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ESHEC
ESWATINI HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL
Ensuring relevance & excellence

ESWATINI HIGHER EDUCATION COUNCIL

QUALITY

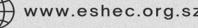# Institutional Assessment Standards and Guidelines

These Institutional Review Standards and Guidelines were developed with the support of the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), Vancouver, Canada. COL is an intergovernmental organisation created by Commonwealth Heads of Government to promote the development and sharing of open learning and distance education knowledge, resources and technologies

PREAMBLE BY THE DIRECTOR MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING

The Eswatini Higher Education Council (ESHEC), under the mandate of the Higher Education Act of 2013, is tasked with assessing the internal quality assurance systems of all higher education institutions in Eswatini. This process provides critical insights into the quality of education nationwide, ensuring that institutions comply with established standards and are committed to continual improvement.

These Institutional Review Standards and Guidelines have been developed to provide a framework that supports institutions in enhancing their quality assurance mechanisms. The standards and guidelines apply to all higher education institutions, including online education providers, regardless of size, mode of delivery, or type of institution.

The developmental assessment process outlined in these guidelines aims to foster continuous improvement and promote excellence. While the standards and guidelines set minimum standards, institutions are encouraged to take full responsibility for their internal quality assurance processes and strive for higher quality levels beyond these foundational requirements.

The primary goals of the standards and guidelines are:

- To guide internal and external institutional reviews by ESHEC, ensuring ongoing performance improvement and achieving high standards.
- To facilitate the development and strengthening of internal quality assurance (IQA) systems in institutions.
- Determine the effectiveness of an institution's internal quality assurance (IQA) systems, policies, and procedures in providing high-quality higher education.
- To form the basis for capacity-building initiatives that enable institutions to deliver impactful, high-quality education.
- Promote continuous, systematic, and measurable improvement in the student experience, focusing on critical academic functions: teaching, learning, research, community engagement and innovation
- Assess the governance and financial management systems of institutions.
- Reinforce the responsibility of institutions to manage and continuously improve their internal quality management systems.

Quality guidelines play a crucial role in differentiating the levels of quality assurance among institutions while providing essential benchmarks for continuous improvement. Their value lies in the extent to which institutions actively engage with them for self-improvement. Institutions are encouraged to adopt a proactive approach, using these guidelines to assess their strengths and weaknesses and to develop targeted improvement strategies.

Institutions can foster a quality culture by taking ownership of these standards and guidelines and integrating them into daily operations. While adequate quality assurance does require dedicated resources, much can be achieved by maximising existing ones. Institutions must engage all stakeholders in understanding the quality agenda and the role these standards play in achieving institutional goals. Through self-reflection and external assessment, institutions can create a sustainable culture of quality that enhances teaching, learning, and research, ultimately advancing the higher education landscape in Eswatini.

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Dr Tholakele C. Mngometulu
The Director Ministry of Education and Training

FOREWORD BY ESHEC BOARD CHAIRPERSON

It is with great pride that we present these revised Institutional Review Standards and Guidelines, which reflect our collective commitment to enhancing the quality and relevance of higher education in Eswatini. This revision has been made possible through the dedicated collaboration between the Eswatini Higher Education Council (ESHEC) and the Commonwealth of Learning (COL), an organisation renowned for its global contributions to open and distance learning.

The standards and guidelines have been updated to align with international best practices and the evolving needs of the higher education sector, especially in the growing importance of online learning. They provide a comprehensive framework to support institutions in improving their governance, internal quality assurance systems, programme design, and infrastructure.

I want to thank the COL team, the expert consultants, and all stakeholders who participated in the review process. Their input has been invaluable in ensuring the standards and guidelines are practical and forward-looking. These standards and guidelines are a testament to our shared vision of fostering excellence in higher education and ensuring that Eswatini's institutions remain competitive on a global scale.

I encourage all institutions to adopt these standards and guidelines in their operational and academic practices. By doing so, we will collectively raise the standard of higher education in Eswatini, ensuring that our graduates are well-equipped to contribute meaningfully to the nation's development.

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Ms. Makhosazana Madondo
ESHEC Board Chairperson

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Accreditation	Accreditation is a formal decision on the quality of a higher education institution, programmes, or facilities based on evidence that qualification framework levels and subject standards are compatible and in compliance with approved Quality Assurance Standards (QAS), usually valid for a limited period (CAT Policy, 2020).
Artificial Intelligence (AI)	Artificial Intelligence (AI) refers to the simulation of human intelligence processes by computer systems. AI encompasses various techniques, approaches, and technologies, including machine learning, natural language processing, computer vision, robotics, expert systems, and more. These techniques enable AI systems to perform tasks that typically require human intelligence, such as understanding natural language, recognising patterns in data, making decisions, and solving complex problems.
Blended Learning	Blended learning, also known as hybrid learning, is a teaching and learning approach that combines traditional face-to-face instruction with online learning activities. In a blended learning environment, learners engage in a mix of in-person classroom sessions and online learning experiences. What learners do independently is complementary to what they do in a face-to-face environment—there is a blend of out-of-class and in-class learning activities.
Continuous Professional Development (CPD	Continuous Professional Development (CPD) refers to ongoing learning and skills development in which individuals maintain and enhance their

	professional competence throughout their careers. It is a structured approach to learning that helps professionals stay up to date with advancements in their field, adapt to changes in their industry, and improve their performance.
Distance Learning	Distance learning refers to a mode of provision in which learners and instructors are separated by physical distance, and instruction is delivered through various technological means rather than in traditional face-to-face settings. Distance learning allows individuals to pursue education and training without being physically present in a traditional classroom setting, offering flexibility in terms of time, location, and pace of learning.
Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen- AI)	Generative Artificial Intelligence (Generative AI) **is** a branch of artificial intelligence focused on creating models and algorithms capable of generating new content that resembles human-created data. This can include generating images, text, audio, video, and other forms of data.
Guidelines	Guidelines are established quality criteria or benchmarks institutions strive to meet to ensure a programme's effectiveness, consistency, and quality. Guidelines describe how standards linked to them may be achieved (ASG-QA).
Institutional Assessment	Institutional Assessment refers to an external quality review process of an institution's quality management system and its constituent elements. Such a review systematically and objectively evaluates the system's appropriateness, coherence and effectiveness in assuring the quality of institutional delivery of higher education's

	core functions (Council for Higher Education, South Africa).
Internal quality assurance (IQA)	Internal quality assurance (IQA) refers to the processes, mechanisms, and practices implemented within an educational institution to monitor, evaluate, and enhance the quality of its academic programmes, services, and operations. IQA aims to ensure that the institution meets its standards of excellence and continuously improves its performance. Internal quality assurance is driven from within the institution.
Learner Support	Learner support refers to the services, resources, and assistance provided to learners to help them succeed in their educational endeavours. It encompasses various forms of support to address the diverse needs and challenges learners may encounter throughout their learning journey.
Learning Management System (LMS)	A platform designed to facilitate the design, delivery, and administration of learning and teaching. LMS platforms are commonly used in educational institutions to deliver online learning experiences for learners.
Qualifications Framework	This is a formal system used at the national level to classify and recognise qualifications and levels of learning achievement. The framework promotes transparency and comparability of qualifications, facilitating domestic and international recognition.
Online learning	Online learning, or e-learning, refers to a mode of teaching and learning delivered primarily or entirely over the Internet or through digital technologies. In online learning, learners use

	online platforms and tools to engage in educational activities, access course materials, and interact with instructors and peers.
Programme of study	It is a structured plan designed by an educational institution to guide students through a specific learning pathway. It outlines the sequence of courses, requirements, and learning outcomes that students must fulfil to earn a qualification. A programme leads to a qualification.
Programme Design	It is the process of planning and organising the structure, content, and delivery of a program or project. It involves defining objectives, identifying target audiences, selecting appropriate methods and resources, and creating a coherent framework that guides the program's implementation and evaluation.
Quality	In higher education, quality refers to achieving desired standards, usually explicitly stated at the institutional and national levels. Quality involves setting standards to be achieved.
Quality assurance	**Quality Assurance** refers to an all-encompassing, ongoing process that systematically evaluates, monitors, and improves the quality of a higher education system, institution or programme. It is a planned and structured approach to ensure that institutions or programmes meet established standards in education, infrastructure, and governance.
Quality Management System	A Quality Management System (QMS) is a structured framework that documents processes, procedures, and responsibilities for achieving quality policies and objectives. It encompasses coordinated activities aimed at directing and

	controlling an institution to ensure that its educational services meet specified requirements, enhance student outcomes, and foster a culture of continuous improvement.
Standards	Standards refer to the specification of aspects, elements or principles to which a higher education institution should conform or by which quality is judged (ASG-QA).
Web-based Tools	Web-based tools, also known as online tools or web applications, are software programmes accessed and operated through a web browser. These tools offer various functionalities and services to users, enabling them to perform tasks, collaborate with others, manage information, and accomplish goals without installing additional software on their devices.

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW STANDARDS AND GUIDELINES

In terms of the Higher Education Act of 2013, the Swaziland Higher Education Council has the responsibility to assess institutions for establishment, registration and accreditation. It is responsible for setting out institutional standards to govern the operations, performance, and general conduct of all higher institutions authorised to operate under the aforesaid Act. The following quality standards and guidelines are considered in the reviewing of an institution.

1. Vision and Mission of the institution
2. Institutional Governance and Management
3. Quality Assurance Systems
4. Programme Design and Review
5. Institutional Facilities and Infrastructure
6. Staffing
7. Learner Recruitment, Selection and Admission
8. Teaching, Learning and Learner Assessment
9. Learner Support and Progression
10. Financial and Administrative Systems
11. Research Activities
12. Management Information Systems
13. Collaboration and Partnerships

STANDARD 1: VISION AND MISSION OF THE INSTITUTION

The institution shall have an explicit vision and mission statement. The mission statement should clearly define the institution's overall purpose, which is why it exists. It should convey its goals and objectives, which serve as the basis for the institution's day-to-day operations and guide its strategic plans. There should be a clear rationale for using non-traditional delivery modes like online learning. The institution's mission should prioritise preferred delivery methods and the need to promote access and success.

Benchmarks

1. The mission statement clearly articulates the institution's purpose within the higher education sector, identifies the interest groups it aims to serve, and aligns with national priorities and policies.
2. Policy statements and action plans to achieve the stated mission are developed for all operations and integrated into the institutional Strategic Plan. Monitoring procedures are in place to ensure the implementation, evaluation, and periodic improvement of the institution's strategic plans.
3. The institutional strategic plans clearly indicate how human, financial and infrastructural resources will be available to achieve stated goals and priorities.
4. The strategic goals clearly reflect milestones and achievable objectives.
5. Relevant stakeholder groups are represented in the formulation of strategic plans to encourage ownership and facilitate feedback and openness.
6. The institution demonstrates its drive to develop itself into a Centre of Excellence and to maintain comparable and acceptable standards nationally, regionally, and internationally.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators
- Strategic Plan for the Institution
- Institution's Charter or Constitution
- Display of the institution's mission statement and vision
- Annual Plans
- Minutes of the strategic planning committee
- Reports on the achievement of key performance indicators/ targets

STANDARD 2: INSTITUTIONAL GOVERNANCE AND MANAGEMENT

The institution shall have a system of governance that facilitates the accomplishment of its mission and purposes; it also supports institutional effectiveness and integrity. Through its organisational design and governance structure, the institution shall create and sustain an environment that encourages teaching, learning, community service and, where possible, research and innovation. It shall demonstrate administrative capacity by assuring the provision of support adequate for the appropriate functioning of each organisational component. As much as possible, the institution's governance shall have sufficient autonomy to implement its mandate without undue interference from any other entity.

Benchmarks
1. The higher education institution has a functioning governing council/board, a duly constituted body qualified and competent to oversee the development and management of the institution's quality culture and integrity.

2. The institution has and employs policies and procedures to engage its internal constituencies, including its governing board, administration, staff, and learners.

3. The management structures are appropriate for the institution's size and purpose. Senior management positions are filled with competent (qualified, experienced, skilled, and knowledgeable) people.

4. The institution has relevant governance and management bodies, such as the University Council, Senate, Management Board, and Student Body, and various committees, each with a clear mandate, duties, responsibilities, powers, privileges, and tenure. These bodies are properly coordinated to ensure efficiency, effectiveness, and quality.

5. Where online learning is the dominant mode of provision, at least one member of management is knowledgeable about online learning or receives appropriate training.

6. The administrative structures are adequately constituted and operate in line with internationally accepted principles of good governance.

7. Delegation of decision-making responsibilities, communication and reporting lines are clearly outlined and are in line with the institution's guidelines– management hierarchy is clearly defined.

8. Appropriate structures and processes facilitate oversight and planning for quality and learner success. Where multiple delivery sites exist, appropriate management structures are established at satellite campuses.

9. Where transnational providers are involved, the Board ensures that the provider and its programmes are accredited in their home and destination countries.

10. Learners are only enrolled after the institution secures registration and accreditation of its programmes from the local authority and displays the accreditation certificate where the public can easily see it.

11. The institution's statutes/guidelines are available and fully functional, and responsibilities and reporting lines are clearly outlined and in line with statutes.

12. All senior management members (Vice Chancellor, Deputy Vice Chancellor, Principle, Registrar, Librarian, Finance Director, Dean/Director) should be on full-time positions.

13. The institution's senior management members should be appropriately qualified, competent and experienced.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators
- Institution's Council (Members) and TOR
- Charter of the Board of Directors or Board Policy Manual
- Institutions Act/Statutes/Charter and Ordinances
- Management Hierarchy (Structure) and their CVs
- Structures of governing bodies
- Appointment letters of members to governance bodies
- Risk management plan
- Audit reports of governance system and structure
- Annual work plans
- Performance Contracts
- Induction minutes of the board

STANDARD 3: INTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEM

The institution should have a structured internal quality assurance (IQA) system to set up, maintain and improve the quality of teaching, learning experiences, research, and service to the community. Effective internal quality assurance systems and policies should be in place to continuously monitor and improve the quality of institutional provision and produce desirable graduate and research outcomes. The institution's impact on the community should be evaluated on an ongoing basis. Where online learning is involved, there is quality assurance of the resources and facilities needed for effective teaching and learning, including curriculum, technology, learner support, professional development, and fiscal viability.

Benchmarks

1. The institution has a quality assurance unit or directorate that ensures adherence to standards at all levels. Competent and experienced leadership oversees developing and managing a strong quality culture, driving continuous improvement and aligning QA processes with institutional goals.

2. The institution has a clear Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) policy supported by an established internal quality assurance unit or directorate, ensuring adherence to standards at all levels. The IQA policy must delineate its rationale and clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of the internal quality assurance (IQA) unit, its sub-units, and all staff, management, council, and board members in maintaining quality standards.

3. The higher education institutions' quality assurance practices and procedures support achieving quality in all aspects of the institution's endeavours.

4. Internal quality mechanisms monitor the institution's day-to-day activities, including governance, administration, staff, finances, teaching and learning, assessment, and learner support services.

5. There is evidence of regular data collection on institutional performance, with thorough data analysis to inform decision-making and improve institutional outcomes. Multiple data sources, including classroom observations, learner feedback, and learner performance analytics, are consistently used to monitor and enhance the quality of teaching.

6. The institution invests in staff development to implement quality assurance and has a system of rewarding quality enhancement.
7. Peer reviews are self-initiated for self-improvement, and the results are used to institute improvements in academic departments.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators
- QA manual, policies and procedures
- Risk management plan
- Internal Quality Assurance Policy
- Course Evaluation Instruments
- Strategic QA plans and goals
- Annual work plan of QA unit(s)
- Internal and external QA assessment/audit reports
- Organisation chart of QA unit(s)
- Job description of QA personnel
- Minutes of QA Committee meetings
- Reports on the performance of IQA system
- Record of QA events/ awareness and training plans

STANDARD 4: PROGRAMME DESIGN AND REVIEW

The higher education institution should have policies and systems to ensure the quality of its programme design and development, as well as the fitness for purpose and relevance of programmes to national and industry socio-economic needs. The programme's design should maintain an appropriate balance of theoretical, practical and experiential knowledge and skills, irrespective of the mode of provision. Programmes should have sufficient discipline content and theoretical depth at the appropriate level to serve their educational purposes. The institution has a policy on the regular and systematic review of academic programmes. Academic programmes are responsive to the changing environment, provide appropriate articulation, and have effective assessment strategies that align with relevant outcomes. For institutions to offer postgraduate programmes, they must have established appropriate and relevant undergraduate programmes that ensure a solid foundation, thus promoting coherence and continuity in the educational pathway. Institutions offering online

programmes must ensure compliance with minimum quality standards and guidelines to guarantee that these programmes provide a rigorous educational experience comparable to traditional formats.

Benchmarks

1. The institution has specialised systems and a clear and comprehensive Programme Development and Design Policy that is implemented and monitored.

2. The design of programmes (face-to-face, blended, distance, or online) follows the principles laid out in the institution's programme design and development policy.

3. The programmes offered by the institution are aligned with its overall mission and vision and reflect the niche area and market segment it serves.

4. Programmes offered by the higher education institution address national and industrial development needs and priorities.

5. Learning outcomes, teaching and learning methods and expected completion times cater to learners' needs.

6. Competences of learners who complete the programme are made explicit and aligned to the correct level of the ESQF.

7. Regular reviews of faculties, directorates, units, and programmes are undertaken. Provision is made for periodic international peer reviews of curricula, and review findings are used to enhance and improve the quality of programmes.

8. The institution has processes that allow learners to evaluate lecturers, and the results are considered to improve teaching.

9. Tracer studies of alumni are undertaken to determine the relevance and impact of the programmes offered by the institution.

10. There is evidence of monitoring or tracking learners' performance in the LMS.

11. Policies for ensuring the integrity of certification processes for the qualification obtained through the programme are effectively implemented. These include:

    a) Mechanisms for monitoring the eligibility of candidates for the award of certificates.

    b) Mechanisms for quality assuring the processing and issuing of certificates.

c) Security measures for preventing fraud or the illegal issuing of certificates.

12. Where applicable, professional and vocational education is catered for in the design of programmes. This includes the following:

a) The programme promotes learners' understanding of the specific occupation for which they are being trained.

b) Learners master and apply techniques and skills required for a specific profession or occupation and can easily adapt to change.

c) Work-integrated learning (WIL) is an integral part of the curriculum and is monitored to ensure students master the requisite competencies.

13. Professional bodies are involved in curriculum development and assessment processes where appropriate.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators

- Policy and Guidelines for Programme Design and Development
- Certificate and award policy and processes
- Approval process reports
- Programme Review Reports
- Evidence of programme accreditation by ESHEC
- Needs Assessment Report (Evidence that consultation with industry was conducted to justify the need for a programme)
- Minutes of meetings of the programme development committee
- Stakeholder inputs
- Reports from surveys, focus groups, dialogue, tracer studies etc.
- Programme evaluation reports
- Graduation booklets

STANDARD 5: INSTITUTIONAL FACILITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURE

The higher education institution should have adequate academic and administrative facilities that support teaching, learning, research and administrative needs. This includes physical infrastructure for face-to-face as well as facilities for online learning. Institutional facilities are designed to accommodate the distributed nature of learners

in open, distance, and online learning. Where the institution has arrangements with other stakeholders to allow learners access to their facilities, the responsibility for the quality provision of such services still lies with the institution providing them (i.e., the institution where the learner is registered).

Resource planning addresses the specific needs of each course across all programmes, ensuring safe and healthy learning spaces, reasonable access to necessary equipment for all learners, and established procedures for facility upkeep and maintenance. The institution ensures reliable, stable internet access for learners and staff for online learning delivery. The Learning Management System (LMS) is regularly monitored by qualified staff to ensure consistent functionality and capacity to support the enrolled learner population.

Benchmarks

1. The institution has explicit and detailed regulations, guidelines and processes for the resourcing and maintenance of physical facilities and learning resources.

2. There must be enough well-ventilated classrooms for the programmes of the higher education institution. For example, each classroom must ensure that students:
   a) Have free movement and easy access to desks.
   b) Sit comfortably and have sufficient space between the desks.
   c) Have a vision for the lecturer and demonstration boards.

3. The institution has budget provisions for acquiring, maintaining, and replacing capital items and consumables needed to support quality teaching, learning and research.

4. Learning resources and physical facilities, including a library, ICT infrastructure, lecture and laboratory facilities, specialist facilities, and ancillary support for learning and teaching commensurate with the number of learners enrolled, to support effective teaching and learning.

5. The institution maintains clear, accurate and adequate information on institutional capacity, facilities and resources.

6. The institution has a properly equipped and stocked library with the required staff to support learners' use of information services. The library provides adequate workspace for learners, particularly where online or distance learning is provided. Library resources are primarily digital to facilitate easy access to learners.

7. All buildings meant for learners' use meet basic health and safety standards and are conducive for learning and living purposes.

8. Learners are supported in using the technology in the programme(s) offered, including the LMS.

9. The institution has mechanisms to regularly evaluate the adequacy and accessibility of resources and services for learners and appropriate remedial measures are taken to address inadequacies.

10. There are written agreements where facilities of other institutions are made available to learners.

11. The institution uses the latest technologies, such as AI, to improve quality and can manage learners' and staff's use of them.

12. Where online programmes are offered, the institution ensures that an appropriate contingency plan is in place to activate in the event of a failure of the primary delivery system, such as during load-shedding or significant disruptions like strikes or political unrest that affect network connectivity.

13. Adequate and appropriate IT infrastructure tailored to each programme's needs is available at all learning and delivery sites.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators
- Campus development and upgrading plans
- Laboratory Handbook or Manual
- Asset Register for institutional facilities, equipment, computer hardware and software and laboratory equipment and facilities
- Maintenance plans and records
- Procurement Policy
- Health Inspector Certificate (or any documentation to prove that buildings are fit for human habitation)
- Safety, health, environmental policies and Emergency plans
- Library collections and online database/journal subscriptions
- Recreational facilities
- Student-computer ratio and Wi-Fi Bandwidth size
- Number of owned vehicles/buses and registration of vehicle books

STANDARD 6: STAFFING

The institution should have an appropriate staffing structure and sufficient administrative, academic, technical, and support staff, all with relevant qualifications and experience to effectively support learning programmes. Staff responsibilities and job descriptions are clearly defined, and there is a systematic approach to continuous professional development (CPD) to ensure that staff remain current with developments and perform their duties effectively.

Benchmarks

1. The institution has sufficient numbers and continuity of faculty members to carry out classroom and non-classroom faculty roles. The academic workload allocation model in use takes into consideration the staff: student ratio, the nature and field of the programme being offered, and the number of courses each lecturer has to offer per semester (not more than four modules per semester).

2. Academic staff at the institution, including full-time and part-time members, are suitably qualified and experienced to teach and assess learner competence. The institution monitors part-time staff activities to maintain the credibility of their services.

3. Faculties and departments ensure that teaching staff has appropriate skills and time for their work (e.g. course development and delivery, assessment, learner support).

4. The institution has a sound and publicly accessible Staff Recruitment Policy with clear guidelines for advertising and filling vacancies.

5. Non-academic staff is available to provide the diversity and range of support functions /activities required, and they are qualified, trained, and well-supported in their professional development.

6. The institution has clear job descriptions outlining the tasks and responsibilities of all staff members

7. A staff appraisal system that provides feedback on staff performance and helps identify staff development needs is in place.

8. A Comprehensive Rank and Promotion Policy is available

9. The institution has a Staff Development Policy focusing on continuous professional development to ensure staff remain updated with the latest advancements in their respective disciplines.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators

- Institution's Human Resource Policy/ Staff Recruitment Policy/Ranking and Promotion Policy
- Organisational chart
- Employment contracts
- Performance Management system (Performance contracts and appraisals)
- Staff Development Policy
- A table/list of staff showing designations and qualifications
- Evidence of qualifications in the form of academic and professional certificates
- Academic Workload Model
- Job descriptions
- Career and succession plans
- Training needs analysis/ training and development plan and budget
- Award and recognition schemes

STANDARD 7: LEARNER RECRUITMENT, SELECTION AND ADMISSION

The higher education institution should have policies and procedures for learners' recruitment, selection, and admission, including fair and equitable guidelines and processes.

Benchmarks
1. The institution has an explicit and coherent Admission Policy that stipulates recruitment, selection, and admission criteria for each programme. These criteria are aligned with the general requirements for entry into higher education and promote access and equity.
2. Prospective learners are provided sufficient information to make informed choices before registration. This information clearly outlines entry requirements, course expectations, and evaluation/assessment criteria and is publicly

accessible through multiple channels, including the institutional website, the prospectus, and other relevant materials.

3. Where online learning is provided, learners are clear about their responsibilities and what the institution will provide. The institution does not pass on undue costs to learners, which has implications for access.

4. The institution provides for equity in admission processes and has specific strategies for international learners.

5. The institution keeps an up-to-date record of its learner profile and uses the information to plan targeted support services.

6. Learner records are maintained in a secure and confidential location, with automated processes for generating statistical data needed by the institution for performance indicators, external reporting requirements and generation of reports on learner progress and achievements.

7. The institution has a policy governing the ethical use of learners' data, outlining principles and guidelines for its collection, storage, processing, and sharing. This policy ensures the integrity and confidentiality of learners' data, protecting their privacy rights and ensuring compliance with relevant data protection regulations.

8. The institution ensures that timely feedback is given to students, including admission and acceptance letters, to facilitate seamless registration processes and ensure their participation in important learning activities.

9. The institution has an online application platform that facilitates seamless recruitment processes and enables students to track their applications effectively.

10. The institution has an established recognition of prior learning (RPL) policy and guidelines to enhance learners' access to education.

11. The institution has established clear guidelines to promote equity in its admission processes through holistic review practices that consider all applicants' diverse backgrounds and experiences, including gender considerations. Specific strategies are implemented to support underrepresented groups, such as persons with disabilities, ensuring an inclusive and equitable admissions environment.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators

- Admission Policy
- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

STANDARD 8: TEACHING, LEARNING AND LEARNER ASSESSMENT

The institution should reflect on its teaching, learning, and assessment practices in alignment with a transformative and socially responsive philosophy that promotes equitable access and success within a learning environment. It should acknowledge the importance of learner success, with explicit policies governing teaching and learning across various programmes. The teaching and learning strategy should be tailored to the institution's type and delivery modes, including contact, distance, blended, or online education.

The institution has established clear assessment policies and procedures to ensure that assessments are conducted professionally, incorporating the latest developments in testing and examination processes. Where online learning is utilised, the institution must ensure that learners possess adequate ICT skills, that programme providers maintain professional competence, and implement effective educational strategies for managing learning through web-based tools. Online teaching and learning should be supported by well-written distance education modules.

Benchmarks
1. The higher education institution has a comprehensive teaching and learning policy that directs all its teaching and learning activities and effectively communicates them to staff and learners.
2. The institution prioritises continuous staff development in teaching and learning in general and using available technologies to enhance the quality of delivery.
3. Learners provide feedback on the programmes they attend, which is used to inform improvements in programme content and delivery methods.
4. There is an appropriate balance of various teaching and learning methods, which align with the design and use of learning materials and instructional technologies.
5. There is evidence for partnerships for experiential learning.
6. The institution has a comprehensive and transparent assessment policy encompassing formative and summative assessments, internal and external

moderation, remedial processes, learner appeal procedures, and measures to uphold intellectual honesty among staff and prevent examination malpractice among learners, ensuring rigour in assessment practices. This policy is well communicated to learners.

7. A variety of assessment strategies is employed to ensure that assessments in blended and online learning environments are rigorous and authentic. Anti-plagiarism software is utilised to validate assessment processes; alternative authentication methods are implemented where such software is unavailable. Regardless of the mode of provision, the assessment policy promotes authentic assessment practices.

8. Students receive timely feedback on the assessment outcomes (in terms of the nature and level of the programme as well as the mode of delivery).

9. All academic staff members have been trained in the setting and evaluation of assessment tasks.

10. A system is in place to ensure the safe storage of examination papers and learners' results.

11. Departments offering online programmes ensure learners have structured opportunities to learn to use the various online course delivery applications/ tools before the programme officially commences.

12. The programme's modules and courses are coherently planned, and the content matches the appropriate ESQF level, credits, and learning outcomes. The programme meets course/module combination rules, and the courses/ modules are appropriately weighted relative to each other.

13. A teaching and learning strategy is appropriate for delivery modes (physical/distance/online learning) and learner composition (full-time/part-time).

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment Policy
- Learner Course Evaluation Instruments
- Strong room for safekeeping of examinations
- Acceptable lecturer-student ratio
- Evidence of action learning such as projects, practical training, assignments, industrial attachment, etc.

- Peer evaluation instrument
- E-Learning Management System (LMS), e.g. Moodle
- Moderation processes
- Examination regulations
- Minutes of meetings of the examination board
- Appeal procedures

STANDARD 9: LEARNER SUPPORT AND PROGRESSION

The institution should have good student services in areas of accommodation, catering, health counselling and advice. It should track learner performance, identify at-risk learners, and have guidelines on the timely support of such learners. There is a wide range of learner support mechanisms that cater for a variety of learners with different needs. Support mechanisms care for learners' academic and non-academic needs, use learner data to provide timely support, effectively use appropriate technology, and put learner success at the centre. The institution puts learner success at the centre of all its business.

Benchmarks

1. The institution has a clear policy on learner support, including guidelines on supporting learners and staff with special needs. The institution offers appropriate and adequate learner support services, including, but not limited to, psychological, social, academic, financial and other learner needs
2. The institution has an accurate profile of learners to inform decisions on the appropriate forms of support needed for the different learners.
3. The institution continuously collects and analyses learner performance data, and the results feed into planning processes for learner support.
4. A policy on supporting at-risk learners is implemented to ensure that such learners are identified early and provided with adequate support to enhance their success.
5. The institution has clearly stated criteria (for each programme offered) which set out the rules for learner progression from one year level to the next.
6. The institution has regulations regarding learner discipline, plagiarism, and other behavioural and academic infringements.

7. Appropriate tutor-learner ratios are used, which allow effective support for individual learners.

8. The institution has clear guidelines for supervising postgraduate students, detailing roles and responsibilities, communication expectations, and feedback processes. These guidelines ensure consistent support, timely progress, and a positive supervisory relationship, enhancing students' academic development and successful completion of their studies.

9. The institution has a system to monitor and support part-time staff, particularly those involved in distance and eLearning, to ensure they provide adequate learner support.

10. Where applicable, the institution clearly outlines how it supports learners who study across national boundaries, providing necessary resources and guidance to ensure they receive consistent educational quality and access to relevant support services.

11. The institution has a clear policy governing the management of cross-border programmes, covering essential aspects like handling practical learning components and examination processes.

12. The institution provides an IT help desk facility to support on-campus and off-campus learners, ensuring they can access technical assistance for a smooth learning experience regardless of location.

13. The institution provides IT support to address technical issues related to internet service provider challenges, firewall protection, and computer hardware and software, ensuring a reliable and secure digital learning environment for all users.

14. The institution has research guidelines for effective training and skill development at all academic levels, supporting students and staff in developing essential research skills and methodologies.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators

- Disciplinary Handling Manual
- Student support office
- Student profiles/data
- Student handbook
- Learner performance data
- Rules of progression

- Academic regulations
- Postgraduate research guidelines
- Grievance Procedures

STANDARD 10: FINANCIAL AND ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS

The higher education institution should have appropriate financial and administrative systems to support its academic activities and tasks. It should demonstrate the ability to respond to financial emergencies and unforeseen circumstances. The budget for establishing a higher education institution should cover a minimum period of twelve months to show that it has adequate resources.

Benchmarks

1. The institution has adequate financial resources to support programme delivery and sustain its operations.
2. The institution has effective administrative and financial services to handle learners' admission, ancillary support, staff appointments, equitable remuneration, staff development opportunities, and financial management.
3. Required systems, processes and structures are in place to ensure sound financial management.
4. Resource procurement and allocation are sufficient to support the core areas necessary to ensure quality teaching and learning, research and community engagement.
5. Funds are utilised per the priorities set in the institution's mission and goals, and financial audits are undertaken regularly.
6. Institutional budgeting processes are inclusive, clearly communicated to staff, continuously monitored and reported to management.
7. Effective risk management systems and processes are in place to ensure the continuous viability of the institution.
8. The administration of the institution's finances is characterised by trustworthiness, which is supported by regular unqualified audit reports.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators

- Medium-Term Expenditure Framework
- Financial Policies and Procedures

- Financial audit reports (Internal and External)
- Budgets for facilities and infrastructure
- Financial reports and statements
- Budgets of organisational units
- Financial management system in place

STANDARD 11: RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

The higher education institution should encourage and promote research and development work for innovation and national development. Research influences the continuous development of educational programmes and services.

Benchmarks

1. The higher education institution provides for research and offers explicit guidelines on how research should be conducted and published.
2. There are clear policies, procedures and regulations for research, including effective supervision of learners.
3. Systems, facilities, and guidelines for conducting and publishing research should be appropriate to the level and scale of the research involved and match local, regional, and international standards.
4. Time and resources are available for academic staff to conduct independent and team research, preferably research aligned with national priorities.
5. There are appropriate procedures and measures to ensure ethical practices in research, including measures to guide the ethical use of AI and other emerging technologies in research.
6. Relevant mechanisms and procedures are in place to monitor and evaluate research within the institution. The institution also monitors its research's impact on the economy.
7. Research, consultancy and extension services are actively promoted to build linkages with industry and the community. The institution is responsive to community needs and conducts relevant extension and awareness programmes.
8. The institution is responsive to current issues faced at the national level, such as climate change and cyber security.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators

- Research policy and procedures

- Research Committee and Subcommittees

- Proof that research is encouraged (a fund or something)

- Policy on Plagiarism (in support of academic integrity)

- Explicit Research Plans and strategies

- Organisational chart of research units and centres

- Job description of academic and research staff

- Minutes of meetings of the research board

- Memorandum of Understanding on research collaboration agreements and contracts with other universities and organisations

- Sources and amount of research fund

- Reports on innovation hubs and industrial parks activities and results

- Patents, copyrights, trademarks

- Research data, records and results

- Publishing Guidelines and research publications

STANDARD 12: MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

The higher education institution should develop and maintain an effective management information system that facilitates the recording and processing of learner information and provides data for management planning. This system covers, amongst other things, learner progression and achievement, employability of graduates, learner satisfaction with their programmes, effectiveness of lecturers, profile of learner population, learning resources and their costs and the institution's key performance indicators.

Benchmarks
1. The institution has a policy for effectively using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to support all educational activities. This includes using evolving forms of technology like Generative Artificial Intelligence (e.g., Chat GPT).
2. The institution has an efficient Information Management System (IMS) for capturing and processing learner information and monitoring learner progress.

3. A competent officer who is dedicated to the overall management of the MIS is appointed.
4. The institution collects, analyses, and uses relevant data (e.g., enrolment, gender, special needs, graduations) to effectively manage its study programmes and other activities.
5. Data on staff and learners are accurate, up-to-date, and used for planning and monitoring.
6. There is dedicated qualified staff that provides technical support to ensure the smooth functioning of the institution's technology systems.
7. The institution has established a comprehensive data protection and backup policy to safeguard sensitive information and ensure its integrity. This policy outlines the procedures for collecting, storing, and processing data, emphasising compliance with relevant data protection regulations.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators
- Information Office
- Data protection policy
- Performance reports of the institution
- Stakeholders' satisfaction trends
- Graduates, alumni and employer's surveys
- Press reports
- Employment surveys and statistics
- Stakeholders feedback
- Data records
- Management and operational reports

STANDARD 13: COLLABORATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

Institutional Partnerships and Collaborative relationships for mutual benefits should be in place and reviewed regularly. The institution should collaborate with other higher education institutions, research institutions and professional bodies. The institution should also collaborate with relevant national and international stakeholders to leverage the benefits of multiple organisations' collective knowledge, resources, and capabilities.

Benchmarks

1. The institution should maintain collaborative and partnership relationships with relevant organisations to facilitate growth and enhance learner support through the signing of Memorandum of Understanding (MoUs), exchanges, and joint programmes.

2. The institution has a stated policy on partnerships and collaborations and a clear process for managing partnership relationships, and the value added by such relationships is evident.

3. When the institution contracts to another agency, in part or full, the educational services of a learning programme, it ensures the academic quality and integrity of all educational services offered in its name. The responsibility for ensuring that quality service is provided to learners lies with the institution and not the contracted partner.

Examples of sources of evidence/indicators

- Memorandum of Understanding (MoU)
- Service Level Agreement (SLA)
- Policies and plans
- Partnership agreements/contracts
- Alumni charters