SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL FOR PLANNERS

P O Box 1084, Halfway House, MIDRAND, 1685
International Business Gateway Office Park, Cnr New Road & 6th Road,
Midridge Office Park -Block G. 1st Floor.
Tel: 011-318 0460/ 318 0437
E-Mail: planner@sacplan.co.za
Website: www.sacplan.org.za

SACPLAN STATEMENT REGARDING WHY MASTER'S GRADUATES REGISTER AS PROFESSIONAL PLANNERS LIKE FIRST-DEGREE GRADUATES

For the past several years a number of planners have queried the professional registration of graduates with Masters's degrees whose first degrees were not in urban/town planning (from cognate subjects e.g. geography, history, sociology, etc). The query arises from the fact that the professional registration for holders of the first degree occurs after fours of study whereas it takes two years for a master's degree (alternatively: Honors plus one year or post-graduate diploma plus one year). This was raised as a point of consternation during the consultation workshops for the Competency and Standards Projects; the Planning Profession Act (PPA), (2002) Amendment consultations, the Spatial Planning, Land Use and Management (SPLUMA), 2013 amendment consultations, seminars, and certainly alongside the comments on the SACPLAN Rules and regulations. Therefore this statement aims to provide clarity on why the Council registers Masters graduates as professional planners without a first degree in planning. The rationale for this lies in two explanations: the structure of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the design of the curriculum as explained below.

The Structure of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)

The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) recognises ten (10) National Qualification Framework (NQF) Levels. Each is a registered South African qualification according to the NQF Act of 2008. The NQF is the system that records the credits assigned to each level of learning achievement in a formal way to ensure that the skills and knowledge that have been learnt are recognised throughout the country. It provides a set of principles and guidelines by which records of learner achievement are registered to enable national recognition of acquired skills and knowledge, thereby ensuring an integrated system that encourages life-long learning. This system is used to determine the level of qualification or qualifications students have achieved. It is also a system for setting nationally recognised and internationally comparable education and training standards and qualifications across countries.

The NQF Levels of all the qualifications are outlined in the following table.

New NQF level	Qualification Type		
	Vocational	**Professional**	**General**
10		Doctoral degree (360 credits)	Doctoral degree (360 credits)
9		Master's degree (120 credits)	Master's degree (180 credits)
8	Postgraduate diploma (120 credits)	Postgraduate diploma Bachelor degree (120 Credits)	Honours degree Bachelor degree (120 credits)
7	Advanced diploma (360 credits)	Bachelor degree Advanced diploma (360 credits)	Bachelor degree (360 credits)
7	Postgraduate certificate (120 credits and 132 credits)	Postgraduate Certificate in Education (120 credits)	
6	Diploma (240 credits and 360 credits)	Diploma (360 credits)	
6	Advanced certificate (120 credits)		
5	Higher certificate (120 credits)		

As reflected in the table, the higher your NQF Level, the higher your qualification. For example, there is a huge difference between a matric qualification at NQF Level 4 and a Bachelor's degree Qualification at NQF Level 7. The learning outcomes for a Matric Qualification are based on basic knowledge whilst the learning outcomes for a bachelor's degree Qualification are based on an advanced understanding of that particular field of study. Therefore, a graduate with a Master's degree is at a higher NQF level 9 than the honours degree at NQF level 8. This reflects that a Masters graduate generally is characterized by advanced features related to the complexity of knowledge and skill development rather than an honours' graduate. This is regardless of the shorter number of credits required for Masters (180). The higher NQF level for a Masters graduate implies that he/she can apply an advanced body of knowledge in a range of contexts or scholarship, for professional practice beyond the level of an honours' graduate. This also indicates that a Masters graduate has the ability to competently engage, absorb and apply knowledge and skills of a subject in a much shorter time than qualification lower than level 9. Therefore, a first-degree graduate normally takes four years to do the first degree whilst the masters take two years.

The students that graduate from a masters' programme with a non-planning first degree also bring a range of knowledge and skills that are covered in the SACPLAN competency and standard framework. All the students have generic competencies and some core and functional competencies. Some of the students have spatial skills e.g. GIS, research skills, and many common skills that are shared across the

humanities and social sciences' disciplines. Therefore, drawing graduates from non-planning disciplines are consistent with the fundamental character of planning as a profession that draws from other disciplines in the training of planners. This demonstrates the historical dynamism of planning as a discipline that has grown through different influences of disciplines. It also reflects that planning has shifted from being a discipline focused on urban or architectural design towards managing substantive processes of political mediation, enabling mutual social and economic interests and forging parameters for sharing of a common vision for the future of a territory.

The Design of the Curriculum

The masters' curricula in the country are not designed to replicate the undergraduate curricula so that the same courses are taken at this level. However, in accordance with the higher level of NQF 9, the masters' programmes provide graduates with planning knowledge and skills to enable them to engage with complex planning issues in order to develop appropriate solutions/interventions at local and international contexts. All the universities that design the masters' programmes are informed by theory and practice and draw from courses and projects that foster a mutual exchange of knowledge and ideas. The Masters' programmes provide a rigorous and critical understanding of the policy and practice of sustainable development and provide students with the competencies to plan, execute and write up scientific research in the urban and regional planning field.

Students are trained to respond to a variety of development challenges in different contexts and at different scales of local and international governance. While the masters' programmes tend to have different emphasise, scopes, and orientations such as, urban design, town planning, development planning, to a large extent is shaped by the expertise and planning traditions of the programme, they are all conforming to the Competency and Standard Framework introduced by SACPLAN in 2017. Therefore, it is not unusual to find a masters' programme with more emphasis on an area of planning and with less emphasis on others. Nevertheless, the different stresses bring out richness and uniqueness of the programmes. While fulfilling all the SACPLAN competences, masters' programmes have also tended to provide graduates with knowledge and skills oriented towards advanced strategic decision making in planning which is less predominant in first degrees.

Since, the introduction of the SACPLAN framework in 2017, all planning programmes have been adjusting their curricula to conform to the requirements. The adjustments involve a constructive interaction between SACPLAN and the planning programmes. The processes of accreditation of the planning programmes have contributed a transformative effect to the programmes in terms of the curriculum, staff profiles, spatial confirmation, etc. Nevertheless, the planning programmes are

following different trajectories of transformation and are responding according to the different set of circumstances e.g. governance, budget, etc. The interaction between SACPLAN and planning programmes has been very positive, constructive, and empowering in a mutual rewarding manner. Since, the transformation agenda is not a destination but an unending journey, SACPLAN is confident about the work of planning schools and the graduates that they produce.