

# National Policy on Nursing Education and Training



**health**

Department:  
Health  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA





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## Foreword by the Minister of Health



The South African health system is predominantly nurse based. The ever-changing health needs demand high levels of competence to ensure responsiveness to current and future population health needs. The education and training of nurses is an essential aspect of the functioning of any health system. It is an important responsibility of government to ensure that sufficient caring and competent nurses are educated and trained to meet the needs of the health services. It is therefore essential that the nursing education and training system be harmonised with service delivery needs while ensuring that qualifications obtained are commensurate with the scopes of practice.

Central to education and training of nurses is a need to align nursing education with post-school education legislative prescripts, while ensuring that qualifications obtained lead to professional registration in prescribed nursing categories. This policy serves as a critical enabler that guides all providers of nursing educations in the implementation of the new nursing programmes.

I am confident that an improved nursing education systems will ensure that current and future generations of nurses and midwives will be able to provide safe, quality patient-centred care across levels of care.

DR PAUL MOTSOALEDI, MP  
MINISTER OF HEALTH

## Statement by the Director-General



Recent changes to the legislation, which require nursing education to be positioned in the higher education band, called for in-depth consideration of the implications of these developments to the health sector. There is a need for a national overarching framework, informed by and designed around health services demands, underpinned by sound education principles, to direct provisioning of nursing education and training within the context of the legislative framework imposed by developments in both health and higher education sectors.

An essential part of enabling this process is to develop a national policy on nursing education and training which will steer stakeholders through the period of change and provide a blueprint for the many decisions that need to be taken to enable compliance with the legislation and a synchronous approach to the provision of nursing education.

This policy outlines the basis for a uniform framework, within which nursing education leading to professional registration in the various categories of nursing is provided. Successful matriculants will access nursing directly at either certificate, diploma or bachelor's degree levels. Provision for recognition of prior learning has been made for nurses and midwives already in healthcare services. A mechanism for seamless articulation between qualifications, thereby enabling students to move efficiently over time from one programme to another is provided. The policy promotes lifelong learning as nurses and midwives can study until doctoral level in both professional and research spheres.

I would like to thank the Office of the Chief Nursing Officer; the technical working group; all nursing education stakeholders; heads of health in provinces; the Joint Health Science Education Committee and the Department of Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation (DPME) in the Presidency for their valuable contribution in the various stages of policy development

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Matsoso'.

MP MATSOSO  
DIRECTOR- GENERAL: HEALTH



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## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Clinical education / teaching** refers to student nurses'/ midwives' experiential learning in a range of clinical settings, in which the theoretical component is integrated and correlated with practice. It provides the student with meaningful, authentic and care-based experience.

**Competence** means the ability of a practitioner to integrate the professional attributes including, but not limited to, knowledge; skills; judgement; values and attributes required to perform as a nurse in all situations; and practice settings according to relevant legislation.

**Governance** refers to all purposeful and accountable efforts to guide, steer, control or manage the nursing education institution as a whole to meet the objectives of the nursing education institution.

**Lecturer / nurse educator** means a person registered under Section 31 of the Nursing Act, 2005 (Act 33 of 2005) with an additional qualification in nursing education.

**Nurse** means a person registered in a category under section 31(1) of the Nursing Act.

**Nursing Act** refers to the Nursing Act, 2005 (Act 33 of 2005).

**Nursing Education Institution (NEI)** means a nursing education institution as defined in the Nursing Act.

**Programme** means a purposeful and structured set of learning content and competencies which lead to a South African Nursing Qualification.

**Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)** means the evidence-based assessment comparison of previous learning and experience against the learning outcomes required for a specific programme of a student, however obtained, and the acceptance of such previous learning for the purpose of accessing a programme awarding of credits and advancing standing.

**Student nurse / midwife** in this context means any person who is enrolled in a nursing education institution and registered with the South African Nursing Council (SANC) in terms of Section 32 of the Nursing Act.

**Qualification** means a formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by an accredited institution.



## ACRONYMS

APS	Admission point score
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EN	Enrolled nurse
ENA	Enrolled nurse assistant
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HRH	Human resources for health
NDOH	National Department of Health
NEI	Nursing education institution
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSC	National Senior Certificate
PGD	Post graduate diploma
PHC	Primary Healthcare
RPL	Recognition of prior learning
SANC	South African Nursing Council
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
UHC	Universal Health Coverage



## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

### 1.1 Introduction

The South African health system is predominantly nurse-based. Nurses and midwives as the backbone of the healthcare system are often a first point of contact with healthcare services for healthcare users accessing the healthcare system. As such, competent nurses and midwives need to be available to respond to current and ever-changing healthcare needs of a growing and diverse population. The demand imposed by reorganisation of health service toward universal health coverage (UHC) through re-engineered primary healthcare (PHC), calls for education and training that will produce safe and competent nursing professionals capable of making a meaningful contribution in addressing the quadruple burden of disease consisting of HIV, AIDS and tuberculosis; high maternal and child mortality; non-communicable disease; and violence and injuries along the continuum of care.

### 1.2. Historical background

Until recently, reforms in nursing education in South Africa have been influenced by the ordinances from provincial health departments and, to a lesser extent, higher education. The nursing education system has developed over the years from a fragmented, hospital-based system to a quasi-centralised system with higher education institutions including universities and universities of technology, provincial nursing colleges and private nursing education institutions all contributing to the education of the nursing workforce

The promulgation of the Health Act, 1977 (Act 63 of 1977) and the acknowledgement by the Minister of Health regarding the centrality of the nursing profession in the provisioning of comprehensive health services finally clarified and confirmed the need for the comprehensive education and training of the registered nurses. However, this aspiration of positioning nursing education within the post- secondary schooling system was undermined by a failure to provide a national policy framework for guiding provisioning of nursing education as post-secondary education by public colleges.

In 1985 the provisions of the Van Wyk de Vries Commission expounded a view that colleges of nursing could be affiliated to universities in order to offer post-secondary school programmes. The affiliation is guided by memoranda of agreement between the university of affiliation and the provincial departments of health in respective provinces. The basis for such affiliation was for nursing science departments within universities to exercise oversight and mentoring on the quality and standards of a diploma programme offered by the colleges in their respective provinces. However, colleges retained responsibility for administration and management of provisioning of the four-year diploma programme leading to registration as a nurse as well as the two certificate programmes leading to enrolment as a nurse and nursing auxiliary. This arrangement invariably introduced a dual and a parallel system for nursing education management.

The promulgation and subsequent proclamation of various sections of the Nursing Act made provisions with implications for nursing education. Key to these was the creation of new categories of nurses, thus making it mandatory for the SANC to redefine the competency framework for nursing; develop scopes of practice and related regulations in preparation for the new Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF)-aligned nursing qualifications.

Accordingly, in 2010 the first HEQSF-aligned qualification for nursing professionals was classified, registered and published by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), thereby locating nursing education qualifications within the requirements of post school education. In addition, the National Strategic Plan for Nursing Education, Training and Practice (2012/13-16/17) recommended that a National Nursing Education Policy be developed locating nursing education within higher education system.

## CHAPTER 2: THE CURRENT CONTEXT

Currently, all qualifications leading to registration in any of the prescribed nursing categories are offered by diverse providers. These providers have diverse settings, models of governance and student management systems. Some of these programmes are not informed by or designed around sound education principles regarding admission into the programme; progression and articulation; nor are they designed to meet pressing national and regional needs to respond to new realities and opportunities. As a consequence, nursing education institutions (NEIs) have varying practices for governance of nursing education, which influence recruitment and selection processes, progression and articulation towards attainment of a full qualification for the prescribed categories of nursing. General lack of a nationally determined educational minimum entry requirement into enrolled nursing auxiliary (ENA) and enrolled nurse (EN) programmes has led to a complexity of problems associated with these graduates.

Lack of internal quality control mechanisms has led to overproduction of ENAs and ENs. In addition, inappropriate progression and articulation pathways, combined with limited clinical training, limits their ability to attain competencies required to successfully complete the programmes leading to registration as a nurse. This limits scopes of practice in the service delivery platforms for nurses who are transient between two nursing categories

In line with provisions of related SANC regulations, both colleges and the universities produce registered nurses through a degree programme designated for universities and a diploma programme designated for colleges. However, these separate and parallel qualifications for universities and colleges have not only caused disharmony in service, but have also not lead to smooth articulation and transfer between institutions and programmes, neither horizontally nor vertically. Government Notice No. R.425 of 22 February 1985 governing this programme made it compulsory for NEIs involved in the preparation of this cadre of nurses to produce a nurse qualified in midwifery, general, psychiatric and community nursing within a four-year programme. The duration of training, especially in relation to midwifery training, is perceived to be too accelerated and does not give student midwives requisite competencies, thus limiting their ability to function within the scope of practice prescribed for midwives.

While post-basic specialisation programmes are designed to educate and train nurses to function at higher level in specific fields of practice, these are also fraught with challenges. There are different educational streams leading to an additional qualification. However, SANC does not make a distinction in qualification obtained through one of the streams leading to post basic qualification. Instead, registration is determined by the area of specialised discipline, regardless of whether it was obtained through a diploma, a bachelor's degree, master's degree or any other qualification. This has resulted in uncertainty about the status and classification of advanced practice nurses in South Africa, and has many implications which impact on remuneration and clinical career paths of the advanced practice nurse.

However, all the programmes currently offered are referred to as legacy nursing qualifications. Accordingly, these have been replaced with a nationally comparable qualification in nursing, registered and published by SAQA. As a result, in 2015 the process of phasing these programmes out was initiated. This paved the way in preparing for the introduction of the new HEQSF-aligned nursing qualifications. The non-HEQSF aligned legacy qualifications and the nurse categories as registered or enrolled with SANC are depicted in the Table 1 below.

**Table 1: Current/legacy nursing qualifications**

Qualification type	Duration in years	Professional registration enrolment with SANC
Post-basic course (specialisation)	One	Area of specialisation
University degree	Four	Nurse (general, community and psychiatric) and midwife
College diploma	Four	Nurse (general, community and psychiatric) and midwife
Basic midwifery	One	Midwife
Basic psychiatry	One	Psychiatric nurse
Bridging course for enrolled nurses	Two	General nurse/ psychiatric nurse
Certificate	Two	Enrolled nurse
Certificate	One	Enrolled nursing auxiliary

## CHAPTER 3: THE RATIONALE

### 3.1 Phasing out of non-HEQSF aligned nursing programmes

Government Notice Number 40123 of July 2016, gazetted by the Minister of Higher Education and Training stipulating 2019 as the last date for the intake of all programmes leading to national qualifications not aligned to the prescripts of the NQF Act, 2008 (Act 67 of 2008) provided an impetus to NEIs to focus on preparation for offering the new HEQSF-aligned nursing programmes.

### 3.2 A unified system of nursing education and training

There is a need for the development of a national overarching framework, informed by and designed around health services demands underpinned by sound education principles to direct provisioning of nursing education and training within the context of the legislative framework imposed by developments in both health and education sectors.

### 3.3 New categories of nurses, the scopes of practice and alignment with NQF

The categories of nurses as prescribed in the Nursing Act and scopes of practice are in line with the current health needs of the country, with specific reference to PHC re-engineering and the district health system approach. Qualifications leading to professional registration in these categories will be offered in line with the requirements of the HEQSF to ensure that nursing operates within the prescripts of post-schooling education system.

**Table 2: The new nursing qualifications**

The new nursing qualifications			
Nursing category	Qualification type	NQF level	Minimum Duration
Registered auxiliary nurse	Higher certificate	5	one year
Registered general nurse	Diploma	6	three years
Registered midwife	Advanced diploma	7	one year
Registered professional nurse and midwife	Bachelor's degree	8	four years
Nurse specialist/ midwife specialist	Post-graduate diploma	8	one year
Advanced specialist nurse	Master's degree	9	one year
Doctorate in nursing	Doctoral degree	10	three years

Table 2 depicts how the provisions of the NQF Act have been applied to the nursing occupational field, by defining pathways for access, mobility and progression in education and training career paths. Nursing qualifications leading to professional registration with SANC in these new categories will be offered in line with requirements of the HEQSF as follows:

#### Higher Certificate in Nursing

This one-year programme will lead to registration as an auxiliary nurse. It is aimed to produce a nurse who will deliver basic nursing care in a variety of settings.

#### Diploma in Nursing

This three-year diploma will enable the nurse to function as a clinically focused, service orientated, independent registered general nurse, who is able to render general nursing care as determined by the appropriate legislative framework.

#### Advanced Diploma in Midwifery

The one-year programme leading to registration as a midwife aims to produce competent, independent and critical-thinking midwives, who will provide a wide range of midwifery healthcare. It is envisaged that other advanced diploma programmes will be introduced in a phased-in approach.

#### Bachelor Degree in Nursing

This four-year degree is aimed at producing a nurse and midwife who contributes to improvement of health outcomes for individuals, families, groups and communities through providing quality, culturally sensitive and evidence-based nursing and midwifery health services.

#### Post Graduate Diploma (Nurse or Midwife Specialist)

The one-year programme leading to registration with SANC as a nurse/ midwife specialist is aimed at producing a nurse or midwife specialist who is able to function as a clinically focused, service-orientated, autonomous, nurse/midwife specialist, able to render comprehensive scientific nursing/midwifery care, as determined by the appropriate legislative

#### Master's and Doctoral Degree

The master's and doctoral nursing programmes will be either research or professional (clinical). There are no determined professional registrations with SANC for these programmes, however the Council will have to consider keeping a database of graduates from these programmes.

## CHAPTER 4: THE PURPOSE

### 4.1 The purpose

The policy outlines the basis for a uniform framework, within which nursing education leading to professional registration in the various categories of nursing is provided. It further provides a mechanism for improving the coherence of the nursing education system and indicates seamless articulation between qualifications, thereby enabling students to move more efficiently over time from one programme to another.

### 4.2 Aims and objectives

The aim of this policy is to provide a national framework for nursing education, which will ensure alignment of nursing qualifications with post-school education legislative prescripts and regulatory requirements for professional registration in the new nursing categories.

### 4.3 The objectives of this policy are to:

- facilitate a standardised system to ensure that diverse/heterogeneous students are attracted to access nursing programmes
- ensure that the nursing and midwifery workforce are competent and responsive to the burden of disease and population health needs
- synchronise and standardise a system of education and training for nurses by strengthening clinical education and training platforms as well as collaborative partnerships between the Department of Health and the NEIs for all nursing programmes

### 4.4 The scope of applicability

This policy applies to all current and prospective providers of the education and training programmes leading to professional registration in any of the prescribed nursing categories.

## CHAPTER 5: LEGISLATIVE IMPERATIVES

Nursing education and training is underpinned by the provisions of applicable legislation and policies that direct healthcare delivery. Legislation and policy documents that inform this policy include, but are not limited to, the following:

- National Health Act, 2003 (Act 61 of 2003)
- Nursing Act, 2005 (Act 33 of 2005)
- National Qualifications Framework, 2008 (Act 67 of 2008) as amended
- Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act 101 of 1997) as amended
- White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (2013)

### 5.1 Alignment to legislation directly related to the nursing profession

Nursing Act: Sections in the act specific to nursing education included the following:

- the scope of profession and practice of nursing (Section 30). Registration in one of the prescribed categories as pre-requisite to practice (Section 31), including limited registration (Section 33) and registration of persons who have acquired additional nursing qualifications
- registration of persons undergoing additional education and training in nursing (Section 32)
- accreditation of institutions that intend conducting education and training programmes in order to prepare persons to practice in any one of the prescribed categories (Section 42)

## CHAPTER 6: POLICY DIRECTIVES

The policy directives strive to ensure a balance between the quantity, quality and relevance of nursing education and training through expanding access, improving quality and increase diversity in provisioning of nursing education.

### 6.1 Registration and accreditation

All programmes and nursing education providers (both public and private) are required to be registered and accredited by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), SANC and Council of Higher Education (CHE) in line with the applicable legislation, prior to the offering of any programmes in the HEQSF leading to nursing qualifications registerable with SANC.

### 6.2 Entry and admission and selection requirements

Access into the nursing programmes can be through any of the three entry level programmes designed as stand-alone qualifications.

- The entry level programme will be determined by the types of National Senior Certificate (NSC) achieved by the students.
- Students who meet national requirements for a higher certificate would access a higher certificate programme, leading to registration as auxiliary nurse.
- Students who meet national requirements for a diploma would access a national diploma leading to registration as a general nurse.
- Finally, students who meet national requirements for a bachelor's degree would access a bachelor's degree leading to registration as a professional nurse and midwife.
- In addition to the type of NSC obtained, a standardised minimum admission points scoring system (APS) for all nursing programmes shall apply.
- Minimum entry requirements shall include appropriate subject combinations and levels of achievement as defined in the DHET's policy on the minimum admission requirements for higher certificate, national diploma or bachelor's degrees, as published in Government Gazette No. 27961 of 26 August 2005.

### 6.3 Recognition of prior learning (RPL)

Some of the students who enter the new nursing programmes will already be working in the nursing/ midwifery context or setting and will have gained knowledge as a result of learning in the workplace and other settings.

- In order to recognise relevant prior learning that is already in place, a key principle that must inform recognition of prior learning practice is that learning outcomes must not be compromised as a result of RPL.
- RPL for access and advanced credit standing must be conducted in accordance with prevailing national policies on higher education such as the National Policy for Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning, which provides for the implementation of RPL and describes how providers should implement RPL in respect of all qualifications and part-qualifications in South Africa.
- This RPL policy indicates that the specific context quality council and its sub framework must be considered in the interpretation of the policy. RPL must take place on an individual, student-by-student basis and must involve an assessment/ professional judgement of the prior learning.

### 6.4 Progression and articulation in nursing

The restructuring of higher education in South Africa gained momentum since the democratisation of the country in 1994. The main purpose was the transformation of education and to increase accessibility to higher education opportunities for those who were previously disadvantaged and marginalised in terms of career progression. The emphasis on recognition of prior learning (RPL) to provide access to career progression was a further strategy to support the underlying principle of a national qualification framework, which allowed for articulation between qualifications and provided individuals with upward mobility.

#### 6.4.1 Higher Certificate (Auxiliary Nurse)

This is an entry level nursing qualifications for those students who meet requirements for a higher certificate in their National Senior Certificate. The purpose of this programme is to produce a nurse who will deliver basic nursing care in a variety of settings.

- A nurse holding the higher certificate qualification at NQF Level 5 cannot progress to an advanced certificate at NQF Level 6 as there is no such qualification in the nursing qualifications framework.
- Such person can articulate to a Diploma in Nursing at NQF Level 6 leading to registration as a general nurse.

## 6.4.2 Diploma in Nursing

This is an entry level nursing qualification for those students who meet requirements for a diploma in their national senior certificate. A nurse holding a diploma qualification at NQF Level 6 can progress as follows:

- advanced diploma at NQF Level 7 (midwifery) leading to a professional registration as a midwife. Advanced diploma in other clinical areas will be introduced in a phased in approach
- from this level, a nurse can progress to:
  - a post-graduate diploma at NQF Level 8
  - a clinical master's degree at NQF Level 9 and, ultimately,
  - to a doctorate at NQF Level 10

## 6.4.3 Advanced Diploma in Midwifery

This programme may be accessed by nurses who have successfully completed a three-year diploma in general nursing.

## 6.4.4 Bachelor's Degree in Nursing

A nurse holding a Bachelor of Nursing Degree at NQF Level 8 can progress to a master's degree, provided they hold a Post-Graduate Diploma (PGD) in Nursing and subsequently to doctorate level. Without a PGD, the nurse can only progress to 'research' category master's and doctoral degrees.

## 6.4.5 Post graduate diploma

A nurse who holds a PGD in Nursing at Level 8 can progress to a masters' degree and subsequently to a doctorate degree in line with prescribed minimum entry requirements.

## 6.4.6 Master's and doctoral nursing programmes

The master's and Doctoral nursing programmes may either involve research in a clinical or professional field. There are no determined professional registrations with the SANC for these programmes. The council will, however, consider keeping a database of graduates from these programmes.

## 6.5 Integration of students into the profession

- All students shall register with NEIs and fall entirely under the jurisdiction of the institution.
- All students admitted by a NEI shall be registered as nursing students with SANC within a stipulated time after being admitted in to a learning programme.
- In addition to the needs and priorities of the national and provincial health departments, the curriculum must take into consideration the student profile in the context of changing teaching and learning environments.

## 6.6 Clinical teaching and learning

NEIs shall engage with health service management at provincial level and plan for the placement, supervision and assessment of clinical training in line with the clinical learning outcomes defined for each level of training.

- Overall coordination of clinical teaching and learning shall be under the control of the health authority, to ensure uniform clinical education and training, supervision and assessments of all students within a facility.
- There shall be a formal memorandum agreement, which specifies terms of engagement amongst all parties involved with of clinical education training inclusive of dress code during clinical training.

## **CHAPTER 7: ROLE PLAYERS**

### **7.1 National Department of Health**

The national Department of Health is responsible for the development of the implementation guidelines required to operationalise the policy.

### **7.2 The quality councils**

The CHE and SANC are responsible for the recognition, endorsement and accreditation of programmes leading to nursing qualifications, as mandated by their respective legislative frameworks.

### **7.3 Provincial departments of health**

Provinces must develop integrated plan (theory and practical) for provisioning of nursing education, based on the following:

- a. evidence of skills shortages and requirements
- b. cost containment
- c. quality improvement
- d. new technology or new health interventions
- e. emerging health programmes requiring certain types of skills

## **CHAPTER 8: MONITORING AND EVALUATION**

Monitoring and evaluation of the National Policy on Nursing Education and Training will be conducted by the national Department of Health in a systematic and objective manner to determine compliance efficiency and effectiveness.

## **CHAPTER 9: POLICY REVIEW**

This policy will be reviewed every five years from the effective date, or as the need arises.







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