Graduation and Certification Policy

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Managed by	Graduation and Certification Manager
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ACRONYMS

AVC	Assessment Verification and Certification
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
AEXCO	Academic Executive Committee
EXCO	Executive Committee
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority

1. Policy Statement

MANCOSA is a Private Higher Education institution registered with the Department of Higher Education and training (DHET) and offers programmes that are accredited by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). MANCOSA programmes are recorded on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Upon successfully completing a programme at MANCOSA, the student will be eligible to graduate. MANCOSA confirms, before issuing a qualification to a student, that compliance to all qualification-related statutory and institutional graduation requirements are met.

2. Purpose

The purpose of this Graduation and Certification Policy is to establish clear and consistent criteria for awarding academic qualifications to students who have met all program requirements. This policy ensures the integrity, credibility, and recognition of the institution's academic standards and credentials.

3. Objectives

The objectives of the Certification policy are to:

3.1 define the academic and administrative requirements students must fulfil to graduate and receive a Graduation Certificate.

3.2 maintain compliance with national and institutional quality assurance standards.

3.3 ensure fairness, transparency, and accountability in the conferral of academic qualifications.

3.4 Enhance the institution's academic credibility.

3.5 Promote student motivation and academic accountability.

3.6 Streamline internal processes for certification and documenting student achievement.

3.7 Facilitate recognition of qualifications by employers and academic institutions.

4. Scope

This policy is applicable to all the departments in the organisation in terms of Certification of students and should be read in conjunction with the Admissions and Selections Policy, the Institutional Rules and the Course and Assignment Handbook.

This policy applies to all students registered for and completed programmes across Higher Certificates, Advanced Certificates, Advanced Diplomas, Degrees, Postgraduate Certificates, Postgraduate Diplomas, Honours Degrees, Master's Degrees and Doctoral Degrees.

It also governs the roles and responsibilities of academic departments, and administrative offices involved in graduation and certification processes.

5. Legal and Regulatory Context

The policy aligns with the relevant national education acts, accreditation standards, and regulatory guidelines set by the country's higher education authority and recognised qualification frameworks. It also reflects institutional statutes and academic regulations, delimited by the parameters set by the provisions of the following relevant pieces of legislation (but not limited to):

- Higher Education Act (Act No.101 of 1997, as amended)
- Protection of Personal Information Act (Act no.4 of 2013)

This policy supports the institution's commitment to academic excellence, regulatory compliance, and the success of its graduates.

6. Policy Background

The Certification Policy was developed in response to the growing need for standardised, transparent, and accountable processes in awarding academic qualifications.

Higher education institutions are increasingly held accountable by regulatory bodies, employers, students, and the broader public to ensure the quality, integrity, and transparency of academic credentials. A robust graduation and certification policy is a cornerstone of academic quality assurance, as it governs the standards, processes, and accountability measures for awarding degrees, diplomas, and certifications.

This policy is designed to ensure transparency, consistency, and fairness of the institution's graduation processes and the awarding of certificates, reinforcing the institution's commitment to academic excellence.

Key Factors Influencing the Policy

- **Regulatory Compliance**: Adherence to national qualifications frameworks and accreditation requirements.

- **Academic Integrity**: Ensuring degrees are awarded only to students who have demonstrably met all academic requirements.
- **Operational Efficiency**: Reducing administrative delays and errors in graduation processing.
- **Student Experience**: Providing clear, timely, and accessible information about graduation eligibility and certification procedures.

7. Definitions

In this policy, unless otherwise indicated –

"conferring a qualification on a candidate or student" means the act of issuing a qualification or certificate to a student on his or her compliance with all statutory and institutional requirements in respect of that qualification.

"first examination" means a student's first opportunity to sit for a Summative Assessment in any module at any level during the course of his or her studies in respect of a qualification. A special examination in certain circumstances, where it is the student's first attempt to pass the subject may also be seen as a first examination.

"formal qualification" means the formal recognition and certification of a learning achievement, as conferred by an accredited higher education institution, signifying the demonstrated achievement of a student, at a specified level of performance, in a planned and purposeful combination of learning outcomes, after following a course or programme for which he or she is registered, which is registered by MANCOSA with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

"MANCOSA" refers to a duly constituted private higher education Institution in terms of the provisions of the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997) as amended.

"official publication date" means the date on which the final examination results are published after being approved by the Academic Verifications and Certification (AVC) Committee.

"phasing-out date" means the cut-off date for offering a module or programme; in other words, the module or programme will no longer be offered from that date onwards.

8. Policy Content

A student is eligible for a qualification to be conferred upon him or her at a Graduation Ceremony thereby to be issued with an original Certificate and Academic Transcript only after he or she satisfies the following conditions of the programme:

- duly registers to pursue studies in an accredited programme for the prescribed period
- completes the programme within the stipulated period
- attains the specified levels of achievement required by the programme
- earns the required minimum number of credits towards the achievement of the qualification
- complies with all other requirements as laid down by the institution
- submits all documentation required for graduation

8.1 Integrity of Certificates

8.1.1 All certificates for formal qualifications completed at MANCOSA shall be printed internally by a designated member of the Graduation and Certification Department under strict security conditions.

8.1.2 The Graduation and Certification Manager shall see to it that all qualification certificates are stored safely and securely in a strong room facility and that each certificate is assigned a unique serial number, which shall be captured electronically and on hard copy.

8.1.3 All certificates shall be signed by at least two members of Academic Exco.

8.2 Conferment of Qualifications

8.2.1 The appropriate official date of publication of the examination results shall be deemed to be the date on which the student will become "Eligible to graduate".

8.2.2 Qualifications shall be conferred only at MANCOSA's official graduation ceremonies.

8.2.3 A candidate shall be entitled to all privileges associated with a qualification only after it has been officially conferred on him or her at a MANCOSA graduation ceremony.

8.2.4 Only the AVC Committee may confirm that a student meets all the requirements laid down for the issuing of a qualification.

8.2.5 Qualifications shall only be issued to candidates who have completed the minimum period set for a qualification, as stipulated by the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. No qualification shall therefore be issued to a candidate who has completed his or her qualification before such minimum period has expired.

8.2.6 A student who has complied with all requirements for a qualification prior to its phasing-out date, shall be entitled to receive the qualification concerned.

8.2.7 A qualification shall not be conferred, nor shall a confirmation of completion of a qualification be issued, if a student has been suspended or is the accused in a pending disciplinary hearing.

8.2.8 A qualification shall be conferred but not receive a confirmation of the completion of a qualification if the student has any outstanding fees. The student will only receive the certificate once all fees are paid in full.

8.2.9 SENATE approves the list of graduates prior to a graduation ceremony.

8.3 Qualifications conferred With Distinction or Cum Laude

MANCOSA confers qualifications **With Distinction** or **Cum Laude** and the requirements for obtaining these are as follows:

Qualification	Requirements for Conferment
Higher Certificates Advanced Certificates Advanced Diploma	shall be conferred **With Distinction** if the student obtained a final average mark of at least 75% for all the modules in the programme.
Bachelor's degree	shall be conferred **Cum Laude** if the student has obtained a final average mark of at least 75% for all the modules

	with an average mark of 75% for all the exit-level modules of the programme.
Bachelor's Honours degree	shall be conferred **Cum Laude** if the student has obtained a final average mark of at least 75% for all the modules in the programme.
Postgraduate Certificates Postgraduate Diploma	shall be conferred **With Distinction** if the student has obtained a final average mark of at least 75% for all the modules in the programme.
Master's degree with Coursework and dissertation,	shall be conferred **Cum Laude** if the student has obtained a final average mark of at least 75% for all the modules with a final mark of at least 75% for the dissertation in the programme.
Master's degree with dissertation only	shall be conferred **Cum Laude** if the student has obtained a final average mark of at least 75% for the dissertation in the programme.

The student will not obtain a qualification **With Distinction** or **Cum Laude** unless he or she passes all modules in the programme during the first assessment (assignment, examination, project and/or dissertation) sitting.

The student will not obtain a qualification **With Distinction** or **Cum Laude** if he or she has:

- attempted any supplementary or aegrotat examination
- attempted a resubmission of any formative assessment (assignment, project and/or dissertation)
- re-registered for any module or dissertation in the programme
- received credit accumulated transfer (exemption) for a module(s) from another institution
- a deferral in the programme

Validation and Recognition of Academic Achievement

Students who have been deemed eligible for **Cum Laude** or **With Distinction** award and recognition of academic excellence is awarded the Principal's Commendation Letter in accordance with criteria 8.3.

8.4 Invitation and other documents

8.4.1 It shall be the responsibility of the Graduation and Certification Department on behalf of the EXCO to issue letters of invitation to the graduation ceremonies.

8.54.2 A letter of confirmation of the completion of a qualification may be issued upon request by the student after the official date of publication of the examination results. This letter is available for download from the myMANCOSA portal.

8.4.3 A letter of confirmation of the completion of a qualification is the legal confirmation that a candidate has met all prescribed requirements for a particular qualification to be issued.

8.4.4 Certificates shall not be issued prior to the graduation ceremony.

8.5 Certificate

8.5.1 Any certificate, diploma, degree, academic transcript or examination results that have been issued erroneously by MANCOSA shall not be valid and will be formally withdrawn by MANCOSA and documented appropriately. The relevant committee (AVC) will preside over these decisions.

8.5.2 A graduating student's Qualification Certificate shall be issued in the name which appears on their official identification document or passport for the duration of studies.

8.5.3 Certificates shall not be re-printed in cases where any part of a candidate's name differs from the name referred to in point 8.6.2.

8.5.4 The date of issue of a qualification shall be indicated on the certificate.

8.5.5 The graduation certificate will have the MANCOSA seal affixed.

8.5.6 Only one certificate will be issued. An official MANCOSA Academic Transcript and Transcript Supplement will also be provided. The graduation certificate will contain, the graduate's full name as recorded in the student record, the type of award (certificate, diploma, degree) and the classification of the award (if appropriate). The student must contact MANCOSA to make any changes to his/her

name. It is the graduate's responsibility to ensure that his/her name is correctly recorded in the student's record.

8.5.7 Measures are taken by the Graduation and Certification Department to ensure that these certificates are delivered to the graduates concerned. All certificates returned by courier services marked "undelivered", as well as those certificates not collected by graduates at graduation ceremonies are kept securely for an undetermined period.

8.6 Replacement of Certificate

8.6.1 Once a student receives his/her certificate and requires a replacement or reprint, an application needs to be submitted to the Graduation and Certification Department for approval of a replacement certificate. If a graduation certificate is to be replaced, the already-issued certificate must be returned before the replacement certificate is issued. An administration fee shall be payable for the issuing of a re-print or re-issue certificate if the reason for the re-print or re-issue is valid.

Process of Reprint or Replacement of Certificate

A student will make an application for a reprint of a certificate by providing a SAPS signed affidavit and the damaged certificate to MANCOSA. An administrative fee is applicable and payable. Once all these documents are received, the reprint will be done and re-issued to the student.

8.7 Students receiving their qualifications in Absentia

8.7.1 Students' will receive a qualification in absentia if he or she does not attend a physical graduation ceremony. This is documented and certificates of such absentia graduates are subsequently couriered to them.

8.7.2 Students that have outstanding fees do not receive an invitation to a physical graduation ceremony and their certificates are only released upon proof of payment of outstanding fees and approved by the Student Accounts Department.

8.8 Roles and Responsibilities

All employees, regardless of their role, are expected to comply with organizational policies and procedures. This includes adhering to ethical standards, maintaining confidentiality, following protocols, and upholding the values of MANCOSA. By clearly outlining roles and responsibilities, MANCOSA fosters a high-performance culture where everyone understands their contributions and works collaboratively toward shared goals. Effective communication, shared accountability, and mutual respect are essential to successful collaboration.

- **AVC Committee:** The Academic Verification and Certification (AVC) Committee primarily consists of Academics, Academic Director and secretary. The objective includes ratifying and verifying students that have met the academic requirements to become eligible to graduate.
- **Monitoring and Evaluation Department:** is responsible for conducting random samples of verified students and ensures proper procedures have been followed. Audits are conducted for continuous improvements.
- **Research Department:** ratifies the students' assessment marks for Research Report for Honours and Dissertation for Masters programme.
- **School of Education and the School of Marketing, Communication and Global Tourism**: ratifies the Work Integrated Learning (WIL) assessment outcome for the applicable programmes.
- **Registry Department:** assists in resolving issues inter alia with regards to updating of student's profile with regards to personal information on SIS.
- **SIS System Administrator:** assist in resolving issues with regards to any status changes or any other anormalies.
- **Student Accounts Department:** confirms student fee status and finance eligibility of all graduates.
- **Doctoral Research Office:** ensures the completion of all doctoral requirements, in respect of Research milestones (e.g., proposal approval, progress reports), thesis submission and successful completion of oral defense

- **Registrar Office:** Ensures the accuracy, confidentiality and security of student records. Verification of previous qualifications with third party agencies
- **The Graduation and Certification Manager:** extracts the list of eligible graduates from the Student Information System (SIS).
- **Graduation Department:** executes all pre-graduation and post-graduation processes for the Graduation Ceremonies.

9 Compliance and Enforcement

MANCOSA continues to review and update these processes and security measures that are adopted to address the risk areas, threats and changing technologies. This step ensures that any discrepancies can be easily traced and addressed. Furthermore, regular audits of the system will help maintain the integrity of the records and ensure compliance with institutional policies. There will always be a need to ensure that MANCOSA remains vigilant against potential risks and certificate integrity issues. By focusing on combining these measures it can be established that MANCOSA has adopted a robust, trustworthy system for issuing certificates, safeguarding the integrity of academic qualifications being conferred.

9.1 Integrity of the Certification Processes

MANCOSA continues to ensure the integrity of certificates issued which involves a robust and secure process throughout the certificate issuance life cycle. We continue to review our practises and here are some key considerations adopted to maintain integrity:

- Documented Policies and Procedures, detailed policy and procedure are in place for the certificate issuance, which includes the criteria for eligibility, verification process, governance which consist of (Academics, Manager, Academic Director, M & E representative) and overall workflow.
- Authentication and Authorisation contribute to the eco-system of issuing certificates which ensures the security, authenticity, and trustworthiness of certificates. These mechanisms include domain ownership for verification and common methods include domain validation through email, DNS records, or HTTP verification. The inclusion of the

multi-factor authentication for certificate issuance to enhance the security of the process. This may involve validating the requester's identity through multiple factors such as passwords. In addition, maintaining comprehensive audit trails and logs of all certificate issuance activities. This facilitates monitoring, analysis, and investigation of any suspicious or unauthorized activities. Ongoing regular audit and update policies as needed.

- Secure Information Systems, including but not limited to the use and restriction of a secure Student Information System (SIS) which has student data and certificate related data. Encryption, restrictions, access controls, unique logins and other security measures to protect the integrity and confidentiality of the information.
- Verification of Eligibility, which consists of a clear and concise criterion as per the institution academic requirements) is available to the users in order to ensure eligibility to receive the certificate. In addition, there also is a step to cross-check that the eligibility outcome is correct before printing of the certificate. A consolidated master list is developed before printing commences.
- Document Verification and record keeping of the verification process which is automated on the Student Information System to allow for consistency and limit errors. All the steps undertaken are documented and supporting documentation or evidence is kept on record. This step ensures that any discrepancies can be easily traced and addressed. Furthermore, regular audits of the system will help maintain the integrity of the records and ensure compliance with institutional policies.
- Digital Signatures are used to ensure the authenticity and integrity. Specific formats are used to prevent replication. These digital signatures are kept securely and are password protected and provides a way to verify that the certificate has not been altered from the time of origin when issued by MANCOSA.
- There is a designated secure printing area with access control which is accessible only to a few members of the graduation team. The introduction of Biometric Technology, for biometric authentication for the authorized users

involved in the certificate validation, approval and issuance process to ensure that only authorised personnel can access the system.

- Once the secure process is completed the certificates are placed in lock up cupboards with limited access to the keys.
- Regular Audits and Reviews are conducted and there are ongoing reviews and audits are undertaken by the Monitoring & Evaluation department to review processes and to identify any gaps or risk areas. These findings are communicated to the manager of the department. The findings from these audits serve as a critical input for improving risk management practices, strengthening controls, and guiding decision-making of the Graduation processes

9.2 Security measures to prevent fraud

Preventing fraud in the issuance of certificates is crucial for maintaining the credibility and integrity of the educational credentials conferred by MANCOSA. Here are security measures that are adopted by MANCOSA which is aimed at mitigating the risk of fraud:

9.2.1 Secure Certificate Design, the MANCOSA certificates have been designed and includes security features which are difficult to replicate. These features make it difficult to reproduce these certificates. When requested to authenticate these certificates these features are very useful. These features are not made available, no matter what your designation at the institution is.

9.2.2 Digital Signatures are used on the original certificates, and we continue to digitally sign certificates using cryptographic signatures. Digital signatures help ensure the authenticity and integrity of the document, as any tampering will be detectable.

9.2.3 Access Controls are available to secure printing processes for physical certificates. This involves using secure printing facilities, controlled access to printing equipment, and secure storage and transportation methods for physical certificates is adopted.

9.2.4 Other security measures include, but are not limited to, certificate paper numbered sequentially, a unique seal, and a unique serial number for each certificate. A register

of certificates is maintained and updated should there be any spoiled copies, incorrect student details, printing issues, etc.

9.3 Illegal issuing of certificates

The prevention of illegal issuing of certificates is on the radar for MANCOSA and we have implemented a combination of technological, procedural, and policy measures. Here are some details of the approach undertaken:

9.3.1 Secure Certificate Design of the certificates include security features which are difficult to replicate.

9.3.2 Digital Certificates are issued such as BC Diploma which is a web-based block chain certification solution which digitises the issuance of certificates. These certificates that are being published are validated, verified and secured. Digital certificates are being populated by means of an integration of the Student Information System (SIS), all of which is access controlled.

9.3.3 Authentication Systems and the use of SIS and CRM both robust authentication processes to ensure that only authorized personnel can access and issue certificates. Ongoing authentication is also in place.

9.3.4 There are measures in place for database Security, storage of certificates, data usage, database access to ensure restricted access. We undertake regular audits and monitor database access to detect and prevent unauthorized changes.

9.3.5 Third party verification of Certificate Verification: working with third-party education verification services to confirm legitimacy and academic credentials

9.3.6 Strict Access Controls with limited access to certificate issuance systems to authorized personnel only. We continue to conduct regular training on data security and the importance of maintaining the integrity of academic records.

9.4 In addition as part of the further enhancements we are considering:

- Ongoing Regular Audits, both internal and external, will be ongoing in order to address potential vulnerabilities and

continue to ensure accountability and ethical behaviour within MANCOSA.

- Legal Measures, we aim to work closely with law enforcement agencies to take legal action against individuals or organizations involved in the illegal issuance of certificates. Advocate stronger legislation and penalties for those engaged in fraudulent activities related to academic credentials.

By combining these measures, MANCOSA continues to focus on significantly reducing the risk of illegal issuing of certificates and protect the integrity of our academic credentials. Ongoing vigilance and adaptation to new technologies and methods used by fraudsters are also crucial in maintaining the effectiveness of these prevention measures.

10 Policy Review and Revision

This policy should be reviewed and updated based on the circumstances applicable to the Department every 3 years.

11 Approval and Authorisation

The policy follows a structured approval process involving multiple internal stakeholders and leadership levels, ensuring thorough review and institutional input before going into effect.

- Managed and compiled by the Graduation and Certification Manager
- Reviewed and approved by the Academic Director of Graduation and Certification
- Approved by the Academic Verification and Certification Committee
- Approval from the Teaching and Learning Committee
- Registrar office for filing purposes