



**COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

*HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE*

**NATIONAL REVIEW OF  
THE  
STRUCTURED MASTER OF  
EDUCATION PROGRAMMES  
CRITERIA AND MINIMUM  
STANDARDS**

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## Criterion 1: The National, Institutional and Unit Context <sup>1</sup>

*The programme is an integral part of the offerings of the higher education institution at which it is located and it complies with all the national policies and regulations regarding the provision of higher education qualifications in South Africa. The unit offering the M.Ed has goals, objectives and forms of internal organisation to support the programme.*

### Minimum standards

- i. *Public Providers:* The programme is part of the institution's programme and qualification mix (PQM), as approved by the DoE, and meets the criteria laid down in the Criteria for the Recognition and Evaluation of Qualifications for Employment in Education;  
*Private Providers:* The provider is registered with the DoE in terms of the requirements of the Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997) and the Regulations for the Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions, 2002 and Annexures to the Regulations (Regulation No. 1564 of Government Gazette No. 24143, 13 December 2002).
- ii. The qualification complies with the minimum credit value of the Norms and Standards for Educators (Government Gazette No. 20844, 4 February 2000) and the purpose of the qualification and its specialism/s are clearly stated. The programme meets national requirements pertaining to programmes which are at present being developed within the context of the NQF (Refer to National Education Policy Act 27 of 1996 as amended by Education Laws Amendment Act No. 100 of 1997 and No. 48 of 1999).
- iii. The qualification and all specialisations are registered by SAQA on the NQF.
- iv. The programme is accredited by the Universities and Technikons Advisory Council (AUT), or the HEQC.
- v. The programme is part of the institution's planning, approval, resource allocation and quality assurance process.
- vi. M.Ed specialisations and programme outcomes take cognizance of national / regional professional priorities and needs.
- vii. The unit offering the M.Ed has an organisational structure that enhances the fulfilment of its stated mission, goals and objectives and provides for the effective participation of faculty and learners in matters of importance.
- viii. Franchising arrangements for programme delivery are not permissible.

In addition, the following minimum standard applies in the case of programmes offered through distance education:

- ix. The provider and programme management team can provide a rationale for the use of distance education for the delivery of the programme/course to the intended target learners.

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<sup>1</sup> 'Unit' refers to the operational organizational structure offering the programme. In most cases this will be a Department or School.

## Criterion 2: Programme Design and Co-ordination

*The learning programme has a clear structure leading to the M.Ed or to the designated areas of specialisation at M.Ed level. As a postgraduate degree, the M.Ed must correspond to the generally accepted minimum standards of an NQF level 8 masters degree. The programme is effectively coordinated in a way that facilitates attainment of its intended purpose and outcomes.*

### Minimum standards

- i. The purpose of the programme (see Criterion 1, minimum standard ii) informs the statement of applied competence, curriculum design and assessment strategy.
- ii. Learning outcomes, degree of curriculum choice, teaching and learning methods, modes of delivery, learning materials and expected completion time cater for the learning needs of the target student intake.
- iii. The design provides opportunities for articulation with other programmes within and across institutions or relevant disciplinary areas.
- iv. Modules represent an appropriate balance between the advanced study of a specialised field in education and the development of research competence in that field. The specialisation coursework component of the degree carries a minimum of 50% of the total mark (or credit point weighting) for the M.Ed.
- v. Programme design reflects the production of student research in a specialised field as an integral component of the M.Ed. The student's research report/ dissertation carries at least 33% of the total mark (or credit point weighting) for the M.Ed.<sup>2</sup> (See Criterion 6 for further detail on research).
- vi. The design maintains an appropriate balance of theoretical, practical and experiential knowledge and skills. It has sufficient disciplinary content and theoretical depth at the appropriate level to serve its educational purposes.<sup>3</sup>
- vii. Measures are in place to ensure the academic coherence of the programme. Modules cohere and are sequenced in a way that meets the aims of the programme. This is reflected in appropriate specification of content, level, credits, purpose, outcomes, relative weight and delivery.
- viii. Mechanisms and processes are in place to ensure that all conditions for programme delivery are met, and that there is equivalence of provision in the case of a programme offered by different modes of delivery and / or at different sites. In cases where decentralised tutor-based learner support systems are in place, these are properly managed and quality assured by the provider.
- ix. The M.Ed programme is suitably coordinated and defined within the faculty/departmental and institutional system. An academic with research and postgraduate supervision experience manages the programme within the framework of an agreed-upon mandate and defined procedures and responsibilities which include:
  - programme coordination
  - monitoring the progress of students
  - overseeing assessment procedures
  - responsibility for ensuring that quality assurance measures are in place.

<sup>2</sup> The figure of 33% does not include research training.

<sup>3</sup> The M Ed reflects appropriate roles of the educator specified in the Norms and Standards for Educators. Specialisations take into account the relevant educator roles and are underpinned by educational theory and practice relating to the field of specialisation.

- x. Opportunities are created for student input and participation in relevant aspects of programme coordination.
- xi. Regular and effective communication takes place with the students. This includes providing reliable information on the various aspects of the programme.

In addition, the following minimum standards apply in the case of programmes offered through distance education:

- xii. An appropriate level of investment has been made in quality programme development, course design and course material.
- xiii. The provider has explicitly designed systems for administering and teaching learners at a distance and has planned for contingencies in order to meet its stated aims in terms of academic quality and standards.
- xiv. Relevant forms of learner support have been incorporated into the programme design.
- xv. The development of course material is linked closely to the required learning outcomes, appropriateness of the teaching and learning approach and its relevance for the target learners.
- xvi. The suitability of learning outcomes is constantly evaluated with opportunities provided for learner input.

### Criterion 3: Student Recruitment, Admission and Selection

*Recruitment documentation informs potential students of the programme accurately and sufficiently, and admission adheres to current legislation. Admission and selection of students are commensurate with the programme's academic requirements, within a framework of widened access and equity. The number of students selected takes into account the programme's intended learning outcomes, its capacity to offer good quality education, and the needs of the particular profession (in the case of professional programmes).*

#### Minimum standards

- i. Appropriate policies, procedures and regulations are in place for student admission, selection and assessment. These are communicated to all M.Ed students, and academic and administrative staff, and implemented consistently across the institution and programme.
- ii. Admission criteria and processes are clearly documented. Prospectuses and other documents adequately describe the programme in terms of the academic calendar, admission policies, academic standards and completion requirements.
- iii. Marketing and advertising are consistent with DoE and SAQA regulations.
- iv. Advertising and promotional materials contain accurate and sufficient information with regard to admission policies, academic standards and completion requirements.
- v. Selection criteria are geared towards widening access and attaining equity.
- vi. The institution provides access to information about funding opportunities for students wishing to enrol for the programme.
- vii. While the general admission requirement of a B.Ed (Hons) or equivalent relevant NQF level 7 qualification is generally applied, provision is made for a flexible RPL entry route. Measures are in place to ensure that incoming students have the required level of understanding to embark on advanced study in the particular field of specialisation.

- viii. Admission through an RPL route may not exceed 10% of the total number of students on any programme.<sup>4</sup>
- ix. The number of students selected for the programme does not exceed the available capacity for offering good quality education.

In addition, the following minimum standards apply in the case of programmes offered through distance education:

- x. Detailed and up-to-date information is available regarding the demands of the mode of delivery and the support services available. Provision is made for a potentially diverse and geographically widely distributed student body.
- xi. The provider has developed detailed learner profiles that identify the characteristics and situation of learners and this is used to inform curriculum issues.
- xii. The enrolment practices include provision of accurate, helpful information to prospective learners as well as efficient handling of finance and registration information.

#### Criterion 4: Staffing

*Academic staff responsible for the programme are suitably qualified, have sufficient relevant experience and teaching competence, and their assessment competence and research profiles are adequate for the nature and level of the programme. The institution and/or other recognised agencies contracted by the institution provide opportunities for academic staff to enhance their competences and to support their professional growth and development.*

#### Minimum standards

- i. Recruitment and employment of staff adhere to the stipulations of the Labour Relations Act, 1996, Basic Conditions of Employment Amendment Act, 2002 and the Employment Equity Act, 1998, and appropriate administrative procedures are in place for the selection, appointment, induction and payment of staff members.
- ii. Where applicable, relevant labour legislation and regulations on health and safety in the workplace are observed.
- iii. Academic staff has research experience gained through their own research and/or studies towards higher education qualifications. The research profile of the staff includes recognised research outputs.
- iv. Responsibility for teaching and supervision rests with core, permanent staff to a greater extent than with temporary /part-time personnel.<sup>5</sup>
- v. Core, permanent academic staff teaching on the programme has relevant academic qualifications at least on the M Ed level.
- vi. A minimum of 50% of the core, permanent academic staff teaching on the programme has a doctoral degree or an equivalent qualification in a field relevant to the study programme and have at least five years of teaching experience in a recognised higher education institution.
- vii. Programme faculty members have formal opportunities to provide input on issues affecting admissions, progress of students, resource allocation, curriculum design and evaluation and research.

<sup>4</sup> Exceptions are permissible in cases where RPL admission is consistent with the institution's policy and practice for RPL.

<sup>5</sup> Outsourcing of delivery is not permitted.

- viii. Academic staff is competent to apply the assessment policies of the institution.
- ix. The staffing on the programme is in line with the equity programme of the institution.
- x. The institution provides orientation, induction and professional development opportunities for both new academic staff members as well as part-time staff.
- xi. Opportunities exist for academic staff to update their knowledge and skills.
- xii. Sufficient administrative staff dedicated to the programme is available, where appropriate.
- xiii. Administrative, technical and academic development support staff are adequately qualified for their duties, and have opportunities for staff development.

In addition, the following minimum standards apply in the case of programmes offered through distance education:

- xiv. Staff are trained, monitored and supported for the specialised distance education roles they perform, including the design, management and delivery of the programmes.
- xv. Workloads allow sufficient time for the development of curricula and materials, marking of assessment and the necessary learner support. Where decentralised learner support is offered, or where marking of assessment involves external people, there are appropriate systems in place for the recruitment, training, monitoring and payment of necessary part-time and contract staff.

#### Criterion 5: Teaching and Learning

*The institution gives recognition to the importance of the promotion of student learning. The teaching and learning strategy is appropriate for the institutional type (as reflected in its mission), mode(s) of delivery and student composition, contains mechanisms to ensure the appropriateness of teaching and learning methods, and makes provision for staff to improve their teaching. Effective teaching and learning methods and suitable learning materials and learning opportunities facilitate the achievement of the purposes and outcomes of the programme. The programme ensures that each student displays an understanding of the areas of knowledge which are fundamental for an M.Ed, and acquires skills and competencies which are relevant to the academic and professional world of education.*

#### Minimum standards

- i. The importance of the promotion of student learning is reflected in the institution's central operating policies and procedures, including resource allocation, provision of support services, and appointments and promotions.
- ii. The teaching and learning strategy is appropriate for the institutional type as reflected in its mode of delivery and student composition.
- iii. Assessment criteria and/or an explicit understanding of coursework requirements and the standard of research achievement required are clearly communicated to students on commencement of their studies.
- iv. There is a balance and mix of different teaching and learning methods appropriate to the learning needs of the students.
- v. Academic support is provided in language, writing and numeracy skills, where required.
- vi. There are systems in place to deal with under-performing or inactive students in the programme.
- vii. The strategy is geared towards providing opportunities for the realisation of the programme outcomes, within the specified programme time.

- viii. Pedagogy contributes to transformation in the sense that it develops the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment as well as for the requirements of social development, and economic and employment growth.
- ix. The institution provides staff development opportunities for staff wishing to improve their teaching.
- x. The quality requirements for programme delivery take into account all delivery modes.

In addition, the following minimum standards apply in the case of programmes offered through distance education:

- xi. The design of the programme ensures the aims and intended learning outcomes, the scope of the learning materials and the strategies for teaching at a distance.
- xii. The programme makes provision for the development of increasingly sophisticated levels of independent study from learning resources provided.
- xiii. The institution has tested systems and technologies for materials development and delivery for distance learning.
- xiv. Learning materials, teaching and learning support strategies and modes of assessment are designed in order to give distance students a reasonable chance of achieving the intended learning outcomes.
- xv. Training and development opportunities are provided for staff to be able to design, deliver and review programmes offered in a distance mode.
- xvi. Systems are in place to identify inactive students timeously.

#### **Criterion 6: Research**

*The programme is directed towards developing student capacity to engage research issues and to produce research. Both staff and students contribute to the knowledge base through their research production.*

##### Minimum standards

- i. The academic unit (institution) has clear and efficient mechanisms to manage research functions and processes in ways that are consistent with accepted ethical standards and that enhance quality as well as increase research participation, productivity and research funding.
- ii. The unit has effective strategies for research development including capacity development for new researchers.
- iii. Students' dissertations show that graduates are competent in: conducting literature reviews; applying appropriate research methodologies; interpreting information; developing and formulating arguments; communicating research results in a scholarly form. (See also Criterion 2, minimum standard v)
- iv. Faculty members teaching on the programme are active in research. (i.e. 0.3 publications per year per full-time academic)
- v. The unit has plans to meet the national benchmark of one publication per year per full-time academic.

## Criterion 7: Supervision of Research Dissertation

*Suitably qualified staff supports students' independent work by offering guidance on all aspects of the research process and on keeping to an achievable time schedule for their projects. Supervisors are accessible, within reason; keep records of decisions agreed upon; offer timeous feedback on student work; and support and encourage the student through to completion.*

### Minimum standards

- i. There is a procedure for approving research proposals before students embark on their projects.
- ii. A procedure exists to determine the appointment of the supervisors, taking due consideration of the field of expertise of the academic, the existing workload of the supervisor, and the compatibility with the student.
- iii. The appointed supervisor has an appropriate research record of accomplishment, as well as experience, expertise and peer recognition in the field of study. In the case of inexperienced or new supervisors, there is ongoing staff development and support, and joint supervision is explored as an option.
- iv. Students are given guidance and support in all aspects of the research process, starting with the design of an acceptable research proposal, and ending with the writing up of the research dissertation as a final product.
- v. Explicit guidelines exist on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students regarding, amongst others, the following aspects: the periodicity of contact between student and supervisor; the nature, format and 'turnaround time' for submitted work; the form of feedback to the student; regulations on plagiarism; and examination and qualification requirements.
- vi. Students are acquainted with the criteria used to assess the research dissertation.
- vii. Monitoring and review of the supervision process takes place regularly and includes student feedback on the quality of the supervision.
- viii. Open, fair and formal procedures are in place for hearing and adjudicating student complaints about the quality of supervision and support provision.

## Criterion 8: Student Assessment

*The different modes of delivery of the programme have appropriate policies and procedures for internal assessment; internal and external moderation; monitoring of student progress; explicitness, validity and reliability of assessment practices; recording of assessment results; settling of disputes; the rigour and security of the assessment system; RPL; and for the development of staff competence in assessment. The programme has effective assessment practices that include internal (or external) assessment, as well as internal and external moderation. The programme has taken measures to ensure the reliability, rigour and security of the assessment system.*

### Minimum standards

- i. Assessment is used to generate data for grading, selecting and predicting, and to provide timely feedback to inform teaching and learning and to improve the curriculum.
- ii. Assessment criteria are of a suitably high standard for an M.Ed programme and are aligned with the learning outcomes at programme and module level.

- iii. Procedures are in place and followed to receive, record, process and return assignments within a specified time that allows students to benefit from feedback prior to the submission of further assessment tasks.
- iv. Student progress is monitored.
- v. For summative assessment, where more than one assessor is involved, internal moderation checks are undertaken to ensure the reliability of the assessment procedures.
- vi. The assessment of student learning achievements by academic staff responsible for a teaching module/course is subject to external moderation by appropriately qualified academics.
- vii. Suitably qualified external moderators / examiners are appointed in terms of clear criteria and administrative procedures and conduct their responsibilities in terms of clear guidelines. These criteria and procedures are consistent with the institution's policy.
- viii. Research is properly assessed, which includes the following:
  - At least one examiner external to the institution is appointed per dissertation/thesis.
  - Without undermining the principle of assessment based on academic judgement, assessment decisions are made transparently and students are afforded reasonable access to information (e.g. examiners' reports or summaries of reports).
  - Higher degree committees or similar structures consider examiners' reports and make considered decisions about examination outcomes.
- ix. Measures are taken to ensure the reliability, rigour and security of the assessment system. Assessment results are recorded securely and reliably.
- x. Policies for ensuring the integrity of certification processes for the qualification obtained through the programme are effectively implemented.
- xi. Completed external moderator reports are returned to the relevant academic member of staff and also to the programme coordinator. Problems are discussed with the lecturer concerned and the programme co-coordinator monitors the implementation of agreed improvements.
- xii. There is a fair and effective procedure for settling student disputes regarding assessment results, and students are acquainted with this procedure. Breaches of assessment rules are dealt with effectively and timeously.
- xiii. Provision is made for the development of staff competence in assessment.

In addition, the following minimum standards apply in the case of programmes offered through distance education:

- xiv. There should be sufficient formative assessment to ensure that the student is given a reasonable chance of success and to identify problem areas before completion of any formal summative assessment for the programme.
- xv. There are systems and processes in place to make possible individual academic support for learners by telephone, email, appointment, video-conferencing or online.

## Criterion 9: Infrastructure and Library Resources

*Suitable and sufficient venues, IT infrastructure and library resources are available for students and staff in the programme. Policies ensure the proper management and maintenance of library resources, including support and access for students and staff. Staff development of library staff takes place on a regular basis.*

### Minimum standards

- i. Suitable and sufficient venues are available at all official sites of learning where the programme is offered.
- ii. A well-trained librarian is available to serve students on the programme and to assist students in carrying out literature searches in education.
- iii. Suitable and sufficient IT infrastructure is available to all students on the programme. This includes appropriate hardware, software and databases for literature searches in the fields of specialisation.
- iv. Suitable, sufficient and current library resources exist in the form of ready access to an extensive national and international journal collection and an appropriate book collection in fields of specialisation and research methodology.
- v. Orientation and training workshops are presented to ensure that students are enabled to access all library resources including IT infrastructure and web-based resources.

In addition, the following minimum standard applies in the case of programmes offered through distance education:

- vi. All services offered to the learners are designed and efficient taking into account the location of the learners and the needs of the programme.

## Criterion 10: Student Retention and Throughput Rates

*Student retention and throughput rates in the programme are monitored, especially in terms of race and gender equity, and remedial measures are taken, where necessary.*

### Minimum standards

- i. The majority of part-time students who enter the programme complete it successfully within 4 years (fulltime students complete within 2 years).
- ii. The profile of the qualifying class in terms of race and gender increasingly resembles that of the entering class.
- iii. Retention and throughput rates are monitored regularly, and appropriate action is taken where necessary.
- iv. The unit has plans and strategies in order to meet the national benchmark graduation rate of 33 percent (contact) and 25 percent (distance).

## Criterion 11: Programme Reviews

*User surveys, reviews and impact studies on the effectiveness of the programme are undertaken at regular intervals. Results are used to improve the programme's design, delivery and resourcing, and for staff development and student support, where necessary.*

### Minimum standards

- i. The unit offering the programme undertakes systematic reviews of its activities to determine its effectiveness in achieving its goals and objectives.
- ii. Programme delivery is responsive to feedback from students.
- iii. User surveys are undertaken at regular intervals for feedback from academics involved in the programme, graduates, peers, external moderators, professional bodies and employers, where applicable, to ascertain whether the programme is attaining its intended outcomes.
- iv. There are regular reviews of the effectiveness of benchmarking in the programme against equivalent national and international reference points, with a view to goal-setting and continuous self-improvement in the programme.
- v. Impact studies are undertaken to measure and evaluate the impact of the programme and its graduates, on the employability of students and in alleviating shortages of expertise in relevant fields, where these are the desired outcomes of the programme. Impact studies could also ascertain the degree of acknowledgement of the programme in the community, by other institutions and in the workplace, where applicable.
- vi. Results of user surveys, reviews and impact studies are utilised in a regular evaluation of all programme aspects and to develop improvement plans.