



**Policy and Criteria for the
Registration of Qualifications
and Part-qualifications on
the National Qualifications
Framework
(As amended, 2020)**

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Foreword

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is the principal instrument through which national education and training qualifications are recognised and quality-assured.

Section 13(1)(h)(i) of the NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008, requires SAQA to “develop and implement policy and criteria, after consultation with the Quality Councils (QCs), for the development, registration and publication of qualifications and part-qualifications...” The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) reviewed its *Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework* as part of its mandate to “further develop and implement the NQF.

The implementation of the *Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (As amended, 2020)* hereafter referred to as the *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications* will further advance the NQF objective to “facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths”.

Inherent to the *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications* is the goal to strengthen accountability within the education, training and development system and to make visible the quality and parity of all qualifications registered on the NQF.

SAQA continues to work with the QCs and other NQF partners to make sure that all South Africans benefit from quality qualifications.

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Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (As amended, 2020)

Definitions

1. The following definitions are relevant for this *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications*:
 - a. “Applied competence” means the ability to put into practice, in the relevant context, the learning outcomes acquired in the process of obtaining a qualification or part-qualification (applied competence encapsulates foundational, reflexive and practical competence);
 - b. “Articulation” means the process of forming systemic, specific and individual possibilities of connection between qualifications and/or part-qualifications to allow for the horizontal/ lateral, vertical and diagonal movement of learners through the formal education and training system and its linkages with the world of work:
 - i. Horizontal articulation is articulation within and between NQF Sub-Frameworks, on the same NQF level;
 - ii. Vertical articulation is articulation across NQF levels within an NQF Sub-Framework;
 - iii. Diagonal articulation is articulation across NQF levels and across NQF Sub-Frameworks;
 - iv. Systemic articulation is a ‘joined up’ system including qualifications, professional designations, policies and various other official elements that support learning and work pathways;
 - v. Specific articulation means aligning qualifications through inter- or intra-institutional agreements such as memoranda of understanding, credit accumulation and transfer and other mechanisms;
 - vi. Individual articulation refers to learners being supported in their learning and work pathways through flexible admission, curriculum, learning and teaching, and learner support systems such as the quality of qualifications and learning, career development services, and other mechanisms;
 - c. “Assessment” means the process used to identify, gather and interpret information against the required competencies in a qualification or part-qualification in order to make a judgement about a learner’s achievement;
 - d. “Assessment Criteria” means the standards used to guide learning and to assess learner achievement and/or to evaluate and certify competence;
 - e. “Competency” means specific knowledge and/or values and/or skills that can be applied in learning and/or work;
 - f. “Credit” means a measure of the volume of learning required for a qualification or part-

qualification, quantified as the number of notional study hours required for achieving the learning outcomes specified for the qualification or part-qualification. One (1) credit is equated to ten (10) notional hours of learning;

- g. “Entry Requirements” means the minimum academic knowledge and/or practical competencies, and/or work experience that a learner must have completed to be able to be admitted for a qualification and/or part-qualification. This may include recognition of other forms of prior learning such as non-formal and informal learning and work experience deemed as comparable for entry. In the South African context, entry requirements also take into account the broad socio-political issue of access;
- h. “Exit Level Outcomes” means the knowledge, skills and attitudes that a learner should have obtained or mastered on completion of a qualification or part-qualification and against which the learner is assessed for competence;
- i. “Integrated Assessment” means the range of formative and summative assessment methods which permits the learner to demonstrate applied competence and which assess different types of learning;
- j. “International Comparability” means an outcome of an analysis of how a qualification compares with- and relates to- similar international qualifications offered by accredited institutions or organisations in other parts of the world. This includes best practices or standards in other parts of the world;
- k. “Learning” means the acquisition of knowledge, understanding, values, skill, competence and/or experience. Learning can be acquired formally, non-formally, or informally;
- l. “Learning Programme” means a structured and purposeful set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification or part-qualification;
- m. “Level” means one of the series of learning achievements arranged in ascending order from one to ten according to which the NQF is organised and to which qualification types are linked;
- n. “Level Descriptor” means a statement describing learning achievement at a particular level of the NQF that provides a broad indication of the types of learning outcomes and assessment criteria that are appropriate to a qualification at that level;
- o. “National Qualifications Framework” means a comprehensive system approved by the Minister for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications;
- p. “Notional hours of learning” means the agreed estimate of the learning time that it would take an average learner to meet the defined outcomes, it includes consideration of contact time, research, completion of assignments, time spent in structured learning in the workplace, individual learning. Ten (10) notional hours equate to one (1) credit;
- q. “Organising Field” means a particular area of learning used as an organising mechanism for the NQF;
- r. “Outcomes” means the contextually demonstrated end-products of specific learning processes, which include knowledge, skills and values. Outcomes could be generic or specific;
- s. “Part-Qualification” means an assessed unit of learning that is registered as part of a qualification;

- t. “Provider” means a legally established institution (public or private) that has been recognised, usually for a particular period of time, by a Quality Council (QC) or its appointed agent, as having the capacity or provisional capacity to offer a qualification or part-qualification registered on the NQF at the required standard;
- u. “Qualification” means a registered national qualification;
- v. “Qualification specialisation” means the part of the qualification or part-qualification that specifies the specific discipline/ field of study that contributes to the academic/ vocational/occupational/professional identity in a particular area/ branch of knowledge. Specialisations include a body of knowledge, theories, concepts and methods particular to the discipline or field of study. The qualifier of the qualification type specifies the qualification specialisation;
- w. “Qualification Type” means the classification of a qualification on a level within a Sub-Framework of the NQF;
- x. “Qualifier” means the specific area of specialisation of a qualification type. In order to use a qualifier, the qualifications and part-qualifications must meet the requirements as stipulated in the Sub-Framework Policies of the Quality Councils;
- y. “Recognition of Prior Learning” means the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development;
- z. “Sub-Framework” means one of three Qualifications Sub-Frameworks, which make up the NQF as a single integrated system: The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework; the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework; and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework; and
- aa. “Work Integrated Learning” means a characteristic of vocational and professionally oriented qualifications that may be incorporated into qualifications and part-qualifications at all levels of all three Sub-Frameworks. Work Integrated Learning may take various forms including simulated learning, work-directed theoretical learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning and workplace-based learning.

Preamble

2. The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a comprehensive system approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications and part-qualifications. The NQF was established under the SAQA Act, Act 58 of 1995¹, and continues under the NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008, which came into effect on 1 June 2009.
3. The objectives of the NQF are designed to contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large. The objectives of the

¹ The SAQA Act, Act 58 of 1995 was repealed in 2008 and replaced by the NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008. The NQF Act (2008), in section 36, makes allowance for transitional arrangements between the SAQA Act (1995) and the NQF Act (2008).

NQF are to:

- a. create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements;
 - b. facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within, education, training and career paths;
 - c. enhance the quality of education and training; and
 - d. accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.
4. The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) is the custodian of the NQF and oversees its further development and implementation. The NQF is a system that enables communication, co-ordination, and collaboration across education, training, development and work. In advancing the NQF objectives, SAQA embraces diversity, environmental sustainability and social justice.
5. The NQF is a single integrated framework, comprising three co-ordinated Qualifications Sub-Frameworks, for:
- a. General and Further Education and Training, as contemplated in the General and Further Education and Training Quality Assurance (GENFETQA) Act (and subsequent amendments);
 - b. Higher Education, as contemplated in the Higher Education Act (and subsequent amendments); and
 - c. Trades and Occupations, as contemplated in the Skills Development Act (and subsequent amendments).
6. In terms of Sections 5(3), 13(1)(h)(i) and 27(h)(i) of the NQF Act (2008), SAQA and the Quality Councils (QCs) must:
- a. develop, foster and maintain an integrated and transparent national framework for the recognition of learning achievements;
 - b. ensure that South African qualifications are internationally comparable and meet appropriate criteria as determined by the Minister;
 - c. ensure that South African qualifications are of an acceptable quality; and
 - d. develop and implement policy and criteria for the development, registration and publication of qualifications and part-qualifications on the NQF.
7. The quality of qualifications and part-qualifications resides in the:
- a. advancement of the objectives of the NQF;
 - b. fitness and suitability of the qualification or part-qualification for its intended purpose;
 - c. outcomes of the learning that took place;
 - d. comparability with similar international qualifications, best practices and standards;
 - e. the relationship between the learning components (modules, courses, subjects) of the qualification; and
 - f. delivery of the qualification or part-qualification and assessment of learner achievement.

8. Following the approval of this *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications*, the QCs must align their Sub-Framework policies and criteria (as per Section 27 (h)(i) of the NQF Act, Act 67 of 2008).

Purpose

9. This *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications* sets out the requirements for developing qualifications and part-qualifications. It will be used by SAQA for evaluating, registering and publishing qualifications and part-qualifications on the NQF as recommended by the QCs.

Scope

10. This *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications* applies to the development, evaluation, registration and publication of qualifications and part-qualifications on the South African NQF, taking into account the requirements of the NQF Act and the relevant Sub-Frameworks.

Objectives

11. This *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications* is designed to:
 - a. facilitate the development, registration and publication of qualifications and part-qualifications on the NQF;
 - b. ensure that registered qualifications and part-qualifications are relevant to the world of work, promote responsible citizenship in a democratic society, and advance knowledge and innovation for a prosperous South Africa;
 - c. create learning pathways for progression between qualifications within and between the NQF Sub-Frameworks, and between learning and work;
 - d. establish and maintain coherence between the three Sub-Frameworks to clarify and strengthen articulation between qualifications within each Sub-Framework and between the Sub-Frameworks; and
 - e. promote public understanding of, and trust in, the NQF through the registration of quality-assured, nationally relevant and internationally comparable qualifications and part-qualifications.

Development of Qualifications and Part-qualifications

Policy

12. The QCs, as per Section 27 (h) (iii) and (iv) of the NQF Act 67 of 2008, with regard to qualifications for its Sub-Framework must:
 - a. ensure the development of such qualifications or part-qualifications as are necessary for the sector, which may include appropriate measures for the assessment of learning achievement; and

- b. recommend qualifications or part-qualifications to the SAQA for registration.
13. The QCs have executive responsibility for the development of qualifications and part-qualifications in their respective Sub-Frameworks and must:
- a. ensure that qualifications and part-qualifications comply with this *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications*;
 - b. ensure that qualifications and part-qualifications meet the criteria as specified in their published Sub-Framework Policies;
 - c. provide guidance to qualification developers to ensure that there is a common conceptual understanding of the difference between qualifications and part-qualifications, learning programmes and qualification specialisations; and
 - d. discourage proliferation and duplication of qualifications and part-qualifications in their Sub-Frameworks.

Criteria

14. In developing a qualification or part-qualification, QCs must ensure that developers:
- a. identify the relevant Sub-Framework on which it is recommended for registration on the NQF;
 - b. include clear specifications of learning outcomes, using the appropriate level descriptors;
 - c. specify the minimum requirements to achieve the qualification;
 - d. provide articulated learning pathways;
 - e. in the case of qualifications, ensure a minimum of 120 (one hundred and twenty) credits;
 - f. in the case of part-qualifications, and in ensuring that it forms part of a registered national whole (parent) qualification, the following must be taken into account:
 - i. in the case where the parent qualification is already registered on the NQF, indicate the name of the parent qualification when submitting the part-qualification for registration;
 - ii. in the case of new qualifications with part-qualifications, submit the relevant parent qualification together with its part-qualifications, noting that SAQA must first register the parent qualification;
 - iii. ensure that the maximum credits of the part-qualification are less than 120 credits;
 - iv. ensure that there is a distinction between the nomenclature for qualifications and part-qualifications;
 - v. ensure that the Exit Level Outcomes are at the level of the part-qualification;
 - g. include consultation with relevant stakeholders; and
 - h. include a public comment period to gauge the opinions of the public before the QC recommends the qualification or part-qualification for registration on the NQF.
15. Qualifications and part-qualifications must be developed to meet the criteria for registration stipulated in Clause 21 and Clause 22 of this *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications*, and must include the following features:

- a. Sub-Framework and Title;
- b. Organising Field and Sub-Field;
- c. NQF level of the qualification and/or part-qualification;
- d. Credits;
- e. Purpose;
- f. Rationale;
- g. Entry requirements;
- h. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL);
- i. Rules of Combination;
- j. Exit Level Outcomes;
- k. Associated Assessment Criteria;
- l. Integrated Assessment;
- m. International Comparability; and
- n. Articulation.

Registration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications

Policy

16. SAQA will register a qualification or part-qualification on the NQF on the recommendation of a QC if it meets the requirements of this *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications*.
17. Qualifications and part-qualifications that are recommended to SAQA for registration, but do not meet the stipulated registration criteria, will be returned to the relevant QC for amendment.
18. The SAQA Board is the final authority that approves the registration of qualifications and part-qualifications on the NQF.
19. Once registered on the NQF, all qualifications and part-qualifications are national qualifications and published on the SAQA Website.
20. All qualifications and part-qualifications offered by accredited providers in South Africa must meet the requirements of this *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications* for registration on the NQF.

Criteria

21. Qualifications and part-qualifications that are recommended by a QC for registration on the NQF must:
 - a. be written in English;
 - b. be submitted in Microsoft Word format;
 - c. be in a format provided by SAQA; and

- d. meet the respective Sub-Framework criteria as specified in the published Sub-Framework Policy of each QC.

22. Qualifications and part-qualifications that are recommended for registration must comply with the format requirements stipulated below:

A. Sub-Framework and Title

- I. The relevant Sub-Framework, on which the qualification or part-qualification is to be registered, must be provided; and
- II. The Title of the qualification and/or part-qualification must comply with the qualification type description provided for in the relevant NQF Sub-Framework Policy.

B. Organising Field and Sub-Field

- I. The NQF Organising Field and Sub-Field must be specified.

C. NQF Level of the Qualification and/or part-qualification

- I. The qualification or part-qualification must be placed within the relevant NQF level;
- II. The published NQF level descriptors must be used to determine the NQF level of the qualification;
- III. The NQF level of a part-qualification may be at the same NQF level as the parent qualification, or a level within the range allowed for in the relevant qualification type; and
- IV. The NQF level must comply with the requirements for the qualification type as determined by the relevant Sub-Framework Policy.

D. Credits

- I. The credits must be calculated on the basis of one (1) credit is equal to ten (10) notional hours of learning;
- II. The minimum credit allocation for a qualification must comply with the requirements for the qualification type as determined by the relevant Sub-Framework Policy. At least 60% of the credits must be at the exit level of the qualification or part-qualification;
- III. A qualification must have a minimum of 120 credits;
- IV. A part-qualification must have a maximum that is less than 120 credits; and
- V. Calculation of the credits for a qualification and/or part-qualification must take into account its articulation.

E. Purpose

- I. The purpose statements must describe:
 - a) how the qualification or part-qualification will benefit the learner;
 - b) what the qualification or part-qualification intends to achieve, i.e. what the qualifying learner will know, do and understand after achievement; and

- c) the typical graduate attributes.

F. Rationale

- I. The rationale must confirm:
 - a) the need for the qualification and/or part-qualification;
 - b) that a similar qualification is not already registered on the NQF;
 - c) how the qualification or part-qualification will benefit the sector, society and the economy;
 - d) the typical learners for the qualification or part-qualification;
 - e) if the assertion in the qualification or part-qualification relates to specific occupations or professions:
 - how the qualification or part-qualification meets the requirements for professional registration, membership or licensing as required by recognised professional bodies, and proof of collaboration, if relevant; and
 - the typical occupations in which the qualifying learner will operate, if relevant.

G. Entry Requirements

- I. All relevant and practical possibilities (within or across Sub-Frameworks), for entry into the qualification or part-qualification, must be specified.

H. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

- I. RPL statements must clearly state how learners will:
 - a) gain access through RPL;
 - b) be exempted from modules through RPL; and
 - c) be awarded credits for, or towards the qualification or part-qualification.

I. Rules of Combination

- I. The rules of combination must:
 - a) comply with the requirements for the qualification type as determined by the relevant Sub-Framework Policy and related policies;
 - b) indicate names of subjects and/or modules and credits;
 - c) stipulate the compulsory modules, their levels and the credits; and
 - d) stipulate the selection of elective modules (where more than one is applicable) and their levels and credits.

J. Exit Level Outcomes

- I. The competencies embedded in the NQF level descriptors relate directly to the competencies required for further learning and/or the work for which the qualification or part-qualification was designed and must be used to guide the formulation of the Exit Level Outcomes (ELOs);
- II. The ELOs must indicate what the learner will be able to know, do and understand after completing the qualification or part-qualification:

- a) The ELOs of the qualification or part-qualification must be aligned with the NQF level descriptors and must meet the competencies of the relevant NQF level; and
- b) The ELOs must be designed for the qualification or part-qualification and not the modules or subjects.

K. Associated Assessment Criteria

- I. The Associated Assessment Criteria (AACs):
 - a) must indicate what the learner must do to show competence, the knowledge involved, the context, the standard of assessment and the range if applicable;
 - b) must indicate the nature and level of the assessment associated with the qualification or part-qualification and how the ELOs could be assessed; and
 - c) can be given as a comprehensive set to assess all the ELOs in an integrated manner or as a comprehensive set to assess ELOs separately.

L. Integrated Assessment

- I. Integrated assessment must indicate how the assessment will be undertaken to determine a learner's applied competence and successful completion of learning in the qualification or part-qualification;
- II. Integrated assessment should include:
 - a) formative and summative assessment;
 - b) experiential learning, work integrated learning (WIL), practicals and work-based learning, where relevant; and
- III. Examples may include the ratio of assignment work to academic examinations, other forms of integrated learning as well as assessment practices.

M. International Comparability

- I. The statement of international comparability must support learner mobility, and in doing so, must include how the qualification and/or part-qualification compares with relevant best practices in other parts of the world;
- II. The best practices must include a relevant comparison of the following areas:
 - a) At least two countries, as well as the registered/recognised/accredited institutions and titles of the qualifications: The comparison must indicate the similarities and/or differences in entry requirements; ELOs/ content/ modules; credits; assessments; duration; and articulation;

OR

 - b) International standards in other parts of the world: The comparison must indicate the international standard used in the development of the qualification and / or part-qualification and outline how the qualification and/ or part-qualification compares with the international standard;
- III. The international comparability must provide details of how the qualification and/or part-qualification compares internationally, and not be a mere reference to websites or links.

N. Articulation

- I. To deepen integration, progression and mobility in the education and training system, articulation must show horizontal, vertical and diagonal articulation:
 - a) Horizontal articulation possibilities within and between Sub-Frameworks at the same NQF level should include systemic, specific and individual articulation;
 - b) Vertical articulation possibilities across NQF levels within a Sub-Framework should include systemic, specific and individual articulation;
 - c) Diagonal articulation possibilities across NQF levels and NQF Sub-Frameworks should include systemic, specific and individual articulation;
- II. QCs must provide a statement to show how the entry requirements of the qualification and/or part-qualification into which articulation is sought have been taken into account; and
- III. QCs must provide valid reasons where articulation options are not possible.

Re-registration and Deregistration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications

23. Qualifications and part-qualifications are registered for a specific time period:
 - a. GFETQSF qualifications for three years;
 - b. HEQSF qualifications for three years; and
 - c. OQSF qualifications for five years.
24. SAQA will, in writing, notify the QCs of qualifications and part-qualifications that are about to expire, and advise them to review and recommend the qualifications and part-qualifications that must be re-registered or deregistered.
25. QCs must review, and recommend to SAQA, the qualifications and part-qualifications that will be re-registered or deregistered.
26. Depending on the outcome of the review process, SAQA will either de-register the qualification or part-qualification or consider the application for re-registration on the NQF.
27. SAQA will not re-register qualifications and part-qualifications if they:
 - a. are replaced by new qualifications or part-qualifications;
 - b. do not comply with the criteria for registration as outlined in this *P&C for qualifications and part-qualifications*;
 - c. were not offered by accredited providers within the registration period of the qualification and/ or part-qualification; and
 - d. had no learner enrolments within the registration period.
28. QCs will be granted a transitional period of one (1) year to develop and recommend new qualifications or part-qualifications when:
 - a. the qualification or part-qualification is being replaced by a new qualification or part-

- qualification; and
 - b. significant changes (over 50%) are proposed to the existing qualification or part-qualification.
29. During the transitional period of one (1) year, new learners may still be enrolled in the qualification or part-qualification that is being replaced.
30. Existing learners in the system will have a teach-out period of two (2) years (using the formula $[n+2]$ where n is equal to the length of the qualification or part-qualification) from the last date of enrollment of the qualification or part-qualification that has been replaced.
31. SAQA may approve the deregistration of a qualification or part-qualification if:
- a. The relevant QC has, in writing, requested SAQA to deregister a qualification or part-qualification and provided SAQA with:
 - i. sufficient supporting evidence for the deregistration of the qualification;
 - ii. proof of consultation with the provider accredited to offer the qualification or part-qualification; and
 - iii. evidence that there are no pending legal cases with the provider.
 - b. SAQA, after consultation with the relevant QC, is convinced that there is no need for a qualification or part-qualification due to non-enrolment of learners on the qualification or part-qualification; or
 - c. The validity of any completed qualification or part-qualification is not affected by its deregistration.
32. Qualifications and part-qualifications that are no longer offered still form part of the NQF.

Publication of Qualifications and Part-qualifications

Policy

33. All qualifications and part-qualifications registered on the NQF are national qualifications.
34. Information on qualifications and part-qualifications, unless prohibited by law, must be accurate and transparent and be made available to the public.
35. Once a qualification or part-qualification is registered on the NQF, any provider seeking to legally offer it must obtain accreditation from the relevant QC.

Criteria

36. QCs must ensure that the publication of information on qualifications and part-qualifications, in their Sub-Frameworks, is consistent with the information on the NQF. The QCs must ensure that:

- a. the public is protected against misleading information about qualifications and part-qualifications;
- b. providers disseminate and advertise accurate information about the legal registration status of the qualifications and part-qualifications;
- c. NQF nomenclature like NQF levels and credits are only used in the context of NQF qualifications and part-qualifications; and
- d. the qualification information, displayed on the websites of QCs and in the transcripts of qualifying learners, is consistent with the qualification information registered on the NQF.

Implementation and review

37. This *Policy and Criteria for the Registration of Qualifications and Part-qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (As amended, 2020)*:

- a. comes into effect on the date of its publication; and
- b. will be reviewed procedurally after five years or earlier if necessary.