Higher Education Qualifications
Sub-Framework

Qualification Standard
for

Bachelor of Social Work

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

May 2015
HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS SUB-FRAMEWORK

STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT: POLICY AND PROCESS

Introduction

National policy and legislative context

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

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

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

Framework for standards development

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

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

The process of development

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

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

The Group met on a number of occasions during the period 2013-15, and the standard has been
through a number of iterations and revisions. In September 2014 a draft was presented by the CHE
to an ASASWEI Conference, and participants were invited to submit comments and
recommendations. The Working Group has taken account of all comments received. On
recommendation from the Working Group, the CHE invited a person from the South African
Council for Social Service Professions to participate in the Group. The standard, therefore, is
cognisant of both academic and professional interests. It has been endorsed, in revised form, by
the Group.

Following endorsement by the Working Group, the CHE disseminates it to all relevant and
interested parties. Comments received by the CHE are referred, as appropriate, to the Working
group for consideration. When all issues have been considered and reconciled, the Directorate:
National Standards and Reviews submits to the Council for formal approval.
QUALIFICATION TITLE

Bachelor of Social Work

QUALIFICATION TYPE AND VARIANT

Bachelor’s degree (*Professional*)

BACHELOR’S DEGREE (PROFESSIONAL): 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 a 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 professional Bachelor’s Degree prepares students for professional training, postgraduate 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.

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

Note

For the Bachelor of Social Work qualification, work-integrated learning is considered to be a mandatory component.
PREAMBLE

One of the greatest challenges to social work education and training is to prepare graduates to respond to local realities against the backdrop of rapid national, regional and global transitions and an increasingly integrated global world order, which impact on the lives and livelihoods of people in profound ways. In developing national standards for social work education, cognisance must be taken of the historical background in South Africa to social work. As an organized profession practising during the pre-democratic era, social work was part of the state machinery and was complicit in the implementation of unjust apartheid laws and practices. Awareness of this has important implications for social work education so that oppressive practices are not condoned, sanctioned and reproduced within the profession. This is particularly so as social work remains part of the government machinery. It is important to point out, though, that social work has always had its more radical and emancipatory thrusts, directed at promoting social justice, respecting human dignity, enhancing human well-being, and strengthening universal human rights, while balancing these against cultural diversities that might violate the rights of certain individuals and groups. Social workers witness on a daily basis the effects of political decisions and policies on the lives of people. They are thus in strategic positions to contribute to the development of humane and just social policies, to challenge those that are pernicious, and to bridge any dichotomies between macro- and micro-level analyses and intervention.

Social work education and training cannot remain static; it has to be responsive to the influence of history on contemporary life; address current life issues as social workers engage people in problem-solving, and societal change initiatives; and work towards greater socio-economic equality. The qualification is therefore designed to:-

- be broad and flexible enough to be responsive to different contexts;
- be of sufficient complexity to ensure that graduates possess the capacity to think on their feet;
- facilitate transfer of knowledge and skills from one context to another;
- ensure that graduates uphold requisite ethical standards;
- allow graduates to register with the professional council to practice and to pursue postgraduate studies.

There are huge diversities in social work practice settings, ranging from clinical practice to political advocacy, so the options for electives and majors are wide, within a range of cognate disciplines.

As social work is an applied discipline and profession, the main focus in this qualification is on applied competencies. Notwithstanding this, the qualification must demonstrate an appropriate balance between theory and practice, with suitable alignment from the first to the final year of study. The applied competencies should be fore-grounded by a relevant conceptual framework and by core knowledge requisites.
PURPOSE STATEMENT

The purpose of the Bachelor of Social Work degree is to provide a well-grounded, generic, professional education that prepares reflexive graduates who are able to engage with people from micro- to macro- levels of social work, within a dynamic socio-political and economic context. The qualification is designed to equip graduates to engage people in problem-solving, promote social change and development, social cohesion and the empowerment and liberation of people. Underscored by principles of respect for human dignity and diversities, social justice, balancing human rights and its corollary duties and collective responsibilities, and underpinned by theories of social work, social and human sciences and locally specific bodies of knowledge, such qualification, which is benchmarked against the Global Standards for Social Work Education and Training, allows for registration to practice as a social worker in South Africa.

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.

While the HEQSF does not place a maximum on the number of credits that may be allocated to the qualification, programmes leading to the qualification should ensure an appropriate balance between the total number of credits allocated and the normal duration of study. Programmes should also take into account, in credit allocation, any requirements set by a professional council for the registration of graduates as social workers.

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 student has demonstrated the graduate attributes embedded in the body of knowledge and the applied competence and skills as outlined below.

BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

The degree comprises sets of values, skills, knowledge and applied competencies at the core of the social work discipline, which constitute at least 50 per cent of the curriculum proportional to the total credit weighting, with the remainder consisting of cognate disciplines such as psychology, sociology, anthropology, political science, criminology, economics and gender studies, and fundamentals such as communication studies, computer literacy and academic literacy.
Core social work knowledge

A graduate has demonstrated knowledge of the following:

- comparative welfare policies in respect of the residual, institutional, industrial-achievement and developmental frameworks and their implications for access to social services on the selective-universal continuum;

- the developmental social welfare paradigm, which is aimed at integrating micro-, mezzo- and macro-level assessment and intervention; clinical, developmental, therapeutic, preventative and rehabilitative aspects of social work; and the harmonization of social and economic development;

- the influence of historical eras, including the eras of colonialism and apartheid, on welfare service delivery and on the history of social work in South Africa;

- the transition from apartheid to democracy and its influence on social welfare service delivery and social work;

- the demographics, socio-economic development status and linguistic and cultural diversities of South Africa’s peoples;

- structural determinants of poverty and inequality, their manifestations and consequences and possible responses to these;

- relevant international and regional conventions/treatises/declarations and a pertinent range of national policies and legislation;

- national, provincial and local structures for the delivery of social welfare services and the role of social work in social welfare policy planning, development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation;

- a range of relevant theories, perspectives and models such as eco-systemic theories; critical and radical theories; structural theory; cognitive-behavioural theories; psychodynamic theory;

- human behavior and the social environment, with particular emphasis on the person-in-environment transaction, life-span development and the interaction among biological, psychological, socio-structural, economic, political, cultural and spiritual factors in shaping human development and behaviour;

- service beneficiary assessment, intervention processes, methods and techniques to render preventative, protective, developmental and therapeutic interventions with individuals, families, groups, organisations and communities;

- the various fields of service such as child and family welfare; youth work; statutory social
work; mental health; corrections; health; HIV/AIDS; social work in occupational settings; gerontology; forensics; disability; substance abuse and crime prevention;

- the ethical requisites of the profession; an appropriate range of ethical theories; and the complexities of ethical decision-making in day-to-day practice;
- the Self vis-à-vis professional practice;
- social work management; social work administration and supervision;
- research paradigms/methods, designs and strategies.

APPLICATION OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Applied competence and skills required of a graduate are described in nine core areas. The central threads permeating the social work professional identity are:

1. The development and consolidation of a professional identity as a social worker

The central threads that permeate the social work professional identity that a graduate needs to master are:

- Understanding the power of process and building sound relationships;
- demonstrated ability in advancing human rights, and working with and for the most disadvantaged groups in society;
- commitment to work toward social justice and egalitarian societies;
- understanding the Self as an important instrument of intervention;
- commitment to caring, building humane societies and mutual inter-dependence;
- use of validation as one of the core empowerment strategies in working with individuals, families, groups and communities;
- willingness to be for the Other, and ability for empathic entry into the life worlds of people;
- demonstrated skills in critical thinking and scholarly attitudes of reasoning, and openness to new experiences and paradigms;
- commitment to professional ethics and to on-going professional development;
- ability to deal with complexity and ambiguity and to think on one’s feet;
- understanding of social work as a context-embedded, proactive and responsive profession;
- ability to use supervision effectively in practice.
- demonstrated ability to understand the links between the personal and the professional dimensions of life and the relationship between the micro- and the macro-aspects of students’ lives and the lives of people whom they engage with.
2. Application of core values and principles of social work

- Demonstrated ability to respect the inherent worth and dignity of all human beings;
- Demonstrated understanding that every person has the ability to solve his/her problem;
- Demonstrated ability to separate acceptance of the person while challenging and changing conditions and behaviours that are self-destructive or harmful to others;
- Upholding the value of doing no harm and practising beneficence;
- Understanding the mutual inter-dependence among human beings and between human beings and other living entities, and a commitment to inter-generational equity and continuity (third generation rights) as advocated by ‘green’ social work;
- Respecting the rights of people to inclusion in decision-making and in the planning and use of services;
- Respecting rights to self-determination (with due consideration to potential structural constraints);
- Respecting rights to confidentiality within legislative constraints.

3. Holistic assessment and intervention with individuals, families, groups and communities

- Recognising humans as bio-psycho-social (BPS) beings, as the biological, psychological and social (including the spiritual) dimensions of life are inter-connected and mutually reinforcing;
- Undertaking holistic BPS assessments to facilitate holistic intervention directly and/or through referrals to appropriate professionals and resources;
- Understanding of the Person-in-Environment gestalt, appreciating that the environment consists of the natural, geographic environment and the various social systems, both proximate and distal, that surround and impact individual and family functioning;
- Understanding of how historical and contemporary BPS approaches impact on human functioning and capabilities development;
- Ability to undertake appropriate interventions ranging from direct protective/therapeutic/educational interventions with individuals, families and groups to broader community interventions, including education, social activism and/or advocacy at local, regional and/or international levels;
- Ability to use a range of strategies to monitor and evaluate interventions.

4. Demonstrated competence in the use of codes of ethics vis-à-vis the moral impulse

- Awareness of international, regional and national statements of ethical principles and codes of ethics;
- Critical engagement with codes of ethics;
- Recognising the inter-relatedness between the moral impulse and codes of ethics;
- Awareness of the boundaries of professional practice and what constitutes unprofessional conduct;
understanding of principled ethics and feminist relational ethics, and skills of negotiating ethical decision-making through discourse ethics and dialogue, and through peer consultation and supervision.

5. Working with a range of diversities

- Demonstrate self-awareness regarding personal and cultural values, beliefs, traditions and biases and how these might influence the ability to develop relationships with people, and to work with diverse population groups;
- awareness of self as individual and as member of collective socio-cultural groups in terms of strengths and areas for further development;
- competence in non-discrimination on the basis of culture, nationality, ethnicity, religion, language, race, gender, language, physical status, and sexual orientation;
- ability to minimize group stereotypes and prejudices and to ensure that racist, sexist, homophobic and xenophobic behaviour, policies and structures are not reproduced through social work practice;
- ability to form relationships with, and treat all persons with respect and dignity irrespective of such persons’ cultural and ethnic beliefs, gender, nationality, language, religion, disability and sexual orientation;
- ability to serve as cultural mediators through the use of constructive confrontation, conflict-mediation, discourse ethics and dialogue where local cultural values, traditions and practices might violate universally-accepted human rights, as entrenched in national, regional and international human rights instruments;
- awareness of the importance of inter-sectoral collaboration, and team work across disciplines and among social service professionals;

6. Ability to undertake research

- Demonstrate appropriate skills in the use of qualitative and/or quantitative research methods;
- ability to recognise and apply the ethical requisites of social work research;
- ability to use research to inform practice and vice-versa;
- appreciate the value of practice-based research, of practice as research, and of research as practice;
- ability to document and communicate research findings to professional and non-professional audiences.

7. Knowledge, practice skills and theories

- Ability to make judicious selection from the wide range of available knowledge and theories to facilitate conceptualization at higher levels of abstraction;
- ability to select from a range of theoretical perspectives and practice skills to facilitate effective interventions at the level of the individual, family, group, organization and
community;
• demonstrate an understanding of the structural determinants of people’s lives and how criteria such as race, class, gender, language, religion, geographic location, disability and sexual orientation might constitute sources of privilege and/or oppression.
• demonstrate an understanding of the complex relationship between the power of structural determinants and the power of human agency, and the relationship between freedom and responsibility;
• show awareness of strategies to facilitate praxis and consciousness-raising to enable people to understand and challenge structural determinants of normalization, and of oppression and/or privilege;
• demonstrate critical understanding of how socio-structural inequalities, discrimination, oppression, and social, political, economic and environmental injustices impact on human functioning and development at all levels.

8. Policy and legislation

• Demonstrate an understanding of how social welfare policy and legislation influence the conception of issues as social problems, interventions and resource allocation;
• ability to analyse, formulate, evaluate and advocate for policies that enhance human wellbeing and environmental sustainability;
• demonstrate an understanding of the relationship between the law and social work;
• applying knowledge of global, regional and national declarations, policies and legislation relevant to social welfare and social work;
• applying knowledge of national, provincial and local governance structures, and the general laws and charters governing social welfare policy and social work services in South Africa;
• identifying understanding the historical, political and economic dimensions of welfare policies.

9. Writing and communication of professional knowledge

• Ability to write coherent, logical, grammatically correct and well considered reports/memos whether for internal or external use;
• awareness of the ethical and legal aspects of report-writing;
• awareness of the targeted audience of any particular communication; the central messages to be communicated and how these are to be communicated, for example, probation reports; reports for children’s court enquiries, divorce settlements, referrals for medical/psychiatric assessment and treatment; support for a social action campaign;
• demonstrate clear, coherent and engaging oral communication skills;
• ability to apply interviewing skills;
• ability to record and disseminate social work research findings and knowledge;
• ability to function in a multilingual context and to use oral and/or written translation and interpretation when necessary.
CONTEXT AND CONDITIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

- A variety of assessment strategies, including summative and formative assessment, is used on a continuous basis to monitor students’ progress.
- Assessment of practice includes a range of forms from simulated teaching on real life issues to work-based learning in field placements, the latter being mandatory to achieve all the graduate attributes.
- Assessment is done by appropriately qualified institutional and/or field supervisors who have adequate infrastructural resources available in order to achieve the purpose of the qualification.
- An adequate student:staff ratio is available to ensure that students receive individual and group supervision on a continuous basis to facilitate their personal and professional development.
- Mechanisms are in place for peer and self-assessment, particularly with regard to field practice.
- A scaffolded approach to assessment from first to fourth year of study is adopted to ensure the incremental integration of theory and practice and the capacity for reflexive practice.

PROGRESSION

The Bachelor of Social Work is the minimum qualification requirement for entry into a Master of Social Work degree or a Masters in a cognate discipline or in the discipline taken as a major in the Bachelor degree.

GUIDELINES

- Given the fact that work-based learning in field placements is a fundamental aspect of the qualification and the achievement of graduate attributes, the comprehensive guidelines for work-based learning produced by the CHE\(^1\) should inform practice in this respect.
- Particular attention must be paid to the recruitment and selection of students who are suitable for the profession, with a reasonable first year intake to meet the requisites of an applied professional qualification, and to ensure a high throughput rate.
- Infrastructural resources, such as flat venues, laboratory and IT facilities must be made available to ensure that credit-bearing field practice modules and related theory

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modules are taught with appropriate simultaneity throughout the programme leading to the qualification.

- Staff ability to bring together teaching, research, community engagement and field practice education in meaningful ways may be facilitated by the appointment of a fieldwork coordinator, at a reasonably senior level, who lends vision to this aspect of the qualification and engages in research to promote it.

- To maximise assessment of nuanced commitments, institutions need to ensure appropriate student:staff ratios to ensure individualised continuous assessment in-situ in field placements, and the availability of on-campus infrastructure, such as e-resources and one-way mirrors to facilitate skills training which allows for the assessment of matters relating to personality and attitude.

- The credibility of assessment can be enhanced via the use of means such as student biographies, reflexive essays, self-awareness tasks, process and consolidated reports, individual and small group supervision, audio/video recordings of work, class presentations, debate, and on-line discussion forums. Institutions should seek to ensure that a range of assessment possibilities are available and that student:staff ratios render these feasible.

**ABOVE-THRESHOLD PRACTICE**

- Student’s field practice education is designed and managed to make discernible impacts on the persons/communities that they engage with. This means that campus-based student units that engage in out-reach should be supported and resourced.

- An appreciation for trans-disciplinary conceptualization and practice within the context of social work, and opportunities for working effectively in multi-disciplinary teams.

- Heightened awareness of the power of the use of the Self in social work interventions, including social work research.

- Demonstrated ability to understand how structural determinants permeate the lives of local communities, families and individuals to manifest in a range of self-destructive behaviours that social workers witness on a daily basis. Equally the ability to see the importance of, for example, intervention with “dysfunctional families and individuals” (taken for granted in the accepted discourse of social work education and practice) as it is to intervene at the level of “dysfunctional societies” (a silenced discourse).

- Demonstrated ability to use strategies to facilitate praxis and consciousness-raising to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions and challenge hegemonic discourses, oppression and/or privilege.
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 the 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.
ANNEXURE B

Members of the Bachelor of Social Work Standards Development Working Group

Professor Sulina Green
Ms Elaine Harrison
Professor Edwell Kaseke
Professor Antoinette Lombard
Professor Ngeni Ntombela
Mrs Santie Pruis
Mrs Dineo T Seloana
Professor Vishanthie Sewpaul
Professor Sello Sithole
Professor Rinie Schenk
Professor Viviene Taylor
Professor Jean Triegaardt
ENDNOTES

i Refers to a range of diversities such as age, race, class, gender, geographic location, culture, religion, language, sexual orientation and disability
