

Do you want to know about the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF)?

What is the NQF?

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF), introduced in South Africa in 1995, is an 8-level framework in terms of which all higher education (HE) qualifications were constructed or 'mapped'. According to the guidelines issued in terms of the NQF, an entry-level HE qualification was at level 5 on the NQF. A matric was presumed to be at level 4. The highest HE qualification possible was at level 8 and included Masters and Doctoral degrees.

Types of qualifications on the NQF

There were several qualification 'types' available to providers of HE. In general terms they were as follows: a certificate (which had to have a minimum of 120 credits), a diploma (which had to have a minimum of 240 credits) and a degree (which had to constitute a minimum of 360 credits). A degree had to exit either at level 6 for a three year degree (360 credits) or it could exit at level 7 for a professional, four year degree (480 credits). Theoretically, therefore, institutions could choose a qualification type (typically a certificate or diploma) and depending on the level at which they wanted to peg the qualification they would amend the name accordingly. Thus a diploma on the original NQF would usually have been at level 5, and a Higher Diploma at level 6. A Certificate course could be at level 5, with an Advanced Certificate at level 6, for example.

Why change the NQF?

As a result of the relative openness of the NQF, qualifications 'types' at different levels and with different credit values proliferated. As you can imagine, this makes equivalence and portability of qualifications (one of the goals of the NQF) somewhat difficult to achieve. In addition, the eight level NQF did not really permit for sufficient differentiation between qualifications, particularly at the higher levels

What is the new HEQF?

In June 2009, the Minister of Education signed into effect the new Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF). The HEQF is a more differentiated framework and consists of 10 HE levels (level 5 to 10). On the new 10 level HEQF, the lowest higher education qualification available is the Higher Certificate (at level 5) and the highest is the Doctorate or PhD (at level 10).

How is the HEQF different to the NQF?

What distinguishes the HEQF from the previous NQF is that the HEQF specifies ALL aspects of a qualification including:

- the name of the qualification
- the type of qualification
- the HEQF level

- the number of credits at each level
- the entry requirements
- possible progression to higher levels.

All of these aspects are, at a minimum, prescribed by law. Institutions may add to the requirements but may not generally lower them (although they may permit 10% of an intake entry into a qualification via a Recognition of Prior Learning process so as to broaden access to a particular programme).

What does the new NQF mean for students or graduates?

The fact that we are moving from an eight level framework to a ten level framework means that some qualifications will have to change levels. For example:

- a three year, 360 credit bachelors degree is at level 6 on the NQF; on the HEQF a three year, 360 level bachelor's degree will be at level 7 and a four year, 480 credit professional bachelors degree may be at level 8.
- All 240 credit diplomas will have to be phased out and replaced with HEQF compliant qualifications. The HEQF makes provision for a 360 credit Diploma at level 6, and a 120 credit Advanced Diploma at level 7.
- Certificates on the NQF may be aligned to either a Higher Certificate (120 credits on level 5) or the Advanced Certificate (120 credits on level 6).
- Masters degrees currently on level 8 will have to be aligned to the requirements for level 9.
- PhDs on level 8 will move to level 10.

What will my qualification be worth after the change?

Until all the current qualifications have been evaluated for their compliance with the HEQF we will effectively have both the HEQF and the NQF in operation. However, this will not impact negatively on the status of whichever qualification you have received, provided it has been accredited by the HEQC and was registered on the NQF by SAQA. Thus, for example, a bachelor's degree will still have status of a degree and a diploma at level 5 will still retain its currency.

In sum, the value of the qualification for which you are registered or with which you have graduated still stands, and the introduction of the new HEQF will not work in any way to undermine the value of your qualification whether over the transitional period or beyond.

Should you have any additional questions, please feel free to submit these via our website.

Quick reference to the new HEQF

Qualification name	Exit level	Min total credits	Credits at exit level / other	Minimum entrance requirements*
Higher Certificate	5	120	Minimum 120 @ level 5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSC
Advanced Certificate	6	120	Minimum 120 @ level 6	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Higher Certificate in appropriate field.
Diploma	6	360	Minimum @ level 7: 60 Maximum @ level 5: 120	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSC but with achievement rating of 3 or better in four recognised subjects • OR • HC or AC in cognate field.
Advanced Diploma	7	120	Minimum @ level 7: 120	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • An appropriate Diploma or Bachelor's degree.
Bachelor's degree (not professional)	7	360	Minimum @ level 7: 120 Maximum @ level 5: 96	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NSC but with achievement rating of 4 in four recognised subjects.
Bachelor Honours degree	8	120	Minimum @ level 8: 120 Must include 30 credit "conducting and reporting research under supervision".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate Bachelor's degree
Postgraduate Diploma	8	120	Minimum @ level 8: 120 Project <i>may</i> include "conducting and reporting research under supervision".	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate Bachelor's degree
Master's Degree	9	180	Minimum @ level 9: 120	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relevant Bachelors (Hons) degree, or • Professional Bachelor's degree with min 96 credits @ level 8, or • Postgraduate Diploma
PhD; Doctorate	10	360	Minimum @ level 10 360	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appropriate Master's degree

* Entry to a qualification is not automatic. Institutions are permitted to add entry requirements or to determine selection for their qualifications as they deem appropriate. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) admissions remain possible under the HEQF.