



**Higher Education Qualifications
Sub-Framework**

Qualification Standard

for

Bachelor of Commerce

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

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 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 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 in accordance with the HEQSF.

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 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 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.

Programmes leading to the Bachelor of Commerce degree

The term 'Commerce' is the designator. The Standard determines the prerequisite graduate attributes that justify the designation. The HEQSF provides for a third name for a qualification title, namely a *qualifier*. For a Bachelor degree, a maximum of two qualifiers is permitted. The prescribed way of naming the qualification is to use the word 'in' between a designator and a qualifier, and between first and second qualifiers (HEQSF, paragraph 50). This implies that the sub-discipline identified by a second qualifier is embedded within the discipline identified by the first qualifier; likewise, a first qualifier is embedded within the field of study Commerce. Use of a qualifier in the title of the qualification must comply with the HEQSF (paragraph 52). At least 50 per cent of the minimum total number of credits, and at least 50 per cent of the minimum credits at the exit level, must be in the specialisation identified by the qualifier. In a case where a specialisation does not meet this requirement, it may be included as an endorsement on the degree certificate but may not be included in the title.

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 Working Group met on several occasions during 2016 - 2019, and the standard statement has been through many iterations, revisions and process of consultation. A draft was disseminated to higher education institutions for comment. Concerns and recommendations were taken into account and, where appropriate, revision was made. The draft has consensus in the Working Group.

QUALIFICATION TITLE

Bachelor of Commerce

QUALIFICATION TYPE AND VARIANT

Bachelor's Degree (*General*)

BACHELOR'S DEGREE: GENERAL CHARACTERISTICS

There are two types of Bachelor's Degrees, namely general and professionally-oriented Bachelor's Degrees. Both types of degree may be structured as a 360-credit qualification with an exit at level 7 or as a 480-credit qualification with an exit at level 8 on the National Qualifications Framework. The 480-credit Bachelor's Degree at NQF level 8 has both a higher volume of learning and greater cognitive demand than the 360-credit degree at level 7 and should prepare students to be able to undertake Master's level study by providing them with research capacity in the methodology and research techniques of the discipline.

The primary purpose of both the general and the professional Bachelor's Degree is to provide a well-rounded, broad education that equips graduates with the knowledge base, theory and methodology of disciplines and fields of study, and to enable them to demonstrate initiative and responsibility in an academic or professional context. Both the 360- and 480-credit Bachelor's Degrees may require students to undertake research in a manner that is appropriate to the discipline or field of study to prepare them for postgraduate study.

The general Bachelor's Degree emphasises general principles and theories as preparation for entry into general employment or for a postgraduate programme. The professional Bachelor's Degree prepares students for professional training, post-graduate studies or professional practice in a wide range of careers. Therefore it emphasises general principles and theory in conjunction with procedural knowledge to provide students with a thorough grounding in the knowledge, theory, principles and skills of the profession or career concerned and the ability to apply these to professional or career contexts. The degree programme may contain a component of work-integrated learning.

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

STANDARD FOR BACHELOR OF COMMERCE

PREAMBLE

A Bachelor of Commerce graduate needs to be prepared for a dynamic world of work in the 21st century with a multi-disciplinary contextual focus.

An ongoing challenge to commerce education, in general, is that graduates will operate in a complex world that is in constant transition as technology and globalisation continue to impact on organisations. The development of a national standard for an undergraduate commerce degree takes cognisance of the rapidly transitioning local, national and global contexts in which commerce operates.

A common feature of all these contexts is the rapid rate of change which challenges the commerce graduate to be adaptable and to practise lifelong learning to enhance employability.

The environment in which commerce is currently studied, both locally and globally, is characterised by social, economic and political transformation, as well as cultural diversity and particular ethical imperatives. To address these multiple, inter-related challenges, the commerce field needs an approach that is characterised by dynamic adaptability that is responsive to developments in the socio-economic, regulatory, technological and digital media domains.

In the current local context, transformation and decolonisation of the curriculum feature prominently in terms of their relevance to the qualification and to enhancing the employability of the graduate and thus need to be taken into account in the development of a Bachelor of Commerce national standard.

This standard applies to a general formative Bachelor of Commerce degree with exit level at NQF 7 and a minimum of 360 credits. If a qualification in this field of study has a different NQF exit level (for example, level 8), it would require a modified standard.

PURPOSE

The primary purpose of the Bachelor of Commerce degree is to equip graduates with conceptual understanding, knowledge, theory, skills, methodology and capacity to function effectively in a broad range of commercial, management and research activities.

The degree aims to provide graduates with values, knowledge and skills in the core areas of accounting, economics and management. The degree contains advanced studies in at least one of the core areas, whilst also allowing, where applicable, advanced studies in another field of study or discipline¹. The degree prepares them for employment and/or postgraduate studies.

The qualification should equip the graduate to:

- respond to constantly emerging economic, social and political trends;
- adapt to change in physical, temporal, technological and procedural spaces;
- incorporate sustainable development in decision making;
- display knowledge and appreciation of the values and principles enshrined in the relevant legislation;
- demonstrate the capacity to take responsibility, to be accountable and to act ethically in all contexts;
- enhance lifelong learning and employability in business, government or not-for-profit sectors, or to engage in entrepreneurial activities.

The degree should produce graduates who are critical thinkers and enlightened citizens with an awareness of social justice as it applies to society, economy and business (including public and private organisations). Graduates should also be able to evaluate and resolve problems and contribute meaningfully to team efforts.

¹ Regarding the terms 'field of study' and 'discipline, refer to *Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education* (CHE, 2013: 37).

NQF LEVEL AND CREDITS

The exit level of the Bachelor of Commerce qualification is **NQF level 7**. The minimum number of credits allocated to the qualification is 360 credits, with a minimum of 120 credits at level 7.

STANDARD FOR THE AWARD OF THE QUALIFICATION

The qualification may be awarded when the qualification standard has been met or exceeded.

Graduate attributes

Bachelor of Commerce graduates should demonstrate holistic knowledge of core areas as well as generic attributes. The knowledge domain comprises a core and supporting areas. The core areas are accounting, economics and management. Supporting areas comprise disciplines in which a fundamental knowledge is necessary for the ability to apply the core knowledge areas effectively. The graduate has at least one area of specialisation², as specified below.

Generic attributes include critical and analytical thinking, problem-solving, ability to transfer and apply knowledge and skills in familiar and unfamiliar contexts, ability to work in diverse contexts, and ability to work in teams. Graduates should be able to apply appropriate interpersonal, communication, time- and self-management skills. Graduates will be able to show due responsibility, accountability and ethical judgement, and an awareness of the need for lifelong learning.

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.

² Specialisation area refers areas in which advanced knowledge is required from at least one of the core areas.

Knowledge

Core areas of knowledge

1. Accounting

Fundamental principles of accounting:

- principles and practices in making decisions and their relevance for studies in commerce.
- the process of gathering, processing and presenting financial information in a specific format according to a specified framework to contribute to making financial decisions.

Basic accounting concepts:

- the workings of the accounting cycle (process) from primary entries extracted from source documents to the compilation of a trial balance;
- the double-entry principle and its interpretation in the context of the accounting equation;
- preparation, analysis and interpretation of a simple set of financial statements.

Recognition of accounting as the basis for advanced studies in areas such as auditing, finance, management accounting, taxation and risk management.

2. Economics

Knowledge of fundamental economic concepts and their effects on the dynamics of economies:

- economic systems, the nature of open economies and the functioning of a regional, national and local economy in a global context;
- the dynamic economic interaction among government, business, non-governmental sector, labour and households, and fundamental economic objectives;
- the working of the market mechanism of supply and demand and its impact on businesses, households and the economy in general;
- responsibilities of key role players in the economy and the impact of policies and practices on the performance of the economy, and the well-being of individuals and organisational stakeholders.

Recognition of the role of economics as a basis for further studies in areas such as Managerial Economics, Development Economics, Public Economics, Environmental

Economics, Financial Economics, International Economics, Natural Resource Economics, Labour Economics, Money and Banking, Health Economics and Econometrics.

3. Management,

Fundamental principles of management:

- managing an organisation to achieve its goals effectively and efficiently through individuals and groups.
- managerial tasks of planning, organising, leading and controlling the activities of an organisation to achieve organisational goals.
- functional areas in management and how they relate to the effective and efficient functioning of an organisation.

Recognition of fundamental management principles as the basis for further studies in areas such as Entrepreneurial and Small Business Management, Strategic Management, Supply Chain Management, Marketing Management, Financial Management, Human Resources (People) Management and International Business Management.

Specialisation

Specialisation refers to areas in which advanced knowledge is required. It may be represented by a qualifier (or qualifiers) accompanying the degree designator Commerce, subject to the HEQSF.

Specialisation must include advanced knowledge from at least one of the core areas (Accounting, Economics and Management). Where applicable, knowledge in another field of study/discipline may also be included as a specialisation. In the case of specialisation in another field of study/discipline, there must be cohesion between the area of specialisation and at least one of the core areas.

Advanced knowledge means knowledge commensurate with the level descriptors for NQF level 7.

Supporting areas of knowledge

The following supporting areas of knowledge are offered at least a foundational level to provide a firm grounding for the qualification.

1. Mathematical concepts and principles

Principles and tools of mathematics that are required for application in the areas of study, and in the workplace.

2. Statistics

Principles and tools of statistics to be able successfully to undertake quantitative analyses.

3. Legal principles, legislation and regulations

Knowledge of and ability to apply relevant legal principles, legislation and regulations in the areas of study, and the workplace.

4. Information technology

Ability to utilise information technology systems and platforms, including fundamental systems and platforms used in commerce and social media.

Applied competence and skills

The qualification enables graduates to display the following attributes in the context in which their knowledge and skills are applied:

1. Ethics and integrity

Knowledge of relevant principles, codes and laws relating to ethics and ability to reflect on such principles, codes and laws to conduct her/himself ethically.

2. Socio-cultural traits

Ability to act in a socially and culturally sensitive manner and to develop an awareness of the cross-cultural and multilingual character of society.

3. Communication

Ability to communicate effectively in familiar and unfamiliar environments, with specialists and non-specialists, using appropriate media.

CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

The attributes of Bachelor of Commerce graduates and their employability will be influenced by the context and conditions of learning, by curriculum and course design, as well as the nature of assessments.

To ensure effective, valid and reliable assessment, institutions have a responsibility to provide a suitable and adequate learning environment to ensure learning, including physical infrastructure commensurate with the mode of study, access to computers and the internet, and learning resources (libraries, databases, journals). In addition to resources typically required for the study of the core areas (accounting, economics, management), in cases where a specialisation beyond the core areas is included the resources would also include any that are typically required for that area of specialisation.

Lecturing and facilitation of classes, tutoring or guidance of independent study and the assessment that evaluates the outcomes must be done by suitably qualified and experienced staff. This implies that academic staff must have adequate qualifications in the relevant domain (subjects they lecture and facilitate) and applicable experience to enhance student learning and developing applicable and practical skills. Monitoring of student progress and suitable academic support must be available.

Assessment must be designed and applied to support learning. This includes feedback about learning and academic performance to students from lecturers and assessors and access for students to interact with peers and lecturers.

The planning and design of assessments must also aim at developing and assessing generic student attributes, skills and applied competence including the requirement for independent thinking, critical analysis, development of research skills, problem-solving skills, application of knowledge to realistic contexts, and demonstration of language and numeracy skills. This includes the ability to produce comprehensive, integrated responses to topics and tasks.

Assessment must be ongoing during the period of study and must consist of a variety of formative and summative assessments addressing a broad taxonomic range of demands, without excessive reliance on any one method. The nature of the assessment tasks should aim to include practical elements and skills associated with the knowledge domain, such as practical and simulated learning activities that support and enrich the assessment of knowledge, comprehension, analysis, evaluation and the ability to be creative. Formative and summative assessment tools must be suited to meet the learning outcomes. Assessments must be progressive and integrative.

PROGRESSION

A Bachelor's Degree is the minimum entry requirement for admission to a Bachelor Honours Degree or Postgraduate Diploma. Entry into these qualifications is usually in the area of specialisation or in a discipline taken as a major in the Bachelor's Degree.

(Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework)

GUIDELINES

Guidelines are aimed at providing institutions with an indication of the content and scope of knowledge areas that are typically found in curricula, to a varying extent, for Bachelor of Commerce degrees.

- a) Advanced knowledge' means knowledge commensurate with the level descriptors for NQF level 7.
- b) The concepts 'introductory', 'intermediate' and 'advanced' knowledge are employed by way of illustration. (For a Bachelor's degree they may be considered as roughly equivalent to NQF levels 5, 6 and 7.)

The following examples would **meet** the requirements for a Bachelor of Commerce degree. The notice should also be taken of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, paragraph 52 (page 20):

- B Com with an introductory and intermediate knowledge in accounting and economics, advanced knowledge in management would meet requirements for the designator Commerce, and Management may be used as a qualifier: e.g. Bachelor of Commerce or Bachelor of Commerce in Management.
- B Com with an introductory knowledge in accounting and economics, advanced knowledge in management and law would meet the requirements for the designator Commerce and appropriate qualifier(s) e.g. Bachelor of Commerce or Bachelor of Commerce in Law or Bachelor of Commerce in Management, depending on the allocation of credits in terms of the HEQSF guidelines.

The following examples **would not meet** the requirements for a Bachelor of Commerce degree.

- B Com with an introductory and intermediate knowledge in all three core areas. There is no advanced knowledge in at least one of the core areas.
- B Com with advanced knowledge in Law, introductory and intermediate knowledge in all three core areas. There is no advanced knowledge in at least one of the core areas.

ANNEXURE A

NQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

The qualification is awarded at **level 7** 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 integrated knowledge of the central areas of one or more fields, disciplines or practices, including an understanding of and the ability to apply and evaluate the key terms, concepts, facts, principles, rules and theories of that field, discipline or practice; and detailed 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 knowledge as contested and the ability to evaluate types of knowledge and explanations typical within the area of study or practice.
- c. Method and procedure, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of a range of methods of enquiry in a field, discipline or practice, and their suitability to specific investigations; and the ability to select and apply a range of methods to resolve problems or introduce change within a practice.
- d. Problem-solving, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to identify, analyse, evaluate, critically reflect on and address complex problems, applying evidence-based solutions and theory-driven arguments.
- e. Ethics and professional practice, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to make decisions and act ethically and professionally, and the ability to justify those decisions and actions drawing on appropriate ethical values and approaches within a supported environment.
- f. Accessing, processing and managing information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to develop appropriate processes of information gathering for a given context or use; and the ability to independently validate the sources of information and evaluate and manage the information.
- g. Producing and communicating information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to develop and communicate his or her ideas and opinions in well-formed arguments, using appropriate academic, professional, or occupational discourse.
- h. Context and systems, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to manage processes in unfamiliar and variable contexts, recognising that problem solving is context and system bound, and does not occur in isolation.
- i. Management of learning, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to identify, evaluate and address his or her learning needs in a self-directed manner, and to facilitate collaborative learning processes.
- j. Accountability, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to take full responsibility for his or her work, decision-making and use of resources, and limited accountability for the decisions and actions of others in varied or ill-defined contexts.