



Higher Education Qualifications  
Sub-Framework

# Qualification Standard

for

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# Bachelor of Agriculture in Agricultural Extension

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

**August 2023. Version 12**

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'<sup>1</sup>. 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-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

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<sup>1</sup> NQF Act 67 of 2008

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.

#### 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 Agricultural extension Reference Group met on several occasions during the period 2022-2023, and the standard statement has been through a number of iterations and revisions. A draft version will be disseminated to the higher education institutions and other interested parties for narrow consultation.

## QUALIFICATION TITLE

# Bachelor of Agriculture in Agricultural Extension

## QUALIFICATION TYPE AND VARIANT

### **Bachelor's degree (*professional*)**

#### 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<sup>2</sup>.

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 in order 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 in order 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)*

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<sup>2</sup> See below, NQF level and credits

# **STANDARD FOR BACHELOR OF AGRICULTURE IN AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION**

## **PREAMBLE**

Agricultural extension agents are innovative thinkers who embrace collaborative problem-solving approaches working together with farmers and other stakeholders to create, assess, and share knowledge, information, and sustainable technologies to build the capacity and resilience of farmers and other relevant parties along the agro-food system value chain. They actively work in partnership with multiple parties in coordinated efforts towards the attainment of meaningful change /transformation in society.

The practitioner is a professional who is sufficiently grounded in the key areas relevant to managing crop, livestock, and mixed farming enterprises, managing environmental, economic, and social contexts within which farming enterprises operate, and fostering farmer learning and innovation. This grounding enables the practitioner to build the capacity of farmers operating in various contexts and scales to manage their farming enterprises, to manage the sustainability contexts in which their farming enterprises operate, and to manage their own life-long learning.

Extension and advisory services (public, private and non-governmental) are keys to sustainable agriculture, resilient livelihoods, and inclusive growth. Extension services, in collaboration with other role-players, play a critical role in the agro-food value chain. There will be an increasing need for extension practitioners well into the future and an urgent need to improve the extension agent-to-farmer ratios to ensure that development objectives can be met.

Recent trends in agriculture affecting agricultural extension include the effects of globalisation and food security, the fourth industrial revolution, demographic changes, increased urbanisation, climate change, private sector expansion, structural adjustments, and rapid technological development. There is also mounting pressure to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). In an era of digitisation, enterprise development by young people is an integral part of the transformation of the agricultural sector.

This calls for a global view of Extension and Advisory Services (EAS) that reinvents and clearly articulates the role of EAS in a rapidly changing rural context. It argues for an expanded role for EAS within agricultural innovation systems (AIS) and the development of new capacities at different levels.

The AIS approach focuses on interactions among a wide range of actors critical for innovation, and on the institutions and policies that influence these interactions. EAS includes parties from public, private, and civil society sectors who support rural communities in many ways. EAS is an important aspect within AIS and plays a major role in enabling innovation.

AIS embodies not only the competencies needed by individuals, but the expanded role of EAS envisaged here and the focus on organizational and system-level capacities. The new extensionist vision implies changes in EAS organisations, systems, and enabling environments, plus reskilling

all types of individuals to better contribute to increasing the productivity and effectiveness of agricultural systems to improve the livelihoods of farmers.

Extension agents have a set of competencies that are special and separate from other disciplines. However, most of their training has traditionally been focused on the technical rather than the functional aspects. Practical level field experience is also missing in their training.

Extension agents influence food and nutrition security through each of the Food and Nutrition Security (FNS) pillars of availability, access, utilisation, and stability. Extension agents contribute to consultation between and within public and private sectors and immerse themselves in recent relevant technical and social science research output, creating links between research and farming practice.

The primary role for graduates with a Bachelor of Agriculture in Agricultural Extension degree is to build the capacity of farmers to manage their farming enterprises, to manage the sustainability contexts in which their farming enterprises operate, and to manage their own lifelong learning. Agricultural extension agents provide an effective linkage between farmers, agricultural research, and other sources of information, making it possible to stimulate collective learning amongst all role-players to improve the quality of knowledge and decision-making skills. Extension agents learn and put into practice principles that are applicable to other fields such as food security, health, nutrition education, land reform, and climate change. They facilitate technology development (including farmer-initiated innovation) and transfer, and linkage with cognate disciplinary specialists. They are drivers of entrepreneurship in the agro-food system.

Training in agricultural extension should enable the graduate to qualify for registration with statutory professional bodies such as the South African Council for Natural Scientific Professions (SACNASP). The Natural Scientific Professions Act (Act No. 27 of 2003) as amended requires that all natural scientists (including agricultural extension scientists) register as practitioners and undertake continuing professional development activities that accrue credits points.

Training in agricultural extension should enable the graduate to qualify for employment in the public, private, and/or NGO sectors as well as provide a foundation for self-employment in a range of contexts including public service extension, commodity organisations, cooperatives, as well as institutions such as banks and private organisations with interests in agricultural and/or rural development.

## **PURPOSE**

The purpose of the professionally-oriented Bachelor of Agriculture in Agricultural Extension degree is to produce graduates possessing the necessary knowledge, skills and applied competence to design, develop, assess and execute or manage scientifically sound situation-specific and community-adapted extension or development programmes, conforming to the principles of participatory development with maximum involvement and impact with respect to those directly affected by extension engagements. The graduate is proficient in extension

science as a discipline that provides pathways toward multiple programmes of applied research, sustainable development, capacity building, and impactful empowerment initiatives that are essential for all aspects of society.

As extension agents the graduates need two sets of competencies: competencies related to agricultural production (pre-production, production, and post-production); and function extension competencies related to engaging with and building the capacity of farmers and others along the agro-food system value chain.

From the global perspective, the expanded role of the “New Extensionist”, including “risk mitigation and adaptation in extension” means that they must be capable of “understanding factors such as declining water availability, soil degradation, uncertain climates, market distortions, infrastructure problems and social considerations such as gender, age and ethnic differences that affect farmers’ adoption of technologies” (Global Forum for Rural Advisory Services, 2017)<sup>3</sup>.

Graduates must be adequately versed with knowledge about, and drivers of positive adaptation to, matters relating to agriculture, including climate change and conservation, so that they are well positioned to assist farmers to adapt. Key to this is the capacity to foster farmer resilience, adaptability, and innovation, with full understanding of prevailing realities. Extension agents must understand climate change and other relevant agricultural influences from the scientific, economic, and social perspectives as well as their direct impact on agricultural production, agricultural decision-making, and natural resources and natural resource management. Extension science therefore must equip the extension agent with professional and systemic technology transfer knowledge and skills on various aspects aimed at effecting change in behaviour of the agriculturalists (manifest in the adoption of new technologies, improved productivity and profitability).

Graduates are prepared to offer services to a wide range of sectors comprising, but not limited to, government, non-government and industry entities in the agricultural and rural development sectors (agri-business), regional and international organisations, and youth entrepreneurship ventures. Clients will include household producers (including vulnerable subsistence producers), smallholder, medium-scale, large-scale, and mega-/corporate commercial producers. The scope includes farming in rural communities, informal settlements, and urban settings.

On qualification the graduate is eligible, subject to prevailing internship requirements, for registration with SACNASP as an agricultural extension agent, is prepared for higher-level postgraduate studies if so desired, and capable of ongoing professional development.

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.g-fras.org/en/activities/the-new-extensionist.html>.



## **NQF LEVEL AND CREDITS**

The exit level of the qualification is **NQF level 8**. The minimum number of credits allocated to the qualification is 480 credits. The qualification includes work-integrated learning (WIL) bearing a number of credits appropriate for demonstration of all WIL-related graduate attributes. A minimum of 120 credits must be awarded at the exit level (NQF level 8)<sup>4</sup>, including an appropriate number of NQF 8 credits allocated to WIL.

## **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.*

A Bachelor of Agriculture in Agricultural Extension graduate displays the NQF level 8 holistic knowledge of core areas, as well as generic attributes including critical and analytical thinking, problem-solving, transfer of knowledge and skills from familiar to unfamiliar contexts, ability to work in disciplinary and cross-disciplinary groups, interpersonal skills, and awareness of the need for lifelong learning, time management, self-management and, in particular, ethical considerations and practice.

### **Core Knowledge**

Agricultural extension is a known body of knowledge and is confirmed as a science in its own right. Graduates in this field must have competence not only in agricultural extension as a professional field of practice, but they also must have a functional understanding of the various aspects of operating an efficient, profitable and sustainable farm within varying operational contexts and within varying social, environmental and policy contexts.

Agricultural extension is the field of operation and the context for all related core knowledge. The related core knowledge must be at least functional in the sense that while the graduate will not emerge as a farmer, he/she will have sufficient knowledge of the principles and practices of farming to be able to provide guidance, assistance and advice.

Upon completion of a Bachelor of Agriculture in Agricultural Extension degree, the graduate demonstrates knowledge of the following:

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<sup>4</sup> Note that the Standard does not specify the duration of a programme leading to the qualification; that is determined by the institution offering the programme.

- 1) In the context of building farmer capacity and otherwise providing advice and other support to farmers, the graduate demonstrates a functional understanding of the principles and practices of:
  - a) Agricultural livestock production systems including large and small stock ruminants and non-ruminants;
  - b) Agricultural plant production systems including, *inter alia*, field crops, vegetables, fruit crops;
  - c) Natural resource management in the context of agriculture including land use planning;
  - d) Farm business management including managing a farm enterprise and managing the social and environmental contexts within which the farm enterprise operates, and risk management;
  - e) Managing farm equipment, structures and infrastructure including basic skills related to design, maintenance and operation; and
  - f) Agro-food system value chain systems and development.
  
- 2) Advanced understanding and application of theories, research methodologies, methods, and techniques relevant to the practice of agricultural extension including theory and practice of:
  - a) Social and economic development;
  - b) Learning ;
  - c) Systems thinking;
  - d) Project design and management;
  - e) Participatory methods, facilitation, group dynamics;
  - f) Innovation;
  - g) Research, including ethical considerations;
  - h) Stakeholder analysis and partnerships.
  
- 3) Advanced knowledge of theories and practices related to policy analysis, development and implementation relevant to agricultural development and food and nutrition security, including:
  - a) Agricultural policy;
  - b) Food and nutrition security policy;
  - c) Land reform policy;
  - d) Rural economic policy;
  - e) Urban agriculture policy.

## Application of knowledge and skills

The graduate demonstrates an ability to apply the knowledge and skills acquired in an integrated manner. This includes demonstrating an ability to assist farmers to achieve their vision, make better use of resources/technology and create opportunities for farmers.

In demonstrating these abilities, the graduate is able to:

- 1) Perform all the duties accurately and precisely within the scope of practice of an agricultural extension agent in keeping with professional standards as implied in the purpose and core knowledge for this qualification;
- 2) Facilitate learning in a variety of development settings;
- 3) Contribute to leadership in an extension unit to promote excellence and effectiveness in service delivery including applying the principles of group dynamics and ethical leadership amongst interacting groups to improve effectiveness of the groups;
- 4) Demonstrate an understanding of his/her role as contributors and eventual leaders in building farmer capacity on local, national, and international levels;
- 5) Think critically and develop creative responses to problems and issues informed by acquired knowledge and applied values to assess and address social, environmental, economic, safety, regulatory and cultural issues relevant to agricultural extension and building farmer capacity;
- 6) Conduct scientific research in an area relevant to agricultural extension and communicate and apply the results of research in the field and among colleagues;
- 7) Understand and apply the use of information technology both to his/her own work in extension and in the work related to the farm and the rest of the value chain;
- 8) Foster innovation among farmers and others in the agricultural value chain;
- 9) Introduce existing and new technologies in relevant contexts;
- 10) Communicate concepts, arguments, information, and solutions to problems in a manner appropriate to the agricultural extension context and to the recipients of the communication, taking into account professional, technical, social, and cultural factors with particular emphasis on promoting learning in a range of contexts including position papers, policy critiques, scientific articles and professional reports;

- 11) Demonstrate an understanding of how to work productively, whether independently or within cross-disciplinary teams, based on an understanding of the roles and relationships between the members of a professional team in diverse environments.

## **CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS FOR ASSESSMENT**

Appropriate assessment of graduate attributes is about finding the right balance between technical and functional knowledge, skills and applied competence, and ensuring that agricultural extension professionals receive practical field training as well as learning provided in the classroom.

- i. The Bachelor of Agriculture in Agricultural Extension degree is delivered and assessed in an environment that places the study in both a professional and an academic context.
- ii. Adequate resources are available to implement effective teaching, learning, and assessment activities, which, in order to achieve the particular purpose of the qualification, include:
  - a. an adequate context-relevant student:staff (academic and support) ratio;
  - b. adequately equipped infrastructural resources;
  - c. adequate access to resources such as in a library (hard copy and/or e-resources) in order to meet the problem-solving and research attributes of the qualification;
  - d. IT resources sufficient to enable graduates to achieve the purpose of the qualification.
- iii. Assessment is conducted by a diverse range of appropriately qualified staff from relevant disciplines adequate for the nature and level of the qualification, to ensure validity, reliability and consistency in both campus-based and field-placement assessment. The institution provides opportunities for academic staff to enhance their competences and to support their professional growth and development. The number of staff, and the ratio of full-time to part-time staff, are appropriate for adequate design, delivery, development, assessment and quality assurance.

- iv. Throughout the qualification, formative and summative assessment strategies are used to ensure that all graduate attributes are identified, understood, and achieved. There is a variety of assessment tasks, so as to give students opportunities to demonstrate developing levels of competence.
- v. Externally-moderated examination is conducted in both taught modules and work-integrated learning, at least at the exit level (NQF level 8), in a manner that promotes evaluation, development, and improvement where appropriate.
- vi. Work-integrated learning (WIL) is a fundamental aspect of the whole qualification and the achievement of graduate attributes. Therefore, assessment of practice includes a variety of WIL approaches. WIL is conducted at appropriate intervals during the programme, and the institution ensures that periods of WIL include relevant and adequately demanding activities on the part of the student. The institution is responsible for the coordination, supervision and assessment of WIL activities. Where a contribution to supervision and/or assessment is made by an external agency or individual, the institution ensures that adequate and timely induction/orientation of such agents is in place. An appropriate number of credits is allocated to WIL, including credits allocated at the exit level.

## **PROGRESSION**

A Bachelor's Degree is the minimum entry requirement for admission to a Bachelor Honours Degree or Postgraduate Diploma. A level 8 Bachelor's Degree with 480 credits may also meet the minimum requirement for admission to a cognate Master's Degree.

(Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework)

## ANNEXURE A

### NQF LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

The qualification is awarded at level 8 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 knowledge of and engagement in an area at the forefront of a field, discipline, or practice; an understanding of the theories, research methodologies, methods, and techniques relevant to the field, discipline or practice; and an understanding of how to apply such knowledge in a particular context.
- b. Knowledge literacy, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to interrogate multiple sources of knowledge in an area of specialisation and to evaluate knowledge and processes of knowledge production.
- c. Method and procedure, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate an understanding of the complexities and uncertainties of selecting, applying, or transferring appropriate standard procedures, processes or techniques to unfamiliar problems in a specialised field, discipline, or practice.
- d. Problem-solving, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to use a range of specialised skills to identify, analyse and address complex or abstract problems drawing systematically on the body of knowledge and methods appropriate to a field, discipline or practice.
- e. Ethics and professional practice, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to identify and address ethical issues based on critical reflection on the suitability of different ethical value systems to specific contexts.
- f. Accessing, processing and managing information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to critically review information gathering, synthesis of data, evaluation and management processes in specialised contexts in order to develop creative responses to problems and issues.
- g. Producing and communicating information, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to present and communicate academic, professional or occupational ideas and texts effectively to a range of audiences, offering creative insights, rigorous interpretations, and solutions to problems and issues appropriate to the context.
- h. Context and systems, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to operate effectively within a system, or manage a system based on an understanding of the roles and relationships between elements within the system.
- i. Management of learning, in respect of which a learner is able to demonstrate the ability to apply, in a self-critical manner, learning strategies which effectively address his or her professional and ongoing learning needs and professional and ongoing learning needs of others.
- 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 full accountability for the decisions and actions of others where appropriate.