



# higher education & training

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA

## **GUIDELINES FOR APPLICATIONS FOR PQM CLEARANCE OF NEW OR CHANGED ACADEMIC QUALIFICATIONS**

### **SECTION A**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Public higher education institutions are permitted to submit programme applications to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) for the following application types:

- Application for a new academic qualification in a new field of study;
- Application for a new academic qualification in an approved field of study;
- Application for a new major field of study in an approved academic qualification;
- Application for change of name or changes/ amendments to an existing academic qualification.

#### **2. Criteria for programme approval**

The following criteria are utilised by the DHET when considering applications for new or changes to existing qualifications.

- 2.1. A new academic qualification in an approved field of study needs to be consistent with the Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM) of the institution as approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training.
- 2.2. A new academic qualification in a new field of study will be considered upon the submission of a Business Plan.
- 2.3. Account will be taken of institutional capacity, such as qualified academic staff, student to academic staff ratios, infrastructure and infrastructure master plan as well as academic support services.
- 2.4. In an application for a new major field of study in an existing qualification account will be taken of institutional performance in terms of enrolment trends, overall graduation rates, success and throughput rates as well as graduation rates in related fields of the existing qualification.
- 2.5. New academic qualifications which are in new fields of study will only be cleared for accreditation by the Council on Higher Education if Ministerial approval for an institution to be active in a new field of study has been obtained. The process of obtaining Ministerial approval is described in section 4.7.

- 2.6. If a programme in a new field of study were to be approved, the institution would be permitted to introduce only the appropriate first level qualification.
- 2.7. The DHET will assess the applications for new programmes in the context of the HEQSF Aligned PQM of an institution and the institution's enrolment plan. Graduation rates as well as the supporting programme design will determine the outcome of the application.
- 2.8. Applications for qualifications that will lead to obtaining professional registration/ recognition must be accompanied by a letter of endorsement in principle by the relevant professional council/body.
- 2.9. All applications for new academic programmes and changes to existing academic programmes must be approved by the Senate of an institution and signed by the Vice-Chancellor or his/ her designate. These applications must be submitted to the DHET on the forms as prescribed and provided.
- 2.10. The PQM Clearance Committee meeting dates are provided to institutions at the beginning of each year. These meetings are scheduled to meet monthly.
- 2.11. Only programmes that are accredited by the CHE and registered by SAQA on the NQF will be approved and placed on the universities' PQMs.

### **3. The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework**

- 3.1. The national academic policies which applied before 2013 have been replaced by the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) promulgated on 02 August 2013 (Notice No 549, Government Gazette No.3672, 02 August 2013).
- 3.2. A central concept in the HEQSF is that of a qualification through a nested approach. The HEQSF states that a new programme or qualification is one that has not existed before or has been significantly changed, such as when its purpose, outcomes, field of study, mode or site of delivery has been changed to a considerable extent (HEQSF: 23).
- 3.3. The content of the HEQSF deals with the requirements which the new types of qualifications need to satisfy. It also deals with what the acceptable naming conventions for specific qualifications would be. Institutions need to ensure that all new programmes meet the requirements of this policy.
- 3.4. The type-specifications for new qualifications are summed up on pages 18 to 20 of the HEQSF; please note the exceptions on page 42. These specifications set out for each qualification type, the minimum credit totals at different NQF levels.
- 3.5. The requirements for the naming of qualifications are set out in terms of (a) qualification types, (b) designators and (c) qualifiers.

### **4. Processing of Applications**

- 4.1. Applications for new qualifications or changes to existing qualifications must be submitted to the Directorate: University Academic Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation of the DHET.
- 4.2. Applications received are captured on a register, receipt is acknowledged and the university informed of a date on which the application will serve before the PQM

Clearance Committee. The dates may change in which case the universities whose applications are on the agenda will be informed. Applications must reach the DHET at least ten days prior to a scheduled PQM Clearance Committee meeting date in order for the applications to be included in the agenda.

- 4.3. All application evaluations commence with verification of current programme offerings on the Ministerial Approved PQM. For higher degrees and diploma applications, existence and evidence of clear articulation pathways is a requirement of the DHET Articulation Policy.
- 4.4. Applications are evaluated according to the criteria set out in section 2 above. Outcomes of evaluations are captured in minutes and communicated to the institutions.
- 4.5. Evaluation outcomes will be in one of the following four options:
  - 4.5.1 The application is cleared for submission to the CHE for accreditation. The university will receive a formal letter from the DHET. This letter is a compulsory component when submitting the programme to the CHE on the HEQC-online application. PQM clearance of a programme is valid for eighteen months from the date on which the letter is signed.
  - 4.5.2 The application is not cleared for submission to the CHE. The university will receive a formal letter containing an explanation from the DHET as to why the application is rejected. The university may, in such a case, not submit the application to the CHE for accreditation.
  - 4.5.3 The PQM Clearance Committee may decide that an application remains pending, usually as more information is required from the university. An email will be sent to the appropriate contact person at the university.
  - 4.5.4 The PQM Clearance Committee may request that the university resubmit the application due to incorrect information on the application. An email will be sent to the appropriate contact person at the university.
- 4.6. Applications for Teacher Education qualifications must be evaluated for employability and approved by the Teaching and Learning Chief Directorate of the DHET before the application can be submitted for PQM Clearance Committee. Clearance by the PQM Clearance Committee supersedes the positive evaluation for employability of a Teacher Education qualification.
- 4.7. Should a university wish to offer programmes in a new field of study, it needs to obtain Ministerial approval to do so. Ministerial approval is obtained by submitting a complete business plan on the offering of the academic programme in a new field of study to the DHET. The Academic Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate will evaluate the business plan and make recommendations to the Minister based on the evaluation. It is only after Ministerial approval for offering programme/s in a new field of study is obtained that a university can submit an application for a new academic qualification to the DHET for consideration by the PQM Clearance Committee.

## **5. Process for appeals to the DHET**

- 5.1. If the DHET decides that an application does not satisfy the criteria set out in section 2 above, the process ends for that particular application. The institution may however submit a formal request for reconsideration to the DHET. Such a request must include a comprehensive motivation and clarification.
- 5.2. The DHET will, as a second step, follow the same procedure as described in section 4 above. Two outcomes are possible:
  - 5.2.1. If the DHET decides that an institution's application satisfies the criteria stated in section 2, the institution will be advised to submit an application for accreditation of the programme to the CHE.
  - 5.2.2. If the DHET decides that an institution's application for reconsideration does not meet the criteria stated in section 2, the decision is final and that application may not be submitted to the CHE for accreditation.
- 5.3. The DHET's recommendations on designators and qualifiers will not be binding on the CHE. The final judgements on the acceptability of designators and qualifiers will be made by the CHE.

## **6. Application for name changes or changes to existing academic qualifications**

- 6.1. All applications for changes to existing programmes must be approved by the Senate of an institution and signed by the Vice-Chancellor or his/her designate. These applications must be submitted to the DHET on the forms as prescribed and provided by the DHET.
- 6.2. The DHET will verify that the programme appears on the Ministerial Approved PQM of the institution. If it does not appear on the Ministerial Approved PQM, then the application for changes will not be considered further. The Academic Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate will follow a different process to ascertain why the qualification or programme is not on an institution's Ministerial Approved PQM.
- 6.3. The DHET will, as a second step, verify the existing standard curriculum of the qualification and the proposed new curriculum against the two 50% rules.
  - 6.3.1. The first rule is that if the proposed changed curriculum differs by more than 50% from the existing curriculum, the institution must submit an application for a new qualification.
  - 6.3.2. The second 50% rule concerns the use of qualifiers. Courses which fall in the field of specialisation denoted by a proposed qualifier must equal at least 50% of the overall credit total of the qualification, and at least 50% of the qualification's final year of study.
- 6.4. In cases where an institution wishes to offer an academic programme at a new site of delivery an application for a change to an existing qualification needs to be submitted to the DHET for PQM Clearance; if the site of delivery proposed is substantial and the programme is cost intensive, DHET will advise the institution to submit an application for accreditation of the new site of delivery to the CHE.

- 6.5. Where the campus of a TVET college is to be utilised for contact offering of a university programme the TVET college campus must be accredited by the CHE as a new site of delivery for the programme
- 6.6. If an institution wishes to change the delivery mode of an existing qualification; an application for changes to an existing qualification needs to be submitted to the DHET for PQM Clearance. The DHET will consider the application and advise the institution to submit an application for accreditation of the new mode of delivery to the CHE.
- 6.7. **In the case of a name change of a qualification** the process will comply with an application for changes to an existing qualification that is submitted to the DHET as part of the PQM Clearance process. Once approved the approval letter will be sent to the institution indicating approval or non-approval of the requested name change.
- 6.8. **In the case of a change to the major fields of study in an existing programme** the process will comply with an application for changes to an existing qualification that is submitted to the DHET as part of the PQM Clearance process. The DHET's discretion as to the extent of change will apply. The DHET will inform the institution of the PQM Clearance Committee's decision and notify the HEQC of all changes to the major fields of study.
- 6.9. The final judgement on whether or not the changes to the existing programme constitute a new programme for which an application for accreditation by the CHE needs to be submitted, is made by the DHET.

## **7. Registration and formal approval**

### **7.1. SAQA Registration**

- 7.1.1. All **new** qualifications that are supported by the DHET and accredited by the CHE must obtain SAQA registration and SAQA Qualification/Learning Programme Identification numbers. The CHE will recommend the registration of programmes that have been accredited to SAQA.
- 7.1.2. All **changes** to approved qualifications, which are supported by the DHET and accredited by the CHE, must obtain SAQA registration. The CHE will recommend the registration of approved changes to existing qualifications to SAQA.

### **7.2. Formal approval of the HEQSF aligned PQMs by the Minister**

- 7.2.1. All new qualifications and amended names of qualifications which have been accredited by the CHE and registered by SAQA must be submitted to the DHET for final approval and recording onto the HEQSF Aligned PQMs.
- 7.2.2. The DHET will advise an institution of the final approval and will place the qualification on the institution's HEQSF Aligned PQM.
- 7.2.3. The DHET will, for a period of time, maintain two separate PQMs for each institution, namely the HEQSF Aligned PQM and the old Ministerial Approved

PQM. The HEQSF Aligned PQM will continue to be updated with new and amended programmes and will become the new Ministerial Approved PQM of 2016. The notifications of discontinued academic programmes will be continued in the old Ministerial Approved PQM as the HEQSF Alignment process progresses.

## SECTION B

### NOTES FOR APPLICATION FORMS

#### **B1: Notes for the completion of the application form: Application for Approval of a New Academic Qualification**

**Paragraphs G1 and G2**-These paragraphs refer to qualifications in a PQM of an institution as approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training in June 2006 and updated in the HEQSF Aligned PQM.

**Paragraph G3**-The delivery mode should be as defined in the VALPAC documentation and should be reflected as campus-based (contact), blended or distance provisioning.

For more information please refer to the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the context of an Integrated Post-School System*, July 2014.

**Paragraph G5**-The delivery site should, in the case of a contact programme, be the main campus, an approved campus, a site of delivery or a TVET College site.

**Paragraphs A1 and A2**-The naming of qualifications are set out on pages 18 to 20 of the document *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* (HEQSF) (Government Gazette No 36721, 02 August 2013). Please note the exceptions on page 42.

**Paragraph A3**-The eleven HEQSF qualification types, including the professional master's degree and the professional doctoral degree are listed on pages 18, 38 and 41 of the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* document and are explained on pages 27 to 42.

**Paragraphs A4 and A5**-The NQF exit levels and minimum credits for each of the HEQSF qualification types can be found under the heading *Type Specifications* on pages 27 to 42 of the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* document.

**Paragraphs A6 to A9**-The use of designators and qualifiers in the title of a qualification is set out on pages 19 to 20 of the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* document.

**Paragraph A10**-The latest CESM categories approved in August 2008 and listed in the document *Classification of Education Subject Matter* and the addendum to the 2008 *CESM Manual*, August 2014 must be used for this purpose.

**Paragraphs A11 and A12**-The NQF credits are determined by the programme design.

**Paragraphs A13 and A14**-The minimum admission requirements for each of the HEQSF qualification types can be found on pages 27 to 42 of the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* document. The Government Gazette No. No. 31231 of 2008 states admission requirement into higher education for students with National Senior Certificates (NSC) while the Government Gazette No 32343 of 2009 states admission requirements for students with National Certificate Vocational (NC (V)). While the institution can set the minimum

requirements at higher levels they need to state, where applicable, specific courses/majors that facilitate vertical and diagonal articulation.

**Paragraph A15**-Please refer to definitions of Work Place Based Learning in the *Work Place Based Learning Programme Policy Framework: 2014*.

**Paragraph B1**-The HEMIS qualification type codes can be found on the VALPAC documentation available from the institution's HEMIS staff.

**Paragraph B2**-The latest CESM categories approved in August 2008 and listed in the document *Classification of Education Subject Matter* and the addendum to the 2008 *CESM Manual*, August 2014 must be used for this purpose.

**Paragraphs B3, B4 and B5**-The HEMIS course level codes of majors in final year of study, the description of HEMIS minimum total time and HEMIS minimum experiential time can be found in the VALPAC documentation available from the institution's HEMIS staff.

**Paragraphs B6 and B7**-The total subsidy units should equal the formal approved time which are at present prescribed for each qualification in terms of "approved total years" less "approved experiential years".

**B 8**-Please note that funding levels are determined by the course levels of the qualification. The funding level of a programme is the weighting that a programme would have on the teaching input funding grid. At present these are: undergraduate level = 1, honours level = 2, master's level = 3, doctoral level = 4.



**B2: Notes for completion of the application form: Application for Changes to an Existing Academic Qualification**

**Paragraphs G1 and G2**-These paragraphs refer to the PQM of an institution as approved by the Minister of Higher Education and Training in June 2006 and updated as in the HEQSF Aligned PQM.

**Paragraph G3**-This refers to the expected date of last enrolments into the programme being phased out/amended.

**Paragraph G4 and G5**-The delivery mode should be as defined in the VALPAC documentation and should be reflected as campus-based (contact), blended or remote mode of provision.

**Paragraph G6 and G7**-The delivery site should, in the case of a campus-based programme, be the main campus, an approved campus or site of delivery/TVET College site.

**Paragraphs A1 and A2**-The title of the existing qualification as accredited and approved on the institution's PQM.

**Paragraphs A3 and A4**-The naming of qualifications are set out on pages 18 to 20 of the document *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* (HEQSF) (Government Gazette No 36721, 02 August 2013). Please note the exceptions on page 42.

**Paragraph A5**-The HEMIS qualification type of the existing qualification can be found on the VALPAC documentation available from HEMIS staff.

**Paragraph A6**-The different qualification types on the HEQSF are described on pages 27 to 42 of the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* document.

**Paragraphs A7 and A8**-The NQF exit levels and minimum credits for each of the HEQSF qualification types can be found under the heading *Type Specifications* on pages 27 to 42 of the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* document

**Paragraphs A9 to A12**-The use of designators and qualifiers in the title of a qualification is explained on pages 18 to 20 of the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* document.

**Paragraph A13**-The latest CESM categories approved in August 2008 and listed in the document *Classification of Education Subject Matter* and the addendum must be used for this purpose.

**Paragraphs A14 and A15**-The NQF credits are determined by the programme design.

**Paragraph A16**-The minimum admission requirements for each of the HEQSF qualification types can be found on pages 27 to 42 of the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* document.

**Paragraph A17**-The minimum admission requirements for each of the HEQSF qualification types can be found on pages 27 to 42 of the *Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework* document. The Government Gazette No. No. 31231 of 2008 states admission requirement into higher education for students with National Senior Certificates (NSC) while the Government Gazette No 32343 of 2009 states admission requirements for students with National Certificate Vocational (NC (V)). While the institution can set the minimum requirements at higher levels they need to state, where applicable, specific courses/majors that facilitate vertical and diagonal articulation.

**Paragraph A18**-Please refer to definitions of Work Place Based Learning in the *Workplace Based Learning Programme Policy Framework: 2014*.

**Paragraphs B1 and B2**-The HEMIS qualification type codes can be found on the VALPAC documentation available from the institution’s HEMIS staff. **Paragraphs B3 and B4** - The latest CESM categories approved in August 2008 and listed in the document *Classification of Education Subject Matter* and the addendum to the 2008 CESM Manual (August, 2014) must be used for this purpose.

**Paragraphs B5 to B12**-The HEMIS course level of majors in final year of study, HEMIS minimum total time and HEMIS minimum experiential time can be found on the VALPAC documentation available from the institution’s HEMIS staff. The total subsidy units should equal the formal approved time which are at present prescribed for each qualification in terms of ‘‘approved total years’’ less ‘‘approved experiential years’’.

**Paragraph B13 and B14**-The funding level of a programme is the weighting that programme would have on the teaching input funding grid. These at present are: undergraduate level = 1, honours level = 2, master’s level = 3, doctoral level = 4.

### Version control

Version	Date issued	Date for review	Revisions made
Version 1	April 2016	April 2017	