**DRAFT SADC GUIDELINES FOR CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER**

***PREPARED FOR THE HAQAA INITIATIVE***

***BY***

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*Summary*

*This is the third version of the document originally headed* ***PROPOSED SADC CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER SYSTEM (SADC-CATS).*** *This version of the Paper analyses the various aspects of a proposed SADC Accumulation and Transfer System and seeks to identify some of the key elements that should be included in the formulation of guidelines for the implementation of that system. The Paper is divided into two main parts:* ***Part I: Proposed SADC Accumulation and Transfer System (SADC-CATS)*** and ***Part II: Draft Guidelines for Credit Accumulation and Transfer.*** *The Paper is further divided into sections as follows:*

1. *The conceptual framework*
2. *The regional context of the proposed system*
3. *Rationale for the development of a SADC Credit Accumulation and Transfer System*
4. *Some key principles*

*5. Definition of terms used in programme design*

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*14. The benefits of the proposed SADC-CATS*

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***PART I: PROPOSED SADC CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER SYSTEM (SADC-CATS)***

1. **The conceptual framework**

In proposing guidelines for a Credit Accumulation and Transfer Systemit is appropriate to begin by discussing the conceptual framework of the proposed system. In this paper it has been found necessary to distinguish between what may be called “general higher education terminology” and “qualification and programme level concepts”. The former term refers to broad systemic concepts used in higher education discourse such as “higher education”, “cross-border education”, “accreditation”, “harmonisation”, “Open and Distance Learning” “recognition of prior learning” etc. The latter refers to terms that are used in and relevant to, the process of programme design, such as “programme”, “module” and “credit”.

Admittedly, the distinction made above between the two can be said to be tenuous, but the categorisation helps to clarify the fact that many of the terms that academics have to grapple with in programme design and at FacuIty Board and Departmental levels still need to be defined in precis terms. In this part of the paper we deal with general higher education terminology, while qualification and programme level terms are dealt with in section 5. A good starting point in defining and unpacking general terminology is the Addis Ababa Convention (UNESCO 2014) which defines a good number of the general concepts, as well as some we would put under the category of qualification and programme level terms such as “degree”, “diploma”, and “partial studies”.

As the general terms relevant to the concerns of this paper have been defined at continental level, there is no need to discuss them here. Suffice it to refer readers to the Convention. What might be useful in discussing credit accumulation and transfer is to highlight some of the aims of the Convention (Article 2(1), especially the following:

* Strengthening and promoting inter-regional and international co-operation in the field of recognition of qualifications;
* Defining and putting in place effective quality assurance and accreditation mechanisms at the national, regional and continental levels;
* Facilitating the exchange and greater mobility of students, teachers and researchers of the continent and the diaspora, by the recognition of qualifications delivered by other Parties in order to pursue higher education;
* Contributing to the harmonization of qualifications, taking into account current global trends;
* Furthering the setting up of high-level joint programmes between higher education institutions and supporting the award of joint degrees.

These are important guidelines that must be taken into account in developing a credit accumulation system for the SADC region and other regions of the African continent.

Two related terms that are not specifically defined in the Addis Ababa Convention are “harmonisation” and “integration”. Discussing “harmonisation” in the context of public health, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) (2017) has made a distinction between “regulatory harmonisation” and “regulatory convergence”. Regulatory “harmonisation” has been defined as “the process by which technical guidelines are developed to be uniform across participating authorities”. Regulatory “convergence” on the other hand “represents a process whereby the regulatory requirements across countries or regions become more similar or ‘aligned’ over time as a result of the gradual adoption of internationally recognised technical guidance documents, standards and scientific principles, common or similar practices and products, or adoption of regulatory mechanisms that might be specific to a local legal context but that align with shared principles to achieve a common public health goal”.

The implications of this distinction are that in the harmonisation of the higher education systems, SADC might consider whether to adopt the “regulatory harmonisation” route or the “regulatory convergence” route, or, perhaps a combination. There may be cases when “harmonisation” is appropriate and others where “convergence” might be the route to go. With this in view, the term “harmonisation” is used loosely in this paper to refer to both “harmonisation” and “convergence” as defined by the FDA. It is also worth noting that in discussing the word “harmonise” The SADC Technical Committee on Credit Accumulation and Transfer (TCCA) agreed that the members prefer to speak of “developing a common understanding”. The principle aim is to work towards mechanisms that align with shared principles in order to achieve the common goal of regional integration.

1. **The regional context of the proposed system**

Two questions arise in the context of this discussion. The first is: Should the focus of these proposed guidelines be on the African continent as a whole or on the SADC region? The second is: Integration for what purpose? The first question should be put because there are continental initiatives that apply to all regions of Africa, including the Southern African Development Community (SADC). As already noted, the Addis Ababa Convention is a key reference point for this project. Another key policy document relevant to the discussion is the Pan African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF) two of whose goals are directly relevant to the goals of this paper, namely:

* Implementation of the Addis Ababa Convention
* Developing a system of credits (African Credit Accumulation and Transfer System).

Reference should also be made to the **Tuning Africa** project, which features later in this paper, and to the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation Initiative (HAQAA) which has resulted in the development of this proposal.

The question could be asked, in the light of all this, why focus on guidelines for SADC and not for the continent? More reasons for focussing on SADC as a region will unfold as the paper develops, but suffice it now to cite the following: There are developments that are taking place in the SADC countries that are specific to the region. If this paper is to be useful and effective, it should be aligned to these developments. What this means is that the Concept Paper should have the region as the principal focus, while it at the same time takes into account continental initiatives and developments. This is important because if it is to be efficiently and effectively achieved, the harmonisation of education should be implemented at three levels: the national, the regional and the continental levels. In this way regional integration systems can become effective building blocks for continental integration, just as national integration should facilitate regional integration.

Having addressed the question on the focus, we now need to clarify for ourselves the purpose of regional integration. In the case of the SADC region, the primary goal should be to accelerate economic and social development in addition to furthering the liberation and unity of the peoples of the African continent as conceived of by the founding fathers and mothers of the Organisation of African Unity (now the African Union). In this regard, “The mandate of the SADC Secretariat, as outlined in the SADC Treaty, is the development of strategic expertise and the harmonization of policies and strategies to accelerate regional integration and sustainable development in the region” (AU, 2014). Now regional integration entails developing from national governance to supranational governance. In very simple terms this means the development of rules and regulations that supranational organisations supply.

In order to accelerate regional integration and sustainable development, SADC has developed the ***Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP)*** which outlines a series of “milestones” to be achieved “within the context of the SADC Common Agenda”. These milestones are:

* Free Trade Area
* Customs Union
* Common Market
* Monetary Union, and
* Single Currency.

It is not within the scope of this paper to discuss these milestones. The purpose of mentioning them is to make the point that the harmonisation of higher education should be seen in relation to the vision and goals of SADC. In other words, what role does the harmonisation of higher education play in facilitating the achievement of these milestones?

At this juncture it is pertinent to mention two harmonisation documents: The SADC Protocol on Education and Training and the SADC Qualifications Framework (SADCQF). With regard to the second document, we are informed that SADC Members States have agreed on an implementation model that includes three focus areas, namely:

1. Development and alignment
2. Quality assurance, and
3. Verification.

In this regard, we are advised that the SADC Credit Accumulation and Transfer System will strengthen alignment, and will therefore be regarded as an integral part of SADCQF focus area 1.

1. **Rationale for the development of a SADC Credit Accumulation and Transfer System**

The Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework document (SADCQF), which was previously referred to as the Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF) opens with this statement: “The main goal of the SADC’s integration agenda in human resource development is to increase the availability of educated and highly skilled personnel through equivalent and harmonized education and training systems of Members”. The need for harmonisation is clearly articulated in the SADC Protocol on Education and Training: Article 7 (a) (2), for example, states that “Member States agree to work towards harmonisation, equivalence and eventual standardisation of university entrance requirements”. Article 7 (a) (3) goes on to reinforce this statement in the following words: “Member States agree that in order to prevent costly repetition of courses taken at universities within the Region and in order to contribute towards the mutual recognition of qualifications throughout the Region, universities shall be encouraged to devise mechanisms to facilitate credit transfer from one University to another within the Region”.

Before proceeding with the discussion on harmonisation, it is necessary to clarify one point: The SADC Qualifications Framework has ten levels and applies to qualifications obtained at all levels from the lowest (Level 1) to the highest (Level 10). The statements just quoted from the SADC Protocol on Education and Training refer to university level education. In this regard, it is necessary to explain that while reference may be made to all the levels of the SADCQF, the focus of this paper is on higher education institutions and other institutions that feed into degree granting institutions. In other words, the focus is on the harmonisation of higher education.

Now, the harmonisation of higher education in the region is necessary for a number of reasons. First, member states recognise the role of higher education in the development of the region. The SADC Industrialisation Strategy, to cite one example, will benefit very substantially from the research, innovation and curriculum transformation initiatives of universities. Furthermore, if they are to be regarded as major players in regional integration, higher education institutions must realise the need for them to participate effectively in the achievement of the milestones referred to above. The role of higher education in this regard will be enhanced if the universities of the region have a common understanding and similar measures of quality in research and programme design and graduate training.

An important reason for harmonising is that SADC is probably one of the African regions with the most diverse education systems on the continent. This is largely due to the different colonial histories of the member states. In this regard, harmonisation will in part entail trying to reconcile education systems that have developed from the French, Portuguese and British systems. To make matters worse, there are some major variations even within English language member states. For example, in some of these states students are admitted into university after four years of secondary education (and are required to do a preliminary year at university). In South Africa the minimum requirement is Matriculation (which is five years of secondary and high school); while in Zimbabwe the requirement is six years of secondary and high school. Thus a common language of international communication is not necessarily an indication of a harmonised education system.

Lastly, it has come to light that in some countries there is no agreed system of credit transfer among institutions of higher learning in the same country, which makes student mobility very difficult, even in the same country! Zimbabwe, for instance, only started working on a common credit accumulation and transfer system in 2016. It is most likely that other SADC countries have similar problems at national level.

***In view of the above, it is hoped that the research project that is being conducted by the Research Team of the SADC/HAQAA Group will shed more light on this problematic.***

The Qualifications Framework document states, “The SADC RQF will recognise the variety of credits awarded by Member States and develop a mechanism that will allow for comparability and transfer. This may ultimately evolve into a Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) system…” The production of the SADC-CATS document is based on the premise that a CATS system is not only a logical development within the implementation of the SADCQF, but that if the harmonisation of higher education is to be accelerated, a regional CATS needs to be put in place as a matter of urgency.

The greater part of this paper will attempt to explain how we can develop a CATS system that meets the requirements of the region.

1. **Some key principles**

Developing a Credit Accumulation and Transfer System demands that there be a common understanding of the following principles:

1. In view of the fact that credit accumulation and transfer is made with reference to qualifications, programmes and “courses”, it is important to have a common understanding and definition of such terms as “qualification”, “programme”, “module”, “course” etc. The relevant terms are defined in the next section of this paper.
2. Developing a national or regional credit accumulation and transfer system requires that the same approach to the calculation of credits be used. It would be invidious to use the **credit hour** approach and the **notional study hours** approach in the same country or region. The difference between these approaches will be explained later.
3. By developing a credit accumulation and transfer system we are not necessarily talking about a ***uniform*** system with exactly the same number of credits and hours for all the units of learning involved and for all the programmes in question. What we are talking about is a ***common system*** which allows reasonable variations within prescribed parameters so that programmes offered by different institutions and in different countries can speak to one another in terms of credits and learning hours. A uniform system can kill initiative and innovation whereas a common system gives institutions the freedom to experiment and innovate within the agreed broad parameters.
4. Because the system proposed here is intended to serve a whole region, this concept paper will only outline broad principles so as to allow different countries and different institutions the freedom and flexibility to use the system according to their needs - provided the broad system explained in this paper are adhered to.
5. A credit accumulation and transfer system must be underpinned by the need to enhance and promote ***quality*** in programme design***.*** There is no point in agreeing on a system that does not result in quality programmes and quality graduates. In this regard, a high quality programme should not just be a haphazard accumulation of the appropriate number of credits, but should be characterised by *coherence*, *depth* and a *logical structure.*
6. **Clarification and definition of terms**

As pointed out in section 1 of this paper, most of the relevant “general terms” are defined in the Addis Ababa Convention. Some of what we have called “qualification and programme design concepts” are also clarified in the Convention. For the sake of clarity, concepts or terms such as “qualification” and “partial studies” which are defined in the Convention are included in the list of definitions below. It is necessary, for example, to define “programme” side by side with the definition of “qualification” in order to make the distinction between them very clear. We begin with the term “Partial studies”.

***Partial studies:*** This is defined in the Addis Ababa Convention as follows: “Education whose duration or content is incomplete according to the regulations and rules of the institution, and which, not having resulted in the conferral of a qualification, has been subjected to an evaluation and a validation, in accordance with the regulations and rules of the institution concerned”.

***Qualification in higher education:*** The Addis Ababa Convention defines this as “Any degree, diploma or other certificate issued by an accredited higher education institution attesting the successful completion of an approved higher education programme”. In our terms,a qualification can be described as the end product of the student’s learning efforts. It has been defined as “the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by an accredited institution” (CHE, 2013, 12). A student who has followed a purposely planned and organised programme of study is awarded the degree, diploma or other qualification as recognition of the fact that he/she has the intellectual, skill and competency requirements of the programme.

***Programme:*** A programme is a structured set of learning experiences designed to enable learners to achieve the desired qualification and the requisite knowledge, skills and abilities. A programme leads to a qualification and is structured according to units of learning.

***Module:*** The units of learning referred to above are called modules in a credit rating system. Modules are the building blocks of a programme. A programme is usually made up of *core modules* (or compulsory courses) and *electives (*from which students are free to choose some and leave out some), and these together constitute what in some systems is called *the minimum body of knowledge* or curriculum benchmarks. In some systems *core modules* may include *fundamentals* or those modules that are not only compulsory but are deemed to give each discipline its defining characteristics.

***Course:*** A discussion of the word *course* is appropriate at this point. In traditional parlance, what are called modules in this paper are referred to as “courses”. Thus, a History programme is said to be made up of a number of courses. Confusion can however arise in the sense that the whole programme can also be referred to as a course. Consequently, the said History “course” can be said to be made up of a number of “courses”, so that the word “course” refers to both the whole and the parts. The use of the terms “programme” and “module” avoids this ambiguity.

***Credit and credit weighting (or credit rating):***  Paraphrasing Kumar (2016) we can define a credit as “the basic unit of measurement that counts towards the award of a qualification”. In the credit system units of learning such as modules are allocated credits. Credit weighting or credit rating is the numerical value given to a module. The value is expressed in terms of the number of credits allocated to each module that forms part of a programme. In the USA, a credit is also referred to as a “credit hour”. The methods used to calculate credits are discussed below.

***National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and Regional Qualifications Framework (RQF)***: The Addis Ababa Convention defines ***Qualifications Frameworks*** as “Systems for classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality assured qualifications”. In terms of this paper we are dealing with both National Qualifications Frameworks and the SADC Qualifications Framework to which national ones should be aligned. Apart from the ten levels, the Regional Qualifications Framework is also characterised by the level descriptors for each level. We will get more insight into the present status of National Qualifications Frameworks in SADC when the research project that is associated with this Draft Guidelines document has been completed. For the purpose of this paper it is appropriate to state that in matters of programme design and credit transfer a Qualifications Framework

* Determines the level of knowledge, skill and competencies required for each qualification at every level from the lowest certificate to doctoral level certificates.
* Deals with issues of articulation between qualification types; provides an explanation of the link between qualifications and actual skills needs of the workplace; and facilitates comparability of programmes.
* Helps determine the number of credits required for each qualification.

***Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS):*** Credit accumulation refers to the adding up of credits earned by a student. Credits may be accumulated from the same programme or from different programmes or even from different institutions if they are regarded by the awarding institution as relevant to the programme in question and contributing to the achievement of the relevant qualification.

The Credit Accumulation and Transfer System of a nation or region has been defined as “the process whereby a student’s achievements are recognised and contribute to further learning even if the student has not achieved a qualification” (CHE, 2013, 16). In terms of this, any credits earned by a student can contribute to the completion of a qualification in the same institution, or in a different institution in the same country or across the borders of the country if there is mutual recognition of the value and relevance of the credits in question between the countries concerned. This clearly facilitates student mobility provided there is a common approach to credit weighting or the equivalences between different systems of the institutions concerned have been worked out. This takes us to the approaches to credit weighting.

1. **Approaches to credit weighting**

The **Tuning Africa Phase II** project (Tuning Academy, 2016, 119 -124) has made a survey of the state of the use of credits in African higher education institutions and made a number of informative observations, including the following:

* The credit system has been known in the African higher education system for many years.
* Credit does not have the same value in all the countries and regions (Anglo-phone and Franco-phone credit systems differ).
* There is currently no credit transfer system among institutions in Africa.
* The load of credit is not comparable among the institutions in Africa.

The study makes a number of recommendations. Here we highlight only the following that are relevant to the proposed SADC system and guidelines:

* There is need [sic. a need] to have a common agreement on the definition and value of credit in the African higher education system in order to promote transferability and comparability.
* There is need for agreement on the workload of a credit unit.
* There is need to agree on number of credit units for each year for different programs (i.e. Bachelors, Maters and Doctorate).
* There is need for a harmonized continental credit system that balances Anglo-phone and Franco-phone countries.

The purpose of this paper is, first, to propose a Credit Accumulation and Transfer System and second, to suggest draft guidelines for the implementation of that system for one of the regions of the continent, namely, the Southern African Development Community (SADC). To propose such a system for the region we must begin by clarifying the methods that are used to allocate credits to modules and programmes.

There are two approaches to credit weighting or the calculation of credits that are commonly used in the SADC region and other countries. These are ***the Credit Hour Approach*** and ***the Notional Study Hours Approach.*** Each approach is briefly described below.

1. ***The credit hour approach***

* The credit hour approach is based on the number of “contact hours” per week and per semester. This should include any time that the lecturer spends with students such as lecture time and laboratory time.
* A credit hour is normally based on the number of contact hours per week.
* As there are normally 15 weeks in a semester, a module that is allocated one (1) contact hour per week per semester is referred to as a one credit module. Similarly, a 3 credit module represents three hours of contact time per week for 15 weeks; and a 4 credit module represents 4 hours of contact time per week for 15 weeks.
* *It should be noted that in this approach the time for private study, research, and the writing of assignments and examinations is not included in the calculation.*

The credit hour approach is widely used in the United States of America where credits are usually referred to as “credit hours”. A standard full-time load in the U.S. is usually 30 credit hours per year. According to Alexander Pop (2016), in order to graduate with a degree, students must typically complete:

* 120 -130 credit hours for Bachelor’s degree, and
* 30 – 64 credit hours for Master’s degree.

The **Tuning Africa Phase II** project (Tuning Academy 2016, 119 ff) has established that many countries in North, West, Central and East Africa use contact hours to measure credit. However, the situation regarding credit hours per semester and per year is not as clear as the explanation just given in respect of the U.S. because in the African countries “the credit load per year varies from institution to institution and from country to country” (122). As noted above, credit does not have the same value in all the countries and regions; Anglo-phone and Franco-phone credit systems differ; and consequently the load or value of a credit is not comparable among institutions in Africa (123).

1. ***The notional study hours approach***

The basic principles of the notional study hours approach are as follows:

* Notional study hours (also referred to as “learning hours”) represent an estimate of the time spent by an average full time equivalent student to master a unit of learning.
* In countries such as Namibia, South Africa, Tanzania and the United Kingdom (England, Wales and Northern Ireland) it has been stipulated that 10 notional study hours are worth one credit. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) has also used this approach in discussing credit accumulation and transfer systems (Tuck, 2007).
* *In this approach, the hours referred to here include all the learning activities of the student, inclusive of contact time, (lecture time), private study, research, assignment writing and examinations.*
* The following assumptions are made: The average student accumulates 8 study hours per day. This amounts to a 40-hour week. Undergraduate programmes are generally based on a 30-week full-time academic year. At 40 hours per week this amounts to 1200 hours per year.
* As 10 notional study hours amount to one credit, a year’s undergraduate programme is worth 120 credits. Masters’ and Doctoral qualifications assume a 45-week full-time academic year, with students earning 180 credits per year.
* It must be noted that the 1200 hours and 120 credits per year are the absolute minimums that must be met with institutions being free to go above these minimums. The determining factor is whether students will be able to cope with the workload that results from the benchmarks used. In this regard, the maximum number of learning hours and credits stipulated by an institution for any programme must take this factor into account.
* The Tuning Africa Phase II project states that most countries in Southern Africa use notional study hours (121).

1. **Which approach for the SADC community?**

It is arguable that neither of the two approaches to credit weighting is fully scientific and fool-proof. The main difference between the two approaches is that the credit hour approach is based on contact hours, on the lecture or laboratory time that the professor spends with students; while the notional study hours approach includes all the learning activities of the student. The credit hour approach is lecturer-centred; the notional study hours approach is student-centred.

While each approach is valid in its own way, using the two side by side in the same country or region is likely to present challenges from the point of view of credit accumulation and transfer because the problem of not having apples to compare with the other apples would arise. First, in calculating credits, the two approaches use different elements, with only the contact time (lecture or laboratory time) being the only element in common. Second, there is a huge difference in the number of credits accumulated. For example, a student who has done a three year degree using the credit hour approach in the U.S. is expected to have accumulated a minimum of 120 credits to get the degree; whereas one who has done a three year degree in the SADC region or in the United Kingdom is at the moment expected to have completed a minimum of 360 credits – staggering difference of 240 credits!

What might be useful and workable for the African continent is for each region to adopt the one or the other of the two approaches with the relevant body, such as the African Quality Assurance Network (AfriQAN), working out the equivalences between the credits used by regions that use the credit hour approach and those that use the notional study hours approach. This would facilitate student mobility between different regions.

In the case of the SADC region, the experience of Zimbabwean universities may perhaps be pertinent here. When this matter came up for discussion in 2016, the vast majority of the institutions in that country,i.e. fourteen(14) universities were using the credit hour approach; while only one (1) was using the notional study hours approach. After debating the matter in groups and in plenary, the universities decided as a group to go for the notional study hours approach for the following, among other reasons:

* A number of SADC countries had already adopted the notional study hours approach, and this appeared to be the way the region was moving, and Zimbabwe wanted to be in line with the rest of the region.
* With the European Higher Education Area adopting the notional study hours approach (though weighting credits rather differently) it appeared that more and more countries were now going for this approach.
* The fact that the notional study hours approach is student-centred was seen to be a progressive development which recognises that learning also takes place outside contact time.
* The approach was seen to be applicable to different modes of delivery, including open and distance learning, online and blended modes.

These would seem to be very strong reasons for the SADC Region to adopt the notional study hours approach to credit weighting, and consequently the rest of this paper assumes that the proposed SADC Credit Accumulation and Transfer System will be based on the notional study hours approach.

1. **How study hours translate into credits**

In this section we give examples of how the number of study hours translates into the number of credits for different qualifications. On the basis of the explanation given in item 6(b) above, it is possible to summarize the relationship between the minimum number of study hours and the minimum number of credits in the qualifications cited below. In each case the exit level (in terms of the SADCQF) of the qualification in question is indicated in brackets. However, it is understood that for many Bachelors’ programmes the constituent modules may be taken at different levels with some at, say, level 6, some at level 7 and some at level 8, in accordance with the regulations of the particular institution or country. In the examples cited below, the assumption is that for undergraduate programmes the average student works for a minimum average of 1200 hours per year, while the Masters’ student puts in a minimum average of 1800 hours of work per year. Translated into credits we get the following results, some of which have been taken from the South African system (DoE, 2007):

1. A one year Higher Certificate (RQF Level 5): 1200 notional study hours = 120 credits.
2. A three year Bachelors’ Degree (RQF Level 7): 3600 notional study hours = 360 credits.
3. A four year Bachelors’ Degree (RQF Level 8): 4800 notional study hours = 480 credits.
4. A five year Bachelor’s Degree (RQF Level 9): 6000 notional study hours = 600 credits.
5. A two year Masters’ Degree (RQF Level 9): 3600 notional study hours = 360 credits.

It is important to emphasize, once again, that the figures given here in terms of both hours and credits are minimums or minima. Some students will put in more time and more credits in the same amount of time. *As indicated in 6(b) above, it is necessary for each institution (or perhaps each country) to determine appropriate minima and maxima in accordance with the requirements of each discipline, and in line with the load that the average student can reasonably carry in a twelve month period –* ***provided the internationally agreed minimum of 1200 hours and 120 credits per year is observed.*** In this regard, a maximum of, say, 1500 – 1800 hours per year for undergraduate programmes could be considered.

1. **Elements that should be included in the calculation of credits**

One of the difficulties of using the notional study hours approach to credit weighting is determining what elements should be included in calculating credits and what value should be attached to such elements as self-directed learning, tutorials and field work. Self-directed learning, in particular, is difficult to measure as there is no obvious proof of the student having actually done the work. Taking into account the fact that *all student learning activities* must be included in the calculation of credits, the following is advisable as a way of dealing with the problem:

* It is advisable to appoint a technical committee of experts to work out the number of credits that should be allocated to lectures, tutorials, self-directed study, continuous assessment etc.
* It is advisable to give self-directed learning a low rating in terms of the number of credits allocated to it.

With regard to the elements included in the calculation, one quality assurance agency (ZIMCHE, 2016) has listed the following:

* Lectures
* Tutorials
* Practical work
* Seminars
* Projects
* Field work
* Self-directed learning
* Assessment.

1. **Intended learning outcomes (ILOs)**

Credits give the numerical value of a module or a component of a module. They give an indication of whether a qualification awarded by an institution is comparable to a similar qualification awarded by another institution. But the quality of a module or programme cannot be measured in terms of the number of credits only. There are at least three other elements that help to define the quality of a module or programme and consequently the quality of the qualification: These three are the Intended Learning Outcomes, the Minimum Body of Knowledge, and the Assessment Method. This section briefly outlines what is meant by Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs).

In terms of the outcomes approach to education, ***outcomes*** are ***goals*** which students are expected to achieve. By the end of each educational experience, be it a practical, a module or a programme, each student is expected to have achieved the specified goals. In designing higher education programmes, the goals are defined in terms of three elements, i.e. knowledge, skills and competencies (in some systems competencies are called “abilities”). Where National Qualifications Frameworks have been developed, the expected outcomes are explained in terms of level descriptors. SADC has developed descriptors for the ten levels of the SADCQF which will be attached to these Draft Guidelines as Annexure A. Such descriptors should ideally be complemented by the lists developed by the Tuning Africa Project (Annexure B).

In view of the above, when academics are designing programmes they should bear in mind what the learner is expected to achieve. In deciding on what learners are expected to achieve we should take into account the needs of society. In thinking about the needs of society we are, among other things, talking about the needs of employers. Awareness of the needs of employers will translate into the needs of the student as the graduates we produce in our universities must meet the requirement for ***fitness for purpose graduates,*** i.e. graduates who are easily employable because their training relates to the requirements of the job market. In today’s society and in our developing economies where there are not enough jobs for everybody, graduates should be trained not only to be employable, but to also have the potential to create employment for themselves and for others. In other words, they should be “job creators”.

To meet the requirement for employability and job creation, graduates should be trained to have the requisite ***Knowledge, Skills*** and ***Competencies (KSCs)*** that are required in the job market. These need to be identified in the determination of curriculum content and the related teaching and learning strategies. These KSCs can be defined at two levels – generic and subject specific. At the generic level we are looking at KSCs that are necessary for all graduates to acquire (or graduates in a cluster of subjects such as Engineering); and at the subject specific level we are concerned about those KSCs that apply to a specific discipline such as Crop Science, Civil Engineering or English Language.

An example of generic competencies has been given by the Tuning Africa Project (Onana et al, 2014). The Project dealt with five groups of disciplines: Agricultural Sciences, Civil Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Medicine and Teacher Education. The five Subject Area Groups agreed on 18 generic competencies which an African Bachelors’ degree holder is expected to possess. These are attached to this paper as Annexure B. The thing to note about the outcome of this particular Tuning Africa Project is that there was no reference to credits, but the identified competencies provide a useful guide. Phase II of the project provides some useful information and guidelines as it compares subject specific competencies of actual programmes with competencies identified by Tuning Africa.

It is necessary to emphasize that in talking about Intended Learning Outcomes we are highlighting the need to transform the university curriculum so that we can produce graduates who will be able to participate effectively in the industrialisation and the social and economic transformation of our countries. Intended Learning Outcomes challenge curriculum developers to ask the question: What kind of graduates do we want to produce in our universities? If the Regional Strategic Development Plan and the SADC Industrialisation Strategy are going to be realized, our universities must produce graduates who are capable of grappling with the problems of underdevelopment and of helping to solve them.

1. **Minimum body of knowledge (MBK)**

Minimum bodies of knowledge are ***curriculum benchmarks.*** The Minimum Body of Knowledge (MBK) of any discipline is what is agreed by specialists in the field to be the minimum that a programme should cover in order for that programme to be accepted as one that is equivalent to similar programmes in reputable institutions. There have been instances when graduates who have done very well in a three year programme at one institution have applied to be admitted for postgraduate studies in another institution. On assessing the work done by the applicants, the latter institution concluded that the work covered by the applicants was equivalent to work covered at the end of Second Year, not at the end of Third Year.

The example given above shows the discrepancies that can be in a system if no curriculum benchmarks have been set by means of agreeing on minimum bodies of knowledge at specified levels and standards for different disciplines. Agreement on minimum bodies of knowledge helps to enhance quality, and it is useful for each country and eventually the region to work on such curriculum benchmarks. This is a typical case where SADC might need to consider whether to adopt the “harmonisation” or “convergence” route, or a combination, as discussed in section 1 of this paper. For professional qualifications such as Law, Medicine and Engineering, the relevant professional bodies such as Medical and Dental Professions Councils, Legal Councils and Engineering Societies, should be involved in determining minimum bodies of knowledge.

At regional level, the comparison of the content of programmes should be done in relation to the Regional Qualifications Framework level descriptors which provide guidelines on the differences in complexity between the different levels of the Framework. In other words, determining the minimum body of knowledge should not consist in a simple comparison of content only, but should also entail a determination of the level of complexity at which the content is taught. For example, where the same topic is taught at both level 6 and level 7 of the Framework, we would expect the teaching and learning of the topic at level 7 to entail more depth and greater complexity.

1. **Assessment policy and practice**

Under the notional study hours approach to credit rating, no learner should be awarded a qualification until he /she has completed the qualification and met the requirements of the qualification. There should be a way of ensuring that the Intended Learning Outcomes of any programme or module have been achieved. This entails assessing learning achievement. What this means is that every institution that is part of the system must have a sound assessment policy and practice.

Student assessment must include the following, among other practices:

* Assessment methods must be fair, transparent and credible.
* There should be a policy on the ratio between course work (continuous assessment) and the examination.
* Examinations must be a fair assessment of what has been taught.
* There should be a good administration system to minimise the possible effects of fraud, plagiarism and cheating on the part of students; and unfairness, favouritism and the leaking of examination papers on the part of staff.
* To ensure fairness and objectivity in marking, universities have traditionally used second marking /moderation and external examination. These practices would still be applicable and useful under the proposed SADC-Credit Accumulation and Transfer System.

1. **Practical application of the proposed SADC-CATS**

Now that we have discussed the different dimensions of the credit accumulation and transfer, we should briefly comment on how the principles of the CAT system summarised in section 4 of this paper can be implemented.

* First, the learner accumulates credits when he/she acquires credits at the same level or at different levels such as, say, level 6, level 7 and level 8 of the Regional Qualifications Framework.
* Second, credit transfer in the proposed system would mean transferring credits horizontally within the same institution (where a student transfers from one programme to another); or horizontally between institutions in the same country or across the borders of the country.
* Credit transfer can also take place vertically where a student wants to transfer to a higher level within the same institution or between institutions in the same country or across the borders of the country.
* In view of what has just been said in this section, it becomes clear that implemented in this way, the proposed SADC-CATS facilitates student mobility within countries and between institutions in different countries of the region.
* However, there cannot be a situation where students seek to transfer credits horizontally or vertically willy-nilly without some guiding principles. Ideally, each member state should have an overarching CAT policy that guides the CAT policies of institutions. (Some countries may wish to adopt the SADC-CATS when this is in place.) For student mobility to take place in an orderly and systematic fashion, each institution will have to develop a policy that stipulates what the institution expects from students transferring from other institutions in the region. That policy would have to be aligned to the national policy. The policy could also include guidelines for students from outside the region to facilitate cooperation with overseas institutions.
* Some guidelines developed at regional or continental level would be useful to some institutions.

1. **The benefits of the proposed SADC-CATS**

The adoption and successful implementation of the proposed system would have the following benefits:

* It would facilitate greater trust and better movement of students within the SADC region, and in that way promote staff mobility and cooperation between higher education institutions in Southern Africa.
* It would facilitate greater trust and better movement of students from the international community into the SADC region and vice-versa. For purposes of promoting internationalisation and the movement of students from one African region to another, and from SADC to Europe and America, equivalences such as the following could be worked out:

1 SADC Credit = 1 UK Credit

2 SADC Credits = 1 ECTS Credit

1.67 ECTS Credits = 1.00 US Credit

Therefore 3.34 SADC Credits = 1 US Credit (or 3 SADC Credits = I US Credit).

* The proposed system would resonate well with the systems of countries that use the same or similar systems. A case in point is the European Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ECTS) of the European Higher Education Area as just shown above. Where the proposed SADC-CATS would require a minimum of 120 credits per year, the equivalent ECTS load is 60 credits per year, which simply means two SADC-CATS credits will be equal to one ECTS credit. The principle of notional study hours is the same, and so the two systems would work well together, promoting student and staff mobility between Southern Africa and countries of the European Higher Education Area. The credit system used in the United Kingdom (with special reference to England, Wales and Northern Ireland and not Scotland) is identical to the proposed SADC system.
* The adoption and successful implementation of the proposed SADC-CATS would constitute a major positive outcome of the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation Initiative (HAQAA), and would be an effective way of promoting the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF).

## **PART II: DRAFT GUIDELINES FOR CREDIT ACCUMULATION AND TRANSFER**

1. **Rationale for guidelines on Credit Accumulation and Transfer**

This part of the paper flows from the proposed system and the feedback received from SADC structures and higher education institutions. Substantial and detailed comments on the proposed SADC-CATS document were received from the Chairman of the SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA). This was in addition to feedback received from the members of the TCCA when the document was presented to them in their meeting in Johannesburg. Submissions from higher education institutions came from Botswana, Lesotho, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

From the feedback received from SADC and HEIs, it became clear that versions 1 and 2 of the Concept Paper were not complete as they left the implementation issue open ended. One comment received was that the document “provides no recommended guidelines on what are the most important elements to have in an institutional CATS policy in order to ensure that it meets regional integration goals”. Some guidelines are therefore given and it is suggested that the guidelines proposed in this version of the document form part of the research that is going to be conducted by the Research Team of the SADC HAQAA Group. The Research Team could solicit comments on these proposed guidelines.

1. **Draft Guidelines for institutional implementation of the system**
2. All higher education institutions in the SADC Region shall use the notional study hours approach to credit weighting, with 10 notional study hours accounting for 1 credit, and 120 credits being the minimum annual load for students at undergraduate level (over a period of 30 weeks), while for Masters’ students the minimum annual load (over 45 weeks) is 180 credits. (Determination of the study hours and credit weighting for PhD level qualifications needs further consultation.)
3. Higher education institutions (HEIs) shall design programmes in line with the SADCQF level descriptors.
4. The calculation of credits shall include all the learning activities of the student, inclusive of the following elements where applicable:

* Lectures
* Tutorials
* Practical work
* Seminars
* Projects
* Field work
* Self-directed learning
* Assessment.

1. The enhancement of quality shall be a guiding principle in the designing, teaching and assessment of programmes and modules. In this regard all programmes (and modules wherever applicable) should show evidence of the following:

* Specification of Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)
* Meeting curriculum benchmarks in terms of the Minimum Body of Knowledge (MBK) for the particular discipline
* Stipulation of the required minimum number of credits
* Application of a sound assessment policy and practice.

1. Every programme and module shall be characterised by the qualities of relevance, depth, coherence and a logical structure. A programme shall have rules of combination showing both core modules and electives and the order and level at which they should be taken.
2. In designing programmes HEIs shall be guided by the definition of terms used in the Addis Ababa Convention of 2014, and the definition of qualification and programme level concepts as used in this paper, provided that in certain cases, and especially in the initial period of implementing the regional system, some flexibility may be allowed in order to take into account special national circumstances and characteristics.
3. The award of a qualification must be based on successful completion of the relevant programme, and this includes completion of all core modules and meeting the minimum credit requirements for the qualification.
4. The relevant professional bodies shall be involved or consulted in the development of programmes for professional qualifications.
5. Every institution shall have a Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS) that is aligned to the national CATS, with the national CATS being aligned to the SADC-CATS. The CATS of institutions shall have admission rules that include the element of Recognition of Prior Learning as defined in the Addis Ababa Convention.
6. Quality Assurance personnel of all higher education institutions shall be adequately trained to enable them to lead their institutions competently and effectively in the implementation of the SADC-CATS.
7. **Actions to facilitate successful implementation of the system**

The following recommendations are made so as to ensure that the project is successfully implemented:

1. Funding should be provided to enable the Research Team of the SADC HAQAA Group to carry out the research project that has been started.
2. The SADC HAQAA Group should be converted into a SAQAN Technical Committee on the Harmonisation of Higher Education in the Region with the project being submitted to the SADC structures as a SAQAN project.
3. SADC should appeal to SADC Member States to ratify the Addis Ababa Convention (the Convention itself needs to updated so as to include qualification and programme level terms in its list of definitions).
4. SADC should urge those Member States that have not yet finalised the development of National Qualifications Frameworks to expedite the process and align the Frameworks to the SADCQF.
5. The SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation (TCCA) is advised to adopt a cautious future-looking approach to the implementation of the SADC-CATS. Due consideration should be given to the distinction made between “regulatory harmonisation” and “regulatory convergence”, and to the possibility of adopting a flexible approach which allows the application of the one or the other approach where appropriate.
6. It must be made clear to higher education institutions that the approach proposed in this document is not a ***uniform*** one, but a ***common*** approach which allows individual institutions the flexibility and freedom to innovate and experiment within agreed parameters.
7. It is essential that all interested parties be consulted. Also important is the need to have the document quickly translated into Portuguese and French.
8. **Proposed plan of action for the SADC HAQAA Group and SAQAN**

After the conclusion of the HAQAA Course in Accra, it is recommended that the following steps be taken:

1. The Group should request that it be constituted as the SAQAN Technical Committee on the Harmonisation of Higher Education in SADC. In this capacity the Committee could be authorised to work collaboratively with the TUNING Group.
2. The Research Team should source funds to enable it to carry out and conclude the research project it has started. This should ideally include consultation with higher education institutions in SADC Lusophone and Francophone countries and in other countries of the region where the Concept Paper may not have been submitted. It should also include investigation on appropriate credit weighting for PhD level qualifications, considering that many students who go to study in countries other their own (e.g. South Africa) go there seeking to pursue PhD studies.
3. While the research is being conducted, the document should in the meantime be submitted to Ministries of Higher Education for comment.
4. The SADC-CATS document should be finalised in the light of the research findings of the Research Team.
5. The document is then submitted to the SADC Secretariat and the SADC Technical Committee on Certification and Accreditation for formal adoption and implementation.

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**Annexures**

Annexure A: *The SADC Regional Qualifications Framework* (Authorisation still to be sought from the TCCA).

Annexure B: *Generic Competences Developed by the Tuning Africa Project*

1. Ability for conceptual thinking, analysis and synthesis.
2. Professionalism, ethical values and commitment to Ubuntu (respect for the well-being and dignity of fellow human beings).
3. Capacity for critical evaluation and self-awareness.
4. Ability to translate knowledge into practice.
5. Objective decision-making and practical cost-effective problem solving.
6. Capacity to use innovative and appropriate technologies.
7. Ability to communicate effectively in both the official/national and the local languages.
8. Ability to learn how to learn and capacity for lifelong learning.
9. Flexibility, adaptability and ability to anticipate and respond to new situations.
10. Ability for creative and innovative thinking.
11. Leadership, management and teamwork skills.
12. Communication and interpersonal skills.
13. Environmental and economic consciousness.
14. Ability to work in an intra- and intercultural and/or international context.
15. Ability to work independently.
16. Ability to evaluate, review and enhance quality.
17. Self-confidence, entrepreneurial spirit and skills.
18. Commitment to preserve African identity and cultural heritage.