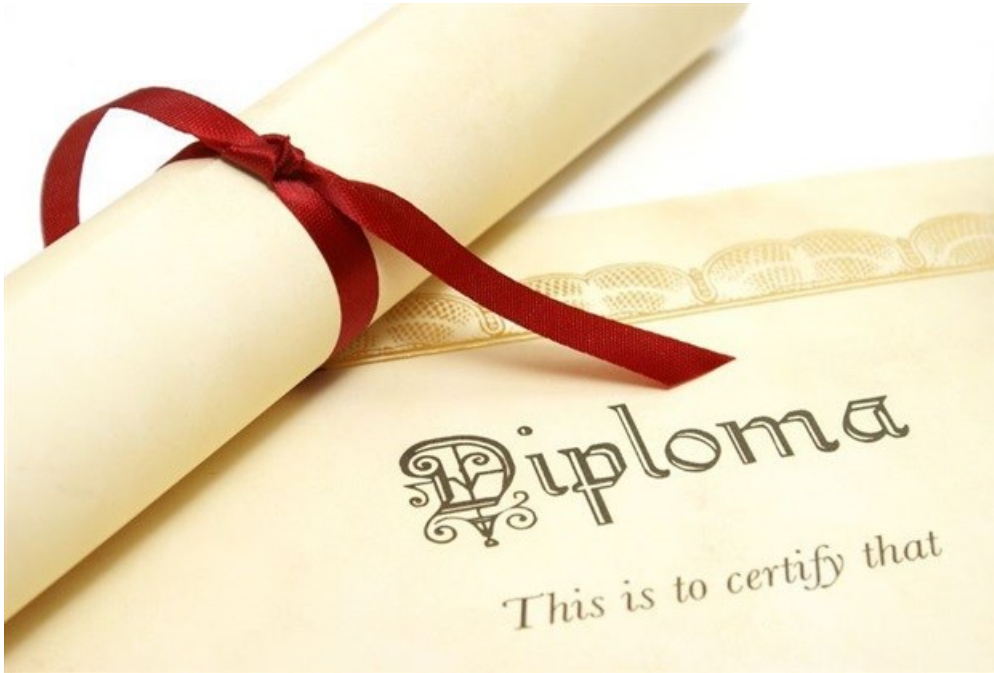


What every student should know about the NQF and course accreditation

By [Dr Felicity Coughlan](#)

25 Jun 2018

Terminology related to education in South Africa can often be very confusing, particularly when learners and prospective students need to consider the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and talk of accreditation and registration. It is, however, very important that prospective students get to grips with the terminology, as not doing so can have serious implications down the line.



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One of the most important aims of the NQF is to protect the general public from abuse by bogus education providers. By developing an understanding of the NQF, you can make assumptions about registration and accreditation, which makes it all much easier to understand because a qualification that is not registered or accredited is not on the NQF, so it really is your shortcut to working out what is real and what is not.

South Africa has a register of all qualifications which is managed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), and this register is referred to as the NQF.

We are fortunate in South Africa to have some really strict rules that educational institutions and training providers have to adhere to, so if you want to study there are a few simple questions to ask to which there are very clear answers. If an institution is not clear with you on the answers, the chances are you should be cautious about registering.

Something can only be called a “qualification” if:

1. It has a credit value of 120 as a minimum, and
2. is registered on the NQF with an NQF ID (sometimes called a SAQA ID) number.

The shortest possible qualification is therefore normally one year as it takes about a year of study to do 120 credits. A degree is normally at least 360 credits and so on. Without these two being in place, what you are studying is considered a short course and not a qualification, so it cannot be called a diploma or degree. So, if a South African institution is offering you a diploma for three weeks of study, it is not legitimate and warning lights should start flashing about that institution.

If an education institution cannot provide a prospective student with a programme’s NQF ID, caution should be exercised as it is then not a South African qualification.

However, even when an institution does provide an NQF ID, one should still verify it independently by searching for it on <http://regqs.saqa.org.za/>.

Look up the qualification and check its level and credit value, as well as information about what it covers. You can then compare that information to the marketing material given to you by the training provider to make sure that the promises and reality match.

Qualifications will only get registered on the NQF if they have been checked for quality and accredited by the Quality Council with the statutory responsibility for doing this.

South Africa has three of these Quality Councils:

1. Umalusi is responsible for “school level” qualifications which are on the first four levels of the NQF – Levels 1 to 4.
2. The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is responsible for higher education (post- secondary school) qualifications, which are the ones on level 5 to 10 offered by registered private higher education institutions and public universities.
3. The QCTO (Quality Council for Trades and Occupations) manages vocational training and education from Level 1 through to level 6. The level overlaps with Umalusi and the CHE, but the area of focus is very much the trades and occupations, from plumbing through to being a chef or even some areas of accounting. These colleges are called TVET – Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges. (In the past called FET (Further Education and Training) Colleges.

The level on the NQF gives one an indication of how complicated the subject matter is. Level 10 is where Doctorates are pitched, for instance, while Level 4 is the level of Grade 12.

Only registered private and public institutions can offer qualifications that are on the NQF, while both private and public institutions can offer on all levels and through approval from all the Quality Councils. This means that the only difference between public (university) institutions and private higher education institutions – which may as a result of regulations not refer to themselves as private universities - is that the public institutions get some subsidy from the government while the private institutions don’t.

When one has a clear understanding of the NQF, that information will assist you in deciding what to study and where.

If, for instance, you want to follow a trade or vocation such as becoming a Chef, you need to find a college (public or private) accredited by the QCTO and registered as a private or public TVET College with a qualification on the NQF.

If, however, you want to pursue a higher education qualification such as a Higher Certificate, Degree or Diploma, you can investigate your options among any of the country's 26 public universities or 116 registered private higher education institutions.

As always, it is crucial for prospective students to thoroughly investigate all their options, to ensure they find the best fit for themselves in terms of location, campus, and offering.

* Prospective students can find a complete list of all registered private colleges and higher education institutions at: www.dhet.gov.za/SitePages/DocRegisters.aspx.

Sub Framework		NQF level	Qualification types	
General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub Framework (GFETQSF)	Occupational Qualifications Sub Framework (OQSF)	1	Grade 9	
		2	Grade 10/ National (vocational) Certificates level 2/ Occupational Certificates	
		3	Grade 11/ National (vocational) Certificates level 3/ Occupational Certificates	
		4	Grade 12/ National (vocational) Certificates level 4/ Occupational Certificates	
Higher Education Qualification Sub Framework (HEQSF)		5	Higher Certificate/ Advanced National (vocational) Certificates/ Occupational Certificates	
		6	Diploma/ Advanced Certificate/ Occupational Certificates	
		7	Degree/ Advanced Diploma/ Post-graduate Certificate	
		8	Honours/Post-Graduate Diploma	
		9	Masters	
		10	Doctorate	

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