



**Higher Education Qualifications
Sub-Framework**

Qualification Standard

for

Bachelor of Science in Dietetics and Nutrition

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

HEQC Approved, 2024

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 standards themselves '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.

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.

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 Reference Group participate in their individual capacity, not as representatives of any institutions or organisations.

The Reference Group met on several occasions during 2022-23, and the standard statement has been through a number of iterations and revisions. The standard is cognisant of both academic and professional interests. The Reference Group took into account comments received from interested parties and made adjustments accordingly. The Standard was endorsed by the National Standards and Reviews Committee (NSRC) and approved by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) at its meeting of 08th February 2024.

QUALIFICATION TITLE

Bachelor of Science in Dietetics and Nutrition

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.

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)

STANDARD FOR BACHELOR OF SCIENCE IN DIETETICS AND NUTRITION

PREAMBLE

Until recently, qualifications in the field have been designed for two cognate, but separate, nutrition professionals, namely a dietitian and a nutritionist. The Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition, under the auspices of the Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA), embarked in 2012 on a consultative process with all their stakeholders to assess if the training of the two professions registered with the Board are meeting the nutrition-related challenges of the country. The process was completed by different Task Teams, comprising of the different stakeholders, in collaboration with the Board. Comments received from different stakeholders made it clear that the training and registration of two nutrition professionals with the current overlap between the scopes and the unclear role delineation is not viable. In addition, national challenges regarding the skills base needed, the training and the employment of the current dietitian and the current nutritionist warranted a restructuring of the field in South Africa. The separation of the two professions resulted in uncertainty and duplication, but also a gap in service delivery addressing nutrition problems at the community and household levels. A polarisation of the professional workforce was not serving well either the profession or the future of nutrition in the country. In common with the South African Development Community region, South Africa has a unique health profile, in terms of concurrent epidemics of communicable and non-communicable diseases, and many of the causes are related to poverty and consequent malnutrition on the one hand, and to overnutrition on the other.

Therefore, in 2022 the Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition approved ‘the concept of training in a single general nutrition cadre at entry level – starting from the needs of the population’ from a primary health care perspective. A practitioner will be referred to as a dietitian-nutritionist, and is described as

a professional who applies the science of food and nutrition to promote health, prevent and treat disease to optimise the health of individual[s], groups, communities, and populations.¹

This development is aligned with international and evolving global health trends. Optimisation includes the application of evidence-based science in the development of public health policies, programmes, interventions, and individual treatment plans, participating within multi-sectoral teams, and in rural and urban settings with their diverse challenges and opportunities. The aim is to ensure that the professional will be able to practice in various

¹ Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition, 2022. *Scope and Competencies of the Registered Dietitian-Nutritionist in the Well-Being of the South African Population with Associated Assessment Criteria for Entry-Level.*

contexts and service delivery platforms to address nutrition-related wellness, prevention of disease, and management and advice.

This qualification standard takes the decision of the Board into account. The title of the qualification reflects its scientific base and the integration of the disciplines of dietetics and nutrition.

PURPOSE

The purpose of the professionally-oriented Bachelor of Science in Dietetics and Nutrition is to provide science-based education and training to equip practitioners with the necessary knowledge, skills and general attributes to render a comprehensive service relevant to context, time and environment. This is achieved through a sound foundation in basic cognate sciences on which applied food and nutrition sciences are progressively built, supported by advanced knowledge in relevant areas of specialisation. The culmination is an entry-level set of competencies, attributes and attitudes that equips the graduate to function knowledgeably, effectively and ethically, both as individual and collaboratively in teams, in a range of familiar and unfamiliar contexts, ranging from deep rural to urban settings, and in public and private sectors within a dynamic South African health care environment. The competences include familiarity with legal, social, cultural, linguistic and ethical issues that are relevant to dietetics-nutrition practice, so that the graduate will uphold and foster professional and ethical standards of practice.

Through critical evaluation, the graduate is able to apply appropriate policies, programmes and nutrition principles to prevent, treat and manage nutrition-related diseases and to promote well-being of individuals, groups and communities.

Service in the field is dependent on the ability to interpret and apply evidence-based knowledge through engaged scholarship, advocacy, and effective communication. Graduates have developed the capacity, through continuing self-directed learning, to upgrade their knowledge in response to well-researched emerging trends in dietetics and nutrition, regionally, nationally, and globally. By equipping them with foundational research methodology, the degree further provides an opportunity for graduates to continue with postgraduate studies and/or to specialise in areas of dietetics and nutrition.

Completion of the degree renders the graduate eligible for professional registration as an independent dietitian-nutritionist, subject to any regulatory requirements for a period of mandatory community service.

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 and includes work-integrated learning throughout the programme.² A minimum of 120 credits must be awarded at the exit level (NQF level 8).³

STANDARD FOR THE AWARD OF THE QUALIFICATION

The qualification may be awarded when the standard has been met or exceeded. The purpose and level of the qualification will have been achieved when the following graduate attributes are evident.

Core Knowledge

Upon completion of a Bachelor of Science in Dietetics and Nutrition, the graduate demonstrates knowledge of the following, including an understanding of food and nutrition sciences, theories, research methodologies, methods, and techniques relevant to the practice of a dietitian-nutritionist:

1. Foundational knowledge of cognate sciences including, but not limited to, chemistry, physiology, pathophysiology, biochemistry, dietetics, nutrition, nutrition status assessment, food science and food safety, food systems, professionally-relevant social sciences and principles of effective communication;
2. Advanced knowledge of the social determinants of health related to diet and nutrition; community nutrition, therapeutic nutrition, food service management and public health nutrition; behavioural change theories; professionally-related human rights, ethics and bioethics; research theories and methodologies.

Application of knowledge and skills

The graduate demonstrates an ability to apply integrated knowledge of the foundational and advanced core food and nutrition sciences to improve and optimise the nutritional well-being of individuals, groups, communities, and the population in different socio-economic and cultural settings by:

1. Understanding and applying a comprehensive body of evidence-based food, diet, and nutrition theory and principles;

² Refer to Contexts and Conditions for Assessment below.

³ The Qualification Standard does not specify the duration of the qualification, which is decided by the institution awarding the qualification.

2. Conducting nutrition assessment and analysis, diagnosing nutritional needs, planning, implementing, managing appropriate nutrition interventions, including therapeutic nutrition, and monitoring and evaluating individuals and communities;
3. Conceptualising, planning, implementing, managing, monitoring, evaluating and documenting appropriate nutritional prescriptions for patients/clients with specific nutritional needs;
4. Implementing appropriate nutrition policies, strategies and guidelines in addressing individual, community and/or population-based nutrition-related problems;
5. Designing and developing community and/or population-based interventions through comprehensive nutrition assessment, analysis, interpretation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation in collaboration with appropriate stakeholder(s);
6. Engaging with advocacy for a food system/environment which enables communities and/or populations to have access to affordable, nutritious and safe food;
7. Assessing, planning, implementing, managing, monitoring, evaluating, and documenting policies and procedures relating to contextually-relevant human, financial, operational and related resources;
8. Demonstrating capacity to manage human, financial and other resources to ensure optimal and equitable delivery of nutrition services in food service, community, population and clinical settings;
9. Planning, executing, and evaluating an effective food service system, based on the specific food and nutritional needs of the healthy and ill, through the various life-cycle stages in various settings;
10. Understanding and applying the science of food and the impact of food storage, handling and preparation methods on the nutritional value, quality and sensory properties of food;
11. Evaluating compliance with national and professional regulations and quality standards that govern the practice of food science, food service, food labelling, marketing and advertising;
12. Communicating and counselling clearly and concisely to a range of individuals and audiences, using various media, appropriate information, and educational materials on nutrition-related topics in different settings;
13. Identifying relevant nutrition-related research questions and applying the research

process in the development of a proposal/protocol, applying all relevant ethical considerations, and analysing, interpreting and discussing the data/findings in a research report.

The graduate is also able to:

14. Think critically and creatively in working effectively within a cross-disciplinary⁴ team and multi-sectoral environment, within a community, and with stakeholders in contributing to the personal, social, and economic development of society, within a human rights framework and in an ethical, professional, and legally-sound manner;
15. Provide leadership at appropriate levels of the health care system, coupled with a strong sense of responsibility and accountability for the development and implementation of nutrition services as an integral component of the health system;
16. Perform all duties within the scope of professional practice of the dietitian-nutritionist based on scientifically-grounded evidence and with care and precision.

CONTEXTS AND CONDITIONS FOR ASSESSMENT

Adequate resources are available to implement effective teaching, learning, and assessment activities which, in order to achieve the purpose of the qualification, include:

- a. adequately equipped infrastructural resources for effective delivery and assessment of the qualification;
- b. adequate access to resources such as library (hard copy and/or e-resources) in order to meet the problem-solving and research attributes of the qualification;
- c. IT resources sufficient to enable graduates to achieve the purpose of the qualification; this includes online production and reception resources, where applicable;
- d. adequate equipment for any simulated application of learning;
- e. availability of administrative and support services for the student and staff to achieve effective teaching, learning, and assessment.

Academic staff responsible for the qualification are suitably qualified and have sufficient relevant experience and teaching competence, and their assessment competence is adequate for the nature and level of the qualification. The institution, as well as any recognised agencies contracted by the institution, provide opportunities for academic staff to enhance their competencies and to support their professional growth and development.

⁴ 'Cross-disciplinary' includes multi-, inter- and transdisciplinary teams.

The academic and support staff complement is of sufficient size and seniority for the nature and field of the qualification and the size of the student body to ensure that all activities related to the qualification can be carried out effectively. The number of staff, and the ratio of full-time to part-time staff, are appropriate for adequate design, delivery, development and quality assurance. The recruitment and employment of staff follows relevant legislation and appropriate administrative procedures, including redress and equity considerations. Support staff are adequately qualified, with appropriate experience.

Assessment of modules and related campus-based activities is conducted by a diverse range of appropriately qualified staff from relevant disciplines (for example, dietitian-nutritionists, dietitians, nutritionists, food service managers), to ensure validity, reliability and consistency.

Throughout the qualification, formative and summative assessment strategies are used to ensure that all graduate attributes are identified, understood, and achieved.

Individual, group, self, and peer assessments are part of reflective assessments that are introduced early in the training of the dietitian-nutritionist student and scaffolded into the higher levels of study. There is a variety of assessment opportunities, to give students opportunities to demonstrate developing levels of competence. Student-centred and problem-based learning is infused as part of delivery and assessment methodologies to build and strengthen independent and lifelong learning.

An externally-moderated examination is conducted, at least at the exit level (NQF level 8), in a manner that promotes evaluation, development, and improvement where appropriate, in both taught modules and work-integrated learning.

Work-integrated learning (WIL) is an integral part of teaching, learning and continuous assessment, the achievement of graduate attributes, and instilling good professional and work ethics throughout the training of the student. WIL assessment comprises a variety of approaches that, in addition to any simulated activities, includes practice and assessment in real-life contexts and case studies. WIL is conducted at appropriate intervals during the qualification, including all years in the qualification commencing in the first year of study and including advanced-level activities at the exit level. 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, and for the induction/training of external mentors and supervisors. Field-placement supervision and assessment at the training sites are conducted by qualified personnel (for example, dietitian-nutritionists, dietitians, nutritionists or food service managers), adequately monitored by the institution. An appropriate number of credits are allocated to WIL, including credits at the exit level of the qualification.

Training sites are identified by institutions with regards to their fitness for purpose, to the provision of adequate infrastructure and resources to train students, and to adequate

evidence of supervisors' experience in the various areas of nutrition (community, public health, food service management and therapeutic nutrition). Identified training sites are accredited by the statutory body.

PROGRESSION

A 480-credit Bachelor's Degree is the minimum entry requirement for admission to a Master's Degree or Postgraduate Diploma.

(Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework)

GUIDELINES

Qualification consonance

The qualification should be consonant with the institution's mission, form part of institutional planning and resource allocation, meet the requirements of the Professional Board for Dietetics and Nutrition, the needs of students and other relevant stakeholders, and be intellectually credible.

Student recruitment and selection

Admission and selection of students are commensurate with the qualification's academic requirements, within a framework of widened access and equity. The number of students selected takes into account the programme's intended learning outcomes, its capacity to offer good quality education and the needs of the particular profession.

Teaching and learning strategies and methods

The teaching and learning strategy is appropriate for the institutional type (as reflected in its mission), mode(s) of delivery, and student composition, contains mechanisms to ensure the appropriateness of teaching and learning methods, and makes provision for staff to upgrade their teaching and assessment methods. The strategy sets targets, plans for implementation, and mechanisms to monitor progress, evaluate impact, and effect improvement.

Training of external field-placement supervisors

Induction of external supervisors includes training on institutional assessment policies and protocols. The role and responsibility of the external supervisors are further guided by the provision of institutional training manuals/assignment guidelines aligned to specific learning outcomes along with rubrics to guide the assessment of student performance.

Training sites

Training is conducted in a range of settings and contexts that are deemed appropriate in terms of exposure to learning outcomes. Training sites may include, inter alia, government departments (for example, agriculture, education, local government), non-governmental organizations (such as early childhood development and health centres), schools, university campuses, community centres, public and private hospitals and clinics, entities involved in food manufacturing, old age homes, orphanages, places of care, food service units within and external to healthcare institutions, nutrition-related businesses such as restaurants, corporate wellness programmes, fitness, and sports centre. WIL from levels 2-4 of the programme is expected to be conducted in a range of settings. This will support the above WIL comment.

Responsibility for WIL activities

Institutional responsibility includes the selection, induction and monitoring of external training partners, such as practitioners, national, provincial and district officials, and trainers, and effective coordination of all related activities.

Community Nutrition

Community nutrition is the process of helping individuals and groups develop healthy eating habits in order to promote wellness and prevent disease. Community nutrition encompasses individual and interpersonal-level interventions focused on creating changes in knowledge, attitudes, behaviour, and health outcomes either individually or in small groups within a community setting.⁵

Public Health Nutrition

Public health nutrition is the application of nutrition and public health principles to improve or maintain the optimal health of populations and targeted groups through enhancements in programs, systems, policies, and environments.⁶

Therapeutic Nutrition

Therapeutic nutrition is the process of using foods and nutrients to prevent and/or treat a disease or condition. Medical nutrition therapy (MNT) is a therapeutic approach to treating medical conditions and their associated symptoms via the use of a specifically tailored diet devised and monitored by a Registered Dietitian Nutritionist or Registered Dietitian. The diet is based upon the patient's medical record, physical examination, functional examination, and dietary history.

⁵ Bruening, M., Udarbe, A.Z., Jimenez, E.Y., Crowley, P.S., Fredericks, D.C. and Hall, L.A.E., 2015. Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics: Standards of practice and standards of professional performance for registered dietitian nutritionists (competent, proficient, and expert) in public health and community nutrition. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 115(10), pp.1699-1709.

⁶ El-Kour, T.Y., Kelley, K., Bruening, M., Robson, S., Vogelzang, J., Yang, J. and Jimenez, E.Y., 2021. Dietetic workforce capacity assessment for public health nutrition and community nutrition. *Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics*, 121(7), pp.1379-1391.

ANNEXURE A

NQF LEVEL 8 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.

ANNEXURE B

Members of the Dietetics and Nutrition Standard Development Working Group

Prof Annelie Gresse

Dr Heather Legodi

Ms Glenrose Manale

Dr Lindelani Mushaphi

Ms Ditope Rabodiba

Ms Jill Wilkenson

Prof Evette van Niekerk

Ms Lenore Spies

Prof Edelweiss Wentzel-Viljoen

Ms Vanessa Mbhatsani

Prof Robin Dolman-Macleod