher education institutions. As such, it is within the University's mandate to verify the achievement thereof.