



**Higher Education Qualifications
Sub-Framework**

Qualification Standard

for

Higher Certificate in Emergency Medical Care

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

March 2023. Version 7

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 the 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'¹. 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 they 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 qualifications 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-

¹ NQF Act 67 of 2008

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

The 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 the 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, an elaboration of terms specific to the statement, guidelines for the 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 of 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 are 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 of 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 aim of the standards development process 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; their prospective employers; and any relevant professional council or association. The standard is, therefore, cognisant of academic as well as professional interests, insofar as the latter apply.

The drafting of this standards statement is the work of a group of academic experts in the field of study, convened by the CHE. Members of the Standards Development Working Group participate in their individual capacity, not as representatives of any institutions or organisations.

The members of the Standards Development Reference Group met on several occasions during 2022-23, and the standard statement has been through several iterations and revisions. A draft is being disseminated to higher education institutions, the Professional Board for Emergency Care of the Health Professional Council (HPCSA), and the public. Comments and recommendations will be considered and, as appropriate, the standard may be revised accordingly, prior to formal approval by the HEQC.

QUALIFICATION TITLE

Higher Certificate in Emergency Medical Care

QUALIFICATION TYPE AND VARIANT

Higher Certificate

HIGHER CERTIFICATE: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

This is an entry-level higher education qualification. The qualification is primarily vocational, with a strong industry-oriented focus. The qualification also serves to provide students with the basic introductory knowledge, cognitive and conceptual tools, and practical techniques for higher education studies in their chosen field of study. It emphasises selected general principles together with more specific procedures and their application. This qualification signifies that the student has attained a basic level of higher education knowledge and competence in a particular field or occupation and is capable of applying such knowledge and competence in an occupation or role in the workplace. The Higher Certificate typically includes a simulated work experience or work-integrated learning (WIL) component.

The minimum entry requirement is the National Senior Certificate or the National Certificate Vocational with appropriate subject combinations and levels of achievement as defined in the Minister's policies: Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma, and Bachelor's Degree Programmes Requiring a National Senior Certificate, Government Gazette, Vol 751, No 32131 of 11 July 2008 and Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programmes requiring a National Certificate (Vocational), published in the Government Gazette, Vol. 533, No. 32743, November 2009.

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

STANDARD FOR HIGHER CERTIFICATE IN EMERGENCY MEDICAL CARE

PREAMBLE

In South Africa, Emergency Medical Services (EMS) respond to incidents, render emergency care, and, if warranted, facilitate the rescue and transportation of ill and injured patients to and between health facilities, and home after treatment has been concluded. Historically, the provision of emergency medical services in South Africa was highly unequal due to the unequal provision of services between races. The National Emergency Care Education and Training Policy¹ identifies the need to provide the EMS with a workforce of emergency care professionals who are capable of serving communities and individuals in a manner that recognises and respects human rights as set out in the Constitution of South Africa, and the need for equality of service for all, within a context of social justice and cultural diversity. To register and practice as an Emergency Care Assistant in South Africa one must have completed a Higher Certificate qualification in Emergency Medical Care through a higher education institution both accredited by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and endorsed by the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA). This Higher Certificate in Emergency Medical Care is recognised nationally as the entry-level qualification for the profession.

At the time of the development of this qualification standard, the one-year 120-credit NQF 5 Higher Certificate in Emergency Medical Care is being offered by several public and private higher education institutions. Graduates of this Higher Certificate are currently eligible for professional registration on the Emergency Care Assistant register at the HPCSA.

In July 2018, the HPCSA published the first evidence-based clinical practice* guidelines for the South African emergency care profession.² These clinical practice guidelines were accompanied by the release of a revised and updated list of Emergency Care Assistant capabilities as they are currently in place. While serving as the only Standard for recognition and accreditation of Higher Certificate in Emergency Medical Care qualifications, it has taken account of these clinical practice guidelines and ECA capabilities.

**Refer to Guidelines below.*

¹National Emergency Care Education and Training Policy (NECETP) 2017 [C2]. The policy is applicable to all emergency care personnel and emergency care education and training providers.

² Emergency Care is defined by NECETP (2017) as “the evaluation, treatment, and care of an ill or injured person in a situation in which such emergency evaluation, treatment, and care are required, and the continuation of treatment and care during the transportation of such person to or between health establishments” at pg1.

This 120-credit Higher Certificate qualification will produce an Emergency Care Assistant able to provide quality emergency care to a diverse South African population and empowers holders of the qualification to progress academically through aligned qualifications.

PURPOSE

This 120-credit NQF level 5 Higher Certificate qualification is designed to produce healthcare professionals with the fundamental knowledge, skills, applied competence, and professional attributes required for rendering quality emergency medical care in a supervised capacity to diverse communities within a South African context. It draws on the same body of knowledge required for a Diploma qualification in the field but, in terms of intellectual and professional demand, at a level appropriate for an NQF-5 qualification and for someone who will be equipped to practice under supervision. The qualification will facilitate access to mobility and progression within emergency care education and training and allow for career pathing, lifelong learning, and professional development within the health sciences and related domains.

Graduates are eligible to register with the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA) as Emergency Care Assistants to practice within a supervised practice category with clinical capabilities as determined by the Professional Board for Emergency Care (PBEC).

NQF LEVEL AND CREDITS

The exit level of the qualification is NQF level 5. The minimum number of credits allocated to the qualification is 120 credits.

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

A suitable proportion of the credits in the qualification³ must be allocated to clinical learning aligned with and purposefully integrated within the programme design, including patient contact within authentic healthcare delivery settings.

STANDARD FOR THE AWARD OF THE QUALIFICATION

The qualification may be awarded when the graduate attributes have been met or exceeded. The purpose and level of the qualification will have been achieved when the following attributes are evident, in respect of knowledge, skills, and applied competence.

Graduate Attributes

The qualification may be awarded when all the following graduate attributes have been achieved.

In all cases, the Graduate Attributes need to be demonstrated at a level relevant to the practice and capabilities of an Emergency Care Assistant.

Core Knowledge

On completion of this Higher Certificate qualification, the graduate must have demonstrated foundational knowledge and understanding of:

- physics, chemistry, and principles of pharmacology, as it applies to the health sciences;
- human anatomy, physiology, and pathophysiology;
- the structure, function, and strategy of the South African health care system;
- relevant legislation and ethics applicable to the delivery of and in relation to emergency care in South Africa;
- the principles of occupational health and wellness related to the emergency care context;
- technology in emergency care;
- administrative procedures, operational routines, and processes associated with emergency care;
- concepts and principles of patient safety and quality assurance in the provision of emergency care;

- the role of the Emergency Care Assistant in the delivery of emergency medical care in the South African context.

Skills and applied competence

On completion of the qualification, the graduate has shown competence to:

- apply principles of occupational health and wellness in the emergency care context;
- use technology, equipment, and resources required to render emergency care;
- record, store and communicate clinical interactions and patient care data;
- make informed decisions and clinical judgments in the delivery of emergency care to patients;
- perform appropriate clinical assessments to inform and defend the working diagnosis of disorders and conditions;
- perform clinical procedures and evidence-based patient care; and
- competencies required for making informed decisions and sound clinical judgments.

Professional attributes

On completion of the qualification, the graduate must have demonstrated the following professional attributes and capacity:

- apply professional and ethical principles and practice being cognisant of diverse communities as identified by, but not exclusive of, culture, language, and gender in both their interaction with diverse communities and in the delivery of emergency care;
- engage in personal and professional development for lifelong learning;
- communicate effectively using appropriate language and discipline-specific terminology to communicate with other health professionals, patients, and communities in both oral and written form;
- develop, maintain and demonstrate appropriate levels of health and wellness, to function safely and effectively within an emergency care environment;
- be socially responsive, showing awareness of the social determinants of health in South Africa, and be able to apply emergency medical care knowledge and skills to address social needs within communities;

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CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

- Students should have access to appropriate resources and infrastructure to adequately prepare for assessments.
- A variety of assessment strategies, including integrated assessment, is to be used on a continuous basis to monitor student progress.
- A developmental approach to assessment is adopted throughout the programme to ensure incremental integration and progression of theory and practice and the capacity for reflexive practice.
- Assessment of competence in clinical practice both in simulated and authentic clinical environments is required to measure the achievement of the graduate attributes and to comply with the capabilities of an Emergency Care Assistant established by the Professional Board for Emergency Care.
- Assessment, including assessment of clinical practice, is undertaken by appropriately qualified, experienced clinicians/health care professionals, who are accountable to the institution and have access to adequate infrastructure and resources.
- Mechanisms are in place for peer assessment, self-critique, and reflection relating to professional acts and practice.
- Full participation is required in practical training sessions and completion of clinical learning at clinical learning sites approved by the Professional Board.
- A student:staff ratio is commensurate with the context and nature of supervision, and the complexity of the capability being taught or assessed, to ensure patient safety and quality of all teaching, learning, and assessment practices.

PROGRESSION

Completion of the Higher Certificate meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to an appropriate Advanced Certificate. Accumulated credits may also be presented for admission into a cognate Diploma. A Higher Certificate may also allow access to an appropriate Diploma and or Bachelor's degree.

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

GUIDELINES

The meaning of selected terms used within the context of this document is now defined.

Clinical practice

Clinical practice refers to supervised interactions between students and patients that take place in authentic real-life healthcare settings. Through engagement in the clinical practice components of the qualification, students will be exposed to supervised practice in the Emergency Medical Services workplace and other healthcare workplace settings such as clinics, hospitals, emergency departments, specialised units, and wards, including approved pre-hospital primary healthcare settings.

Clinical practice placement refers to the purposeful placement of students in relevant healthcare settings and environments (as described above) for purposes of observation and/or the supervised performance of clinical procedures, skills, and tasks relating to service delivery and patient care. The qualification includes integrated supervised clinical practice and related placements as described above.

Authentic clinical environment

References to an *authentic clinical environment* refer to learning experiences that take place in real-life, real-world settings. The term is used to purposefully differentiate clinical practice and clinical learning from other learning experiences that take place in the classroom or through simulation in simulated laboratory settings.

Simulated learning environment

References to *simulated learning environments and/or experiences* refer to learning experiences that are facilitated via simulation, making use of task trainers, manikins, actors, and standardised cases. Learning through simulation does not involve contact with real-life patients.

Suitable proportion of the credits

A suitable proportion of the allocated credits refers to the credits allocated to clinical practice, which must be aligned with the achievement of all graduate attributes demonstrated in accordance with the contexts and conditions for assessment set out above.

Supervised practice

Supervised practice means practising under the supervision of an appropriately qualified health practitioner at an approved facility or service as determined by the Professional Board for Emergency Care.

REFERENCES

¹<http://www.health.gov.za/index.php/2014-03-17-09.../policies.../327-2017po?...policy>

²http://www.hpcs.co.za/Uploads/editor/UserFiles/downloads/emergency_care/CLINICAL_PRACTICE_GUIDELINES_PROT

ANNEXURE A

NQF LEVEL 5 DESCRIPTORS

- a. Scope of knowledge, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an informed understanding of the core areas of one or more fields, disciplines or practices, and an informed understanding of the key terms, concepts, facts, general principles, rules and theories of that field, discipline or practice.
- b. Knowledge literacy, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the awareness of how knowledge or a knowledge system develops and evolves within the area of study or operation.
- c. Method and procedure, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to select and apply standard methods, procedures or techniques within the field, discipline or practice, and to plan and manage an implementation process within a well-defined, familiar and supported environment.
- d. Problem solving, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to identify, evaluate and solve defined, routine and new problems within a familiar context, and to apply solutions based on relevant evidence and procedures or other forms of explanation appropriate to the field, discipline or practice, demonstrating an understanding of the consequences.
- e. Ethics and professional practice, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to take account of, and act in accordance with, prescribed organisational and professional ethical codes of conduct, values and practices and to seek guidance on ethical and professional issues where necessary.
- f. Accessing, processing and managing information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to gather information from a range of sources, including oral, written or symbolic texts, to select information appropriate to the task, and to apply basic processes of analysis, synthesis and evaluation on that information.
- g. Producing and communicating information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to communicate information reliably, accurately and coherently, using conventions appropriate to the context, in written and oral or signed form or in practical demonstration, including an understanding of and respect for conventions around intellectual property, copyright and plagiarism, including the associated legal implications.
- h. Context and systems, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to operate in a range of familiar and new contexts, demonstrating an understanding of different kinds of systems, their constituent parts and the relationships between these parts, and to understand how actions in one area impact on other areas within the same system.
- i. Management of learning, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to evaluate his or her performance or the performance of others, and to take appropriate action where necessary; to take responsibility for his or her learning within a structured learning process; and to promote the learning of others.
- j. Accountability, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to account for his or her actions, to work effectively with and respect others, and, in a defined context, to take supervisory responsibility for others and for the responsible use of resources, where appropriate.