



**COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework**

**Qualification standard**

**for**

**Master of Business  
Administration**

**The process of drafting this standard is described in the Introduction.**

**May 2015**

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is an independent statutory body established by the Higher Education Act, no. 101 of 1997 (amended). The CHE is the Quality Council for Higher Education, advises the Minister of Higher Education and Training on all higher education issues and is responsible for quality assurance and promotion through the Higher Education Quality Committee.

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# HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS SUB-FRAMEWORK

## STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT: POLICY AND PROCESS

### Introduction

#### National policy and legislative context

In terms of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act, 67 of 2008, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) is the Quality Council (QC) for Higher Education. The CHE is responsible for quality assurance of higher education qualifications.

Part of the implementation of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) is the development of qualification standards. Standards development is aligned with the *nested approach* incorporated in the HEQSF. In this approach, the outer layer providing the context for qualification standards are the NQF level descriptors developed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in agreement with the relevant QC. One of the functions of the QC (in the case of higher education, the CHE) is to ensure that the NQF level descriptors 'remain current and appropriate'. The development of qualification standards for higher education therefore needs to take the NQF level descriptors, as the outer layer in the *nested approach*, into account. An ancillary function is to ensure that they 'remain current and appropriate' in respect of qualifications awarded by higher education institutions. This means that standards need to be responsive to the distinctive features of each field of study.

A secondary layer for the context in which qualification standards are developed is the HEQSF. This framework specifies the types of qualification that may be awarded and, in some cases, the allowable variants of the qualification type. An example of variants is the provision for two variants of the Master's degree (including the 'professional' variant). Another example is the distinction, in the Bachelor's degree type, between the 'general' and 'professionally-oriented' variants. The HEQSF also specifies the purpose and characteristics of each qualification type. However, as indicated in the *Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education* (CHE, 2013), neither NQF level descriptors nor the HEQSF is intended fully to address, or indeed capable of addressing, the relationship between generic qualification-type purpose and the specific characteristics of that qualification type in a particular field of study. One of the tasks of standards development is to reconcile the broad, generic description of a qualification type according to the HEQSF and the particular characteristics of qualifications awarded in diverse fields of study and disciplines, as defined by various descriptors and qualifiers.

#### Framework for standards development

Development of qualification standards is guided by the principles, protocols and methodology outlined in the *Framework*, approved by the Council in March 2013. The focus of a standards statement is the relationship between the purpose of the qualification, the attributes of a graduate that manifest the purpose, and the contexts and conditions for assessment of those attributes. A standard establishes a threshold. However, on the grounds that a standard also plays a developmental role, the statement may include, as appropriate, elaboration of terms specific to the statement, guidelines for achievement of the graduate attributes, and recommendations for above-threshold practice.

A qualification standard is a statement that indicates how the purpose of the qualification, and the level on the NQF at which it is awarded, are represented in the learning domains, assessment contexts, and graduate attributes that are typical for the award of the qualification. Qualification standards are not the same, in either scope or effect, as other modalities used for the establishment of standards in higher education, for example, resource allocation standards, teaching and learning standards, or standards used for the grading of individual students. Matters such as actual curriculum design, tuition standards and standards for resource allocation for a programme are the responsibility of the institution awarding the qualification. Nor does the standard prescribe the duration of study for the qualification. It establishes the level on the NQF on which it is awarded, and confirms the minimum number of credits as set by the HEQSF. The standard relates to all programmes leading to the qualification, irrespective of the mode of delivery, the curriculum structure, and whether or not a prior qualification at a lower or the same level on the NQF is a prerequisite.

#### The process of development

The CHE is engaged in a pilot study, involving a selection of qualification types, offered in various fields of study. The aim of the study is to explore the extent to which the principles, procedures, content and methodology of standards development meet the requirements of all relevant parties: the institutions awarding the qualifications, the CHE as quality assurer of the qualifications, the graduates of those qualifications, and their prospective employers.

The drafting of this standards statement is the work of a group of academic experts in the field of study, convened by the CHE. They were invited by the CHE after consultation with the South African Business Schools Association (SABSA). Members of the Standards Development Working Group participate in their individual capacity, not as representatives of any institutions or organisations. Members of the working group are listed in Annexure B.

The Group met on a number of occasions during the period 2013-14, and the standard statement has been through a number of iterations and revisions. In September 2014 and again in March 2015, drafts were presented by the CHE to meetings of SABSA, and at the later meeting SABSA members were invited to submit further comments. The Working Group has taken account of all comments received. The standard, therefore, is cognisant of both academic and professional interests. It has been endorsed, in revised form, by the Group.

When all issues have been considered and reconciled, the Directorate: National Standards and Reviews submits to the Council for formal approval.

Qualification title

# MASTER OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

Qualification type and variant

## Master's degree (Professional)

Master's degree (Professional): General characteristics

The primary purpose of a Professional Master's degree is to educate and train graduates who can contribute to the development of knowledge such that they are prepared for advanced and specialised professional employment, with the capacity for critically aware and innovative leadership in a particular field.

The requirements for the successful completion of the professional Master's Degree are as follows:

Successful completion of a coursework programme requiring a high level of theoretical engagement and intellectual independence as well as demonstration of the ability to relate knowledge to the resolution of complex problems in appropriate areas of professional practice. In addition, a professional Master's degree must include an independent study component that comprises at least a quarter of the total credits, which must be at NQF level 9, consisting of either a single research or technical project or a series of smaller projects demonstrating innovation or professional expertise.

Master's graduates must be able to deal with complex issues both systematically and creatively, design and critically appraise analytical writing, make sound judgements using data and information at their disposal and communicate their conclusions clearly to specialist and non-specialist audiences, demonstrate self-direction and originality in tackling and solving problems, act autonomously in planning and implementing tasks with a professional orientation, and continue to advance their knowledge, understanding and skills relevant to a particular profession.

*(Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, CHE, 2013)*

# Standard for Master of Business Administration (MBA)<sup>1</sup>

## PREAMBLE

The goal of most business professionals is to obtain a management position and to manage and lead organisations efficiently and effectively within a national and/or international context. The MBA is therefore often a beneficial degree choice for working professionals who need to obtain an additional education that will equip them with the knowledge, abilities and motivation that will be demanded by such a higher level management position.

The MBA provides a post-graduate education in functional business practices such as finance, marketing, operations, human resources and management with the emphasis on the development and application of business administration principles, knowledge and competencies to evaluate problems, and construct and implement innovative, creative and sustainable business solutions.

Complex demands on business administration programmes on this level mirror the demands on organisations and managers. MBA programmes must prepare professionals to lead their organisations in a sustainable manner and to grow personally and professionally throughout their careers. Part of the MBA learning curve involves understanding what is universal in these business challenges and what is distinctive in terms of international and national contexts. To ensure an international dimension to the programme, the curriculum should take care to incorporate an understanding of management styles and practices from different regions and cultures and the integration and implementation of these in management decisions.

South Africa has been facing a unique social, economic and political transformation over the last two decades and South African leaders and managers face challenges as well as opportunities that are different from other countries. Graduates therefore need, apart from the business administration core focus of the programme, also to be equipped to be responsible leaders who take into account the national context in which they solve problems and make decisions to build and sustain their organisations as well as the broader society of which they form part.

The purpose of this document is to set demanding but realistic thresholds and standards for the MBA qualification, as a professional master's degree which can be used by educational institutions in South Africa to guide the development and improvement of their programmes. A MBA is a masters-level programme of study and postgraduate in nature. Institutions should therefore be able to prove that masters-level learning is achieved across the programme. There should be an expectation on the part of the provider that the student will be able to fulfil the objectives and outcomes of the programme and achieve the standards required for the award. The design and content of the programme should further embrace a range of relevant theory

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<sup>1</sup> Henceforth referred to as the MBA.

firmly linked to the practical realities of ethics, sustainable leadership and corporate social responsibility.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the qualification is to develop the capabilities and skills of current and potential managers and professionals to deal effectively with the challenges of managing and leading organisations in a national and international competitive business environment, by means of the development of professional business administration knowledge at an advanced level, underpinned by the conceptual, theoretical and contextual understanding of leadership and core management functions and principles.

## **NQF LEVEL AND CREDITS**

The exit level of the qualification is **NQF level 9**. The minimum number of credits allocated to the qualification is 180 credits, of which at least 120 credits are at level 9.

## **STANDARD FOR THE AWARD OF THE QUALIFICATION**

The qualification may be awarded when the qualification standard has been met or exceeded. The *purpose* and *level* of the qualification will have been achieved when the following attributes are evident.

### **Knowledge and understanding**

The graduate has an appropriate combination of business administration knowledge<sup>2</sup>. This includes knowledge of the business environment, finance, marketing, operations, people management, strategy, technology (including management & information systems), ethics & governance, sustainability, leadership and self-awareness. The knowledge results in ability to:

- engage in effective decision making to integrate strategically multi- disciplinary components of an organisation to enhance its effectiveness and efficiency;
- apply theoretical knowledge to formulate practical solutions;
- learn from practical experience and apply the knowledge gained in the field of business and organisations;
- demonstrate the necessary knowledge to conduct relevant research<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> See Guideline no. 1 below.

<sup>3</sup> See Guideline no. 2 below.



## **Skills**

The graduate is able to demonstrate:

- advanced problem-solving skills in an organisational context;
- critical thinking skills in effective and ethical management decision-making;
- multi- disciplinary skills necessary to be an effective and professional manager;
- effective communication skills to present ideas on management through appropriate forms and media to all relevant stakeholders, specialist and non-specialist alike, and in cross-cultural and multi-cultural contexts;
- analytical and research skills to collect, analyse and synthesize data and information that will inform business and management decisions;
- strategic thinking and management skills that will lead to the effective future execution<sup>4</sup> of management and business decisions
- leadership skills which will include but are not restricted to skills in respect of personal and interpersonal relations, negotiation, management of change, working in teams and corporate social responsibility.

## **Applied competence**

The graduate is able to:

- apply business knowledge and concepts across business disciplines, specifically to evaluate problems and construct and implement sustainable business solutions;
- adopt an innovative, analytical, creative and ethical approach to decision-making and problem-solving in business environments.

## **CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS FOR ASSESSMENT**<sup>5</sup>

While the MBA is primarily a degree for ‘working professionals’ and has a focus on ‘functional business practices’<sup>6</sup>, it is not essential that work-integrated learning (WIL) is an integral part of the assessment process. An institution might elect to incorporate a WIL component as a complementary assessment method. Assessment (both formative and summative) for the MBA should be based on both simulation and real scenarios. In the case of simulation, case studies might be used.

## **PROGRESSION**

Completion of the MBA meets the minimum requirement for admission to a cognate Doctoral degree, usually in an area of specialisation in the MBA.

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<sup>4</sup> See Guideline no. 4 below.

<sup>5</sup> For recommendations in respect of types of assessment, see Guideline no. 3 below.

<sup>6</sup> Preamble, above.

## GUIDELINES

### 1. 'An appropriate combination of business administration knowledge'

A thematic model reflecting 'an appropriate combination of business administration knowledge' is suggested in table 1 below:

<b>Table 1: Appropriate combination of themes as minimum standard for the MBA</b>		
<b>Competency Category</b>	<b>Examples</b>	<b>Classified Course Examples</b>
Managing Decision-Making Processes	Getting information; Judging the qualities of things, services, or people	Managerial Decision Analysis; Decision Models; Applied Statistical Analysis; Managerial Statistics; Quantitative Methods
Managing Human Capital	Coaching and developing others; Resolving conflicts and negotiating with others; Developing and building teams	Organisational Behaviour; Human Resource Management; Leadership Dynamics; Organisational Theory; Negotiation; Managerial Effectiveness
Managing Strategy & Innovation	Thinking creatively; Developing objectives and strategies; Provide consultation and advice to others	Strategic Planning; Strategy Implementation; Strategic Analysis; Competitive and Corporate Strategy
Managing the Task Environment	Communicating with persons outside organisation; Establishing and maintaining interpersonal relationships; Selling or influencing others	Marketing Management; Managerial Economics; Macroeconomic Policy; Globalization of Business; International Economics; Environment of Business
Managing Administration & Control	Evaluating information to determine compliance with standards; Documenting or recording information; Performing administration activities	Managerial Accounting; Financial Analysis; Contemporary Business Law; Corporate Finance; Business Policy; Cost Analysis
Managing Logistics & Technology	Inspecting equipment, structures, or material; Controlling machines and processes; Interacting with computers	Operations and Supply Chain Management; Management Information Systems; Production and Operations Management; Operations Management; Risk Management
Managing Sustainability	Ethical business conduct; considering humanity and environment; social responsibility; responsible leadership	Corporate Governance; Business Ethics; Social Responsibility and the Environment

## **2. 'Conduct relevant research'**

According to the HEQSF, *“a professional Master’s degree must include an independent study component that comprises at least a quarter of the total credits, which must be at NQF level 9, consisting of either a single research or technical project or a series of smaller projects demonstrating innovation or professional expertise.”*

Independent research is required to demonstrate the ability to integrate theoretical knowledge with challenges/problems in relevant areas of professional practice. The research must be aimed at submitting well-researched problem-solving proposals in the field of business administration.

## **3. Types of assessment**

### ***Summative assessment***

For the MBA appropriate methods of assessment should be applied. Consideration should be given to an appropriate ratio between formal written examination and other forms of assessment. As the MBA is practical in nature and aimed at the real world scenario, consideration should be given to assessment based on portfolios of evidence. This would allow students to integrate the accumulated knowledge base (theory) with a real-time environment, thus displaying both the ability to interpret and to apply knowledge as is required of the MBA graduate. Another option is summative oral examination. Individual student assessment should be considered as a crucial type.

### ***Formative assessment***

This type of assessment will remain a requirement for MBA students as the need for continuous feedback and confirmed assimilation is a necessity in the theory-to-practice environment. Use of a portfolio- or case-based approach enhances the scope for demonstration of understanding of the concepts and constructs required by business in order to enable such students to implement such constructs in the practical domain. Formative assessment implies the demonstration of practical understanding based on theory. It may include peer assessment.

## **4. 'Effective future execution of management and business decisions'**

Assessment of the student includes the applied integration of present with likely future scenarios, addressing the capacity to adapt competence in familiar situations to unfamiliar ones.

## ANNEXURE A

### NQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

The qualification is awarded at **level 9** on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and therefore meets the following level descriptors:

- a. Scope of knowledge, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate specialist knowledge to enable engagement with and critique of current research or practices, as well as advanced scholarship or research in a particular field, discipline or practice.
- b. Knowledge literacy, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to evaluate current processes of knowledge production, and to choose an appropriate process of enquiry for the area of study or practice.
- c. Method and procedure, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate a command of and the ability to design, select and apply appropriate and creative methods, techniques, processes or technologies to complex practical and theoretical problems.
- d. Problem solving, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate: the ability to use a wide range of specialised skills in identifying, conceptualising, designing and implementing methods of enquiry to address complex and challenging problems within a field, discipline or practice; and an understanding of the consequences of any solutions or insights generated within a specialised context.
- e. Ethics and professional practice, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to make autonomous ethical decisions which affect knowledge production, or complex organisational or professional issues, and the ability to critically contribute to the development of ethical standards in a specific context.
- f. Accessing, processing and managing information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to design and implement a strategy for the processing and management of information, in order to conduct a comprehensive review of leading and current research in an area of specialisation to produce significant insights.
- g. Producing and communicating information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to use the resources of academic and professional or occupational discourses to communicate and defend substantial ideas that are the products of research or development in an area of specialisation; and use a range of advanced and specialised skills and discourses appropriate to a field, discipline or practice, to communicate with a range of audiences with different levels of knowledge or expertise.
- h. Context and systems, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to make interventions at an appropriate level within a system, based on an understanding of hierarchical relations within the system, and the ability to address the intended and unintended consequences of interventions.
- i. Management of learning, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to develop his or her own learning strategies, which sustain independent learning and academic or professional development; and can interact effectively within the learning or professional group as a means of enhancing learning.
- j. Accountability, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to operate independently and take full responsibility for his or her own work, and, where appropriate, to account for leading and initiating processes and implementing systems, ensuring good resource management and governance practices.

**ANNEXURE B**

**Members of the MBA Standards Development Working Group**

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