



**Higher Education Qualifications  
Sub-Framework**

# **Qualification Standard**

for

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# **Diploma in Emergency Medical Care**

**Approved**

**February 2022**

# HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS SUB-FRAMEWORK

## STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT: POLICY AND PROCESS

### Introduction

#### Introduction

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. 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.

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 to address, or indeed capable of fully addressing, the relationship between generic qualification-type purpose and the specific characteristics of that qualification type in a 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 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, 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 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, like 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 program 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 a prior qualification at a lower or the same level on the NQF is a prerequisite.

#### The process of development

is standards development process aims 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 capacity, not as representatives of any institutions or organisations.

The members of the Standards Development working Group met on several occasions during 2018-22, and the standard statement has been through several iterations and revisions. A draft was disseminated to higher education institutions, the Professional Board for Emergency Care of the Health Professional Council (HPCSA) and the public. Comments and recommendations were considered, and the standard was revised accordingly. The standard is cognisant of both academic and professional interests. The qualification standard statement was approved by the HEQC at its meeting of 11 February 2022.

QUALIFICATION TITLE

# Diploma in Emergency Medical Care

QUALIFICATION TYPE AND VARIANT

## *Diploma*

DIPLOMA: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

This qualification primarily has a vocational orientation, which includes professional, vocational, and industry-specific knowledge that provides a sound understanding of general theoretical principles as well as a combination of general and specific procedures and their application. The purpose of the Diploma is to develop graduates who can demonstrate focused knowledge and skills in a field. Typically, they will have gained experience in applying such knowledge and skills in a workplace context. A depth and specialization of knowledge, together with practical skills and experience in the workplace, enables successful learners to enter several career paths and to apply their learning to particular employment contexts from the outset. Diploma programmes typically include an appropriate work-integrated learning (WIL) component.

There are two key distinctions between the 240- and 360-credit Diploma variants. The latter may provide for up to 120 credits of workplace-based learning, while the 240-credit variant does not, and the 240-credit variant may only be offered where it leads to a professional designation or occupational role as determined by a professional body.

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

# **STANDARD FOR DIPLOMA 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. The impact that our apartheid history has had on the inequitable provision of emergency medical services in South Africa is acknowledged. The National Emergency Care Education and Training Policy<sup>1</sup> identifies the need to provide the EMS with a workforce of emergency care professionals. One of the cadres of emergency care professionals is the Paramedic. Paramedics are currently a national and global resource. To register and practice as a Paramedic in South Africa one must have completed a diploma qualification in Emergency Medical Care through a higher education institution accredited by both the CHE and the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

At the time of development of this qualification standard, the two-year 240-credit NQF 6 Diploma in Emergency Medical Care is being offered by several public and private higher education institutions. Students who graduate with this Diploma are currently eligible for professional registration onto the Paramedic register at the HPCSA.

In July 2018, the HPCSA published the first evidence-based clinical practice guidelines for the South African emergency care profession. These clinical practice guidelines were accompanied by the release of a revised and updated list of Paramedic capabilities.<sup>2</sup> Educators, students, regulators, and industry began to raise concerns regarding the feasibility of achieving the expanded list of capabilities and exit-level competencies required, within a 240-credit diploma.

Considering the context of emergency care education and the current and future structure of the HEQSF, taking into account the envisaged role the Paramedic is set to play within the local pre-hospital emergency care context, the exit level competencies and capabilities required to practise practice as a Paramedic would be better achieved through completion of a 360-credit NQF 6 diploma qualification. Embedded in the 360-credit NQF 6 diploma qualification is appropriate clinical learning (in the form of clinical practice placements in support of attaining the graduate attributes).

This 360-credit diploma qualification will produce a Paramedic able to provide quality emergency care to a diverse South African population.

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

<sup>2</sup>

[https://www.hpcs.co.za/Uploads/editor/UserFiles/downloads/emergency\\_care/CLINICAL\\_PRACTICE\\_GUIDELINES\\_PROT OCOLS\\_2018.pdf](https://www.hpcs.co.za/Uploads/editor/UserFiles/downloads/emergency_care/CLINICAL_PRACTICE_GUIDELINES_PROT OCOLS_2018.pdf).

## **PURPOSE**

This 360 credit NQF-6 diploma qualification is designed to produce healthcare professionals with focused knowledge, skills, applied competence, and professional attributes required for rendering quality emergency medical care and rescue services to diverse communities within a South African context. 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 Paramedics to practice within a pre-defined scope with capabilities as determined by the Professional Board for Emergency Care.

## **NQF LEVEL AND CREDITS**

The exit level of the qualification is **NQF level 6**. The minimum number of credits allocated to the qualification is 360 credits with a minimum of 120 credits at level 6. A significant portion of the credits in the qualification must be allocated to clinical learning that is purposefully integrated within the programme design, including patient contact within authentic health care 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**

#### **1. Knowledge**

On completion of this diploma qualification, the graduate must have demonstrated knowledge and understanding of:

- physics, chemistry, and principles of pharmacology relevant to Paramedic practice;

- human anatomy, physiology, and bioprocesses relevant to Paramedic capabilities;
- the South African health care system;
- applicable legislation and ethics in relation to emergency care provision;
- 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, according to paramedic capabilities; concepts and principles of patient safety and quality assurance in the provision of emergency care;
- the role of the Paramedic in the delivery of emergency medical care in the South African context;
- principles and practices related to search and rescue.

## **2. 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 independently where appropriate and through consultation where required;
- perform appropriate clinical assessments to inform and defend the working diagnosis of disorders and conditions in relation to Paramedic capabilities;
- perform clinical procedures and evidence-based patient care according to Paramedic capabilities;
- participate effectively in rescue activities involving the location, access, care for, and/or extrication of patients from potentially hazardous environments associated with low visibility, fire, heights, and motor vehicle accidents; and
- competencies required for making informed decisions and sound clinical judgments in line with Paramedic capabilities.

### **3. Professional attributes**

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

- apply professional and ethical principles in their practice being cognisant of diverse audiences as identified by, but not exclusive of, culture, language, and gender;
- engage in personal and professional development for lifelong learning;
- evaluate and report on efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery;
- communicate effectively using appropriate discipline-specific terminology to communicate with other health professionals, patients, and communities;
- develop, maintain and demonstrate appropriate levels of health, wellness, and physical preparedness to function within an emergency care and rescue 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; and
- use innovation to maintain and, where necessary, improve efficiency and effectiveness of service delivery and be environmentally conscious and responsible.

### **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.
- Assessment of competence in clinical practice both in simulated and authentic learning environments is required to measure the achievement of the graduate attributes and to comply with the PBEC Paramedic capabilities requirements.
- 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.



- A student: staff ratio 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.
- Mechanisms are in place for peer assessment, self-critique, and reflection relating to professional acts and practice.
- A developmental approach to assessment is adopted within and between the academic years to ensure incremental integration and progression of theory and practice and the capacity for reflexive practice.
- Full participation is required in practical training sessions and completion of clinical learning at accredited clinical learning sites.

## **PROGRESSION**

Completion of the 360-credit Diploma meets the minimum entry requirement for admission to a Bachelor's degree, and admission to an Advanced Diploma. Accumulated credits may also be presented for admission into a cognate bachelor's degree programme.

A qualification may not be awarded for an early exit from a Diploma programme.

*(Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework)*

# **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 health care 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 health care workplace settings such as clinics, hospitals, emergency departments, specialised units, and wards, including pre-hospital primary health care settings

*Clinical practice placement* refers to the purposeful placement of students in relevant health care 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.

It should be noted that there are no distinctly separate Work Integrated Learning (WIL) or Workplace-Based Learning Components in this qualification. Rather, the qualification includes integrated supervised clinical practice and related placements as described above.

## **Authentic learning environment**

This document references to an *authentic learning 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**

In this document, 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. Clinical learning through simulation does not involve contact with real-life patients.

## ANNEXURE A

### NQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

The qualification is awarded at **level 6** 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: detailed knowledge of the main areas of one or more fields, disciplines or practices, including an understanding of and the ability to apply the key terms, concepts, facts, principles, rules, and theories of that field, discipline or practice to unfamiliar but relevant contexts; and knowledge of an area or areas of specialisation and how that knowledge relates to other fields, disciplines or practices.
- b.** Knowledge literacy, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of different forms of knowledge, schools of thought and forms of explanation within an area of study, operation, or practice, and awareness of knowledge production processes.
- c.** Method and procedure, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to evaluate, select and apply appropriate methods, procedures, or techniques in investigation or application processes within a defined context.
- d.** Problem solving, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to identify, analyse and solve problems in unfamiliar contexts, gathering evidence and applying solutions based on evidence and procedures appropriate to the field, discipline, or practice.
- e.** Ethics and professional practice, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of the ethical implications of decisions and actions within an organisational or professional context, based on an awareness of the complexity of ethical dilemmas.
- f.** Accessing, processing, and managing information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to evaluate different sources of information, to select information appropriate to the task, and to apply well-developed processes of analysis, synthesis and evaluation to that information.
- g.** Producing and communicating information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to present and communicate complex information reliably and coherently using appropriate academic and professional or occupational conventions, formats, and technologies for a given context.
- h.** Context and systems, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to make decisions and act appropriately in familiar and new contexts, demonstrating an understanding of the relationships between systems, and of how actions, ideas, or developments in one system impact on other systems.
- i.** Management of learning, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to evaluate performance against given criteria, and accurately identify and address his or her task-specific learning needs in a given context, and to provide support to the learning needs of others where appropriate.
- j.** Accountability, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to work effectively in a team or group, and to take responsibility for his or her decisions and actions and the decisions and actions of others within well-defined contexts, including the responsibility for the use of resources where appropriate

## **. ANNEXURE B**

Members of the Emergency Care Reference Group.

1. Prof Craig Vincent-Lambert
2. Mr Sidney Dywili
3. Mr Kubendhren Moodley
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7. Mrs Dagmar Muhlbauer