

## Draft Policy Statement – Level 8 Degrees

### Background

Stakeholders at the NQF Review Conference held at Swakopmund in 2013 identified two matters regarding the two types of degrees able to be registered at NQF Level 8:

- a. the NQF Regulations gave, in Annexure C, information for only one structural formulation of a Bachelor Honours degree whilst accepted practice within Namibia since the promulgation of the Regulations enabled two structural formulations.

The Regulations give information on what is regarded as an 'add-on' degree where additional studies with Honours characteristics build onto a Bachelor Degree in the same cognate area. The accepted alternative has been referred to as a 'composite' degree where the requirements of a Bachelor degree and Honours degree are integrated.

- b. the progression from a Professional Bachelor degree to a Masters degree seemed unclear as the Professional Bachelor degree did not seem to require research capacity to be developed as preparation for studies at a Masterate level.

### Results

#### *Bachelor Honours degrees*

- a) The accepted practice regarding the alternative structural formulations for Honours degrees has been reflected in a revised statement of characteristics for such degrees that will replace the current statement in Annexure C of the NQF Regulations.

The headings as currently used in Annexure C have been retained where relevant.

For ease of reading, new text has been italicised. The italics will not appear in any amended version of Annexure C.

***Professional Bachelor degrees***

- b) Amended wording has been developed for the statement of the characteristics of a Professional Bachelor degree that will replace the current statement in Annexure C of the NQF Regulations. The amended wording reflects the professional orientation of the Professional Bachelor degree, in particular amplifying the nature of the professional or work practice project or exercises required as a component of the degree. Graduates would likely progress to a Masters degree that also has a professional orientation rather than an academic orientation.

The headings as currently used in Annexure C have been retained where relevant.

For ease of reading, new text has been italicised. The italics will not appear in any amended version of Annexure C.

- c) Institutions of higher learning must give consideration to the revised policy on the credit values and characteristics of NQF Masters degrees when determining their admission policies to any programme leading to a Masters degree. In particular:
  - a. Institutions of higher learning should give consideration, especially in discussions with relevant stakeholders, whether additional learning associated with the research practices relevant to the cognate area of an 'academic' Masters is required when admitting students with a Professional Bachelor degree into a Masters degree with an academic orientation. This would be an addendum (but not necessarily credit bearing) to the composition of a Master's degree with an academic orientation.
  - b. Institutions of higher learning should give consideration, especially in discussions with relevant professional bodies and other stakeholders, whether additional learning associated with the professional practices relevant to the professional field of the 'professional' Masters is required when admitting students with a Bachelor Honours degree into a Masters degree with a professional orientation. This would be an addendum (but not necessarily credit bearing) to the composition of a Master's degree with a professional orientation.

**Policy statement: Structural composition of a Bachelor Honours degree (Revision to Annexure C)**

**Bachelor Honours Degree**

**Characteristics and purpose**

Bachelor Honours degrees represent a post graduate specialisation qualification *generally* building on a Bachelor degree in the same cognate area *and, usually*, preparing people for research-based postgraduate study *beyond NQF Level 8*.

Bachelor Honours degrees must:

- consolidate and deepen expertise in a particular discipline beyond that recognised in a Bachelor programme
- develop research capacity in the methodology and techniques *relevant to the discipline in which the degree is to be awarded*
- demand a high level of theoretical engagement and intellectual independence, and
- require the conduct and reporting of supervised research representing a minimum of 25% of the total credits at the level of certification.

A lower qualification may not be awarded for early exit from a Bachelor Honours degree programme except where exit represents the attainment of another, *registered* qualification.

**Level of certification**

Bachelor Honours degrees shall be awarded at Level 8.

**Structure and size of qualification**

*Bachelor Honours degrees may be formulated in either of two principal ways:*

- a) A minimum of 120 NQF credits at Level 8 that build on the credit requirements for the award of a Bachelor Degree in the same cognate area, or*
- b) A minimum of 480 NQF Credits of which:*
  - *a minimum of 120 NQF Credits must be at Level 8, and*
  - *the remainder of credits closely reflect the composition requirements for a NQF Bachelor degree.*

*The content and pedagogical approach for the Level 8 components of a Bachelor Honours degree must have a close alignment with the broad outcome statements provided in the Descriptor for NQF Level 8.*

*A minimum of 30 of the Level 8 credits must, in each structural option above, be research related. Research-related can refer to abilities to:*

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- *use a coherent and critical understanding of the principles, theories and methodologies of a particular discipline*
- *select research methods, techniques and technologies appropriate to a particular problem*
- *utilise efficient and effective information retrieval and processing skills, involving critical analysis and independent evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data*
- *engage with current research and scholarly or professional literature*
- *communicate academic or professional work effectively, catering for a wide range of audiences and/or in diverse genres.*

**Policy statement: Structural composition of a Professional Bachelor degree (Revision to Annexure C)**

**Professional Bachelor Degree**

**Characteristics and purpose**

Professional Bachelor degrees represent a substantial attainment of a *coherent cluster* of outcomes of learning *relevant to a particular field of professional practice, generally governed by a statutory or recognised professional body. A substantial portion of the outcomes of learning are in advance of those associated with a Bachelor degree.* Such degrees normally contain a substantial element of *integrated work or practice-based learning* and *generally* focus on preparation for entry into a professional field of practice.

*Professional Bachelor degrees must be developed in association with the relevant professional body.*

Professional Bachelor degrees must:

- build to a level of conceptual sophistication, specialised knowledge and intellectual autonomy (similar to that described for Bachelor Honours degrees) *relevant to the specified area of professional expertise or practice*
- include a terminal project or other supervised practice-based exercise(s) intended to demonstrate readiness for employment in the professional or occupational field of the qualification. *The nature of any terminal project and/or other supervised practice-based exercise(s) would likely be specified in terms of actions, NQF Level and NQF Credits by the relevant professional body in a 'Qualification Standard' agreed with the NQA. The terminal project or supervised work practice would likely be comparable in demand (quantitatively and qualitatively) with the research component of an Honours degree, and*
- require performance in accordance with *any* regulatory framework administered by a regulatory or professional body (and thus have the direct recognition and endorsement of that body).

A lower qualification may not be awarded for early exit from a Professional Bachelor degree programme except where exit represents the attainment of another, *registered* qualification.

**Level of certification**

A Professional Bachelor Degree shall be awarded at Level 8.

**Size of qualification**

A *minimum* of 480 NQF credits at Level 4 and above are required of which a *minimum* of 120 credits must be at level 8.

The number of contributing credits from Level 4 is restricted to a

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*maximum of 40 credits.*

## **Rationale for amendments to characteristics for a Professional Bachelor degree**

1. There are growing realisations in the international qualifications community that programmes and qualifications can give different orientations – general, vocational, academic, professional and career. These orientations have not, to date, been specifically delineated in qualification types within the NQF of Namibia except at NQF Level 8. Bachelor Honours degrees have been expressed with a clear academic focus. Professional Bachelor degrees have been expressed with a clear professional practice focus.
2. As both degree types are registered at NQF Level 8 there is an expectation of a high degree of comparability of the broad nature of each with the broad and generic descriptions of abilities provided in the Level Descriptor for NQF Level 8. The Descriptor is specifically couched in generic terms so as to be potentially inclusive of the diversity of subjects or fields of study that could be certificated by way of a degree at that level. Whilst broad and generic there is an acceptance that more specific outcomes of learning would be expressed in the programme descriptions relevant to each degree. The more specific outcomes of learning would reflect the content and contextual requirements of the particular application-orientations for each degree qualification.
3. The orientations of the two degree types at NQF Level 8 are reflected in the characteristics of each degree. The Bachelor Honours degree has a requirement for the development of (supervised) research capacity with an implicit acceptance that progression would likely be towards a Masters degree that would, through academic scholarship, advance knowledge in or across a subject or subjects. A Professional Bachelor degree has a requirement for the completion of a (supervised) terminal project or practice-based exercises that would lead to readiness for employment in a profession and, perhaps, progression into a Masters degree that would further develop knowledge or techniques in a recognised profession. This further development could be undertaken through but not be limited to the application of a *scientific method* approach.
4. The Descriptor for NQF Level 8 provides useful guidance as to what ‘research capacity’ or ‘terminal project’ or ‘practice-based exercises’ mean. These components of the relevant degree must assess abilities to:
  - use a coherent and critical understanding of the principles, theories and methodologies of the particular discipline(s)
  - select research or investigative methods, techniques and technologies appropriate to any particular problem
  - utilise efficient and effective information retrieval and processing skills, involving critical analysis and independent evaluation of quantitative and qualitative data
  - engage with current research and/or scholarly or professional literature
  - communicate the results of academic or professional work effectively, catering for a wide range of audiences and/or in diverse genres.

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5. The quantum of effort associated with the terminal project and/or practice-related exercises in the Professional Bachelor degree was not specified in the NQF Regulations. However, to retain a broad level of comparability with the other degree type able to be registered at NQF Level 8 there should, perhaps, be an expectation that the effort should, as a minimum, be similar to that of the supervised research for an Honours degree – and be at a similar level of complexity of required performance. However, as mentioned later, there could be specific requirements as guided by the legal requirements applicable for practice as a ‘professional’ that could require some, justified, differences.
6. A distinction between orientations is not common in the nomenclature assigned to qualification types in other national qualification systems. Other systems tend to use more generic terminology whilst acknowledging different orientations within the qualification descriptions<sup>1</sup>. The orientation is often acknowledged as having significant influences in terms of:
  - the nature of the relevant learning outcomes – with emphasis being weighted to some of the ‘abilities-domains’ of the Levels Descriptors
  - structural composition of the qualification
  - teaching, learning and assessment methodologies in the associated programmes leading to the award of the qualifications.
7. The contribution of relevant stakeholders towards qualification design (and the design of related courses or programmes) can be significant in determining the type of qualification required at any Level. In most national qualification systems there is a requirement for stakeholder engagement in design and support (or endorsement) for the registration of a qualification.
8. The significant role of professional bodies in qualification design and registration support was reflected in a number of decisions taken by the NQA Council in September 2009. Specifically, the Council required that:
  - all detailed qualification and other requirements linked to professional designations and/or restricted occupations were to be lodged with the NQA by the respective professional and/or regulatory body before the end of January 2011
  - detailed qualification requirements were to utilise the structural devices of the NQF, especially the NQF Levels and NQF Credit systems) and were to be consistent with the characteristics specified for the relevant qualification type
  - no unreasonable barriers were to be contained within the detailed qualification requirements

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<sup>1</sup>The significance of different purpose-related orientations is covered more fully in the Revised Policy for Masters degrees on the NQF of Namibia.



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The decisions were intended to enhance the transparency of the requirements associated with entry into the professions and/or registration or licensing as a 'professional'. In specifying the requisite requirements in a 'qualification standard' the professional or regulatory body was making a significant contribution towards the design by providers of relevant and acceptable qualifications.

9. Having two degree types with specific orientations specified for NQF Level 8 has not been problematic to qualification designers in Namibia. This, and the fact that there have been a number of Professional Bachelor degrees developed and registered suggests that there is no compelling need to amend the types of degree qualifications registered at NQF Level 8.
10. The international practices reflect the diversity of uses for which qualifications can be designed and registered. The practices represent what is possible to be registered. The practices do not suggest, however, that there may be multiple qualification types at the same level for each distinct qualification purpose or, perhaps, in the same cognate subject or career or professional field.
11. The contribution of relevant stakeholders to qualification design (and the design of related courses or programmes) becomes significant in determining the type of qualification required at any Level. In most national qualification systems there is a requirement for stakeholder engagement in design and support (or endorsement) for the registration of a qualification. Essentially, the decision as to what qualification type will be registered at a NQF Level rests with the relevant stakeholders. Thus, it is they who will significantly defuse any potential for confusion with different qualification types at the same Level. In their specific field, the stakeholders will likely not support different qualification types at the same Level.