



## The South African NQF (National Qualifications Framework) regulatory history

### **Background**

The University of Johannesburg (UJ) receives many queries relating to the verification of UJ qualifications. A brief history is set out below. UJ is a merged institution, incorporating the qualifications of the old Rand Afrikaans Universiteit (RAU) (established 1967) and the Technikon Witwatersrand (TWR) (established in 1903). A great many of the qualifications that graduates obtained and which now fall into the UJ mandate were thus originally offered by RAU or TWR and were legally 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, 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established just prior to this, by the *South African Qualifications Authority Act*, Act 58 of 1995, an act that was repealed by the promulgation of the *National Qualifications Framework Act*, Act 67 of 2008.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 qualifications in South Africa. Subsequent to the promulgation of the relevant legislation, all education and training in South Africa takes place within this framework. However, qualifications prior to these dates were not regulated by an NQF, and were not subject to its requirements. These qualifications did, however, retain their legitimacy, and were deemed accredited by the relevant statutory bodies at the time. Universities offered degrees by virtue of their own establishing acts, and were not regulated by any overarching body.

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South Africa has had two NQFs – one of eight levels (in operation from the year 2000), and one of ten levels (in operation from 2008). The timelines and dates above are critical to determining where a qualification will be on the NQF or not (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) **of promulgation** of the NQF in either case, they **will not appear on the NQF**.
- Qualifications will **not have credits** or **NQF levels** attached to them.
- Modules will **not have credits** or **NQF levels** attached to them.
- Students whose studies **began** just **before the Acts** came into force, and who completed their degrees in the period after the Acts were promulgated but before they were **implemented**, will also **not** have their qualifications on the NQF.

The qualification nomenclature we currently use (and since 2008) was not established by the regulators prior to 2008, which is why there are qualifications with names different to those used now. All institutions had to align to the new frameworks.

**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).

### **Short learning programmes**

At no time have short learning programmes (SLPs) 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 qualifications are registered on 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 made law 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 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. A further development in SLPs was in respect of credits and levels. It is not legal to allocate 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 an 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 an 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 the higher education institutions. As such, it is within the University's mandate to verify the achievement thereof.