



COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE

**NATIONAL REVIEW OF
MASTER OF EDUCATION
PROGRAMMES BY DISSERTATION
CRITERIA AND MINIMUM
STANDARDS**

Didacta Building, 211 Skinner Street, Pretoria, 0002; PO Box 13354, The Tramshed, 0126;
Telephone: +27 12 392 9119; Fax: +27 12 392 9110; E-mail: bhengu.t@che.ac.za

Visit our website at <http://www.che.ac.za>

Criterion 1: The National, Institutional and Unit Context ¹

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 master's degree by dissertation 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 is 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 is 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. 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.
- vii. Franchising arrangements for programme delivery are not permissible.

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

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

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

Criterion 2: Programme Strategy and Co-ordination

There is a strategy to induct novice researchers into independent research and to support their research projects through to completion. Such strategy may consist of the provision of non-credit bearing learning experiences (seminars, courses) that support students in the production of dissertations that meet the minimum standards of an NQF level 8 master's degree. The implementation of such a strategy necessitates an enterprising, effective coordinating structure to facilitate attainment of the intended purpose and outcomes of the programme.²

Minimum standards

- i. The dissertation is conceptualised and presented as a substantial piece of academic work at a suitably advanced level commensurate with NQF level 8 (see also Criterion 6, minimum standard iii).
- ii. The design provides opportunities for articulation with other programmes within and across institutions or relevant disciplinary areas.
- iii. Procedures are in place to locate students' independent projects within a broad but coherent focus representing the mission and aims of the academic unit as well as the research strengths of academic staff.
- iv. There is a strategy comprising appropriate principles and/ or procedures for inducting students into research and for supporting their projects through to completion.
- v. Procedures and responsibilities for giving effect to the research design are defined within the faculty/departmental and institutional system.
- vi. 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
 - ensuring that quality assurance measures are in place.
- vii. The activities and learning experiences made available to students are fit for purpose, coherent, and sequenced in a way that meets the aims of the programme.
- viii. Regular and effective communication takes place with the students. This includes providing reliable information on procedures and activities associated with the development of student competence in research.
- ix. Opportunities are created for student input and participation in relevant aspects of programme procedures and activities.

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

² It is a fundamental assumption that B.Ed (Hons) graduates are not yet adequately prepared to begin functioning as fully-fledged independent researchers at master's level. The term 'design strategy' represents an attempt to establish a standard that goes beyond acceptance of no more than 'one to one' individual supervisory arrangements. It also implies a measure of diversity and flexibility in terms of activities involving students. Such activities may, for example, involve students in: workshops on ways of developing a research question into a research design; presenting research proposals to Faculty staff; attending lectures by a visiting authority in a relevant field; presenting seminars on work in progress; working in the field alongside established researchers; participating in research seminars presented by staff.

- x. An appropriate level of investment has been made in quality programme development.
- xi. Relevant forms of learner support have been incorporated into the programme design.

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 and the capacity of the academic unit to offer good quality research support.

Minimum standards

- i. Appropriate policies, procedures and regulations are in place for student admission, selection and assessment. These are communicated to all 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. Students are given information on areas of research focus encouraged and supported by the programme.
- vi. Selection criteria are geared towards widening access and attaining equity.
- vii. The institution provides access to information about funding opportunities for students wishing to enrol for the programme.
- viii. 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 of the topic area in which they intend to embark on research.
- ix. Admission through an RPL route may not exceed 10% of the total number of students on any programme.³
- x. The number of students selected for the programme does not exceed the available capacity for offering good quality research training and support in the focus areas made available.

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

- xi. 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.

³ Exceptions are permissible in cases where RPL admission is consistent with the institution's policy and practice for RPL.

- xii. The provider has developed detailed learner profiles that identify the characteristics and situation of learners and this is used to inform curriculum issues.
- xiii. 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, the 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. Responsibility for research training and student supervision rests with core, permanent staff to a greater extent than with temporary /part-time personnel.⁴
- iii. Core, permanent academic staff teaching on the programme has relevant academic qualifications at least on the M. Ed level.
- iv. 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 appropriate to that of the students' research, and have supervised at least three completed major dissertations (or five minor dissertations) in the past five years.
- v. Programme faculty members have formal opportunities to provide input on issues affecting admissions, progress of students, resource allocation, programme design strategy and activities, evaluation and research.
- vi. Academic staff are competent to apply the student supervision policies of the institution.
- vii. The staffing on the programme is in line with the equity programme of the institution.
- viii. The institution provides orientation, induction and professional development opportunities for both new academic staff members as well as part-time staff.
- ix. Opportunities exist for academic staff to update their knowledge and skills.
- x. Sufficient administrative staff dedicated to the programme is available, where appropriate.
- xi. 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:

- xii. Staff are trained, monitored and supported for the specialised distance education roles they perform in supporting independent student research.

⁴ Outsourcing of delivery is not permitted.

- xiii. Workloads allow sufficient time for the development of the necessary learner support at a distance. Where decentralised support is offered, 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

Given the nature of the master's by research, relevant minimum standards with respect to teaching and learning have been subsumed under Criterion 7, Supervision of Research Dissertation.

Criterion 6: Research

The programme is actively focused on research. Both staff and students contribute to the knowledge base in education 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 demonstrate competence in: conducting literature reviews; applying appropriate research methodologies; interpreting and analysing information; developing and formulating arguments; critically reflecting on research methodologies as well as on theories relevant to the particular field of study; communicating research results in a scholarly form. (See also Criterion 2, minimum standard i.)
- 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

The institution gives recognition to the importance of the promotion of student learning. Suitably qualified staff support 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. 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. An explicit understanding of the required standard of research achievement is clearly communicated to students on commencement of their studies.

- iii. 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.
- iv. There is a procedure for approving research proposals before students embark on their projects.
- v. 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.
- vi. 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 formalised where appropriate.
- vii. 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.
- viii. The requirements for supervision take into account all delivery modes.
- ix. There is a balance and mix of supervisory techniques and methods appropriate to the learning needs of individual students.
- x. Where necessary, students are afforded access to specialist expertise and resources, e.g. statistical packages and procedures.
- xi. Academic support is provided in language, writing and numeracy skills, where required.
- xii. There are systems in place to deal with under-performing or inactive students.
- xiii. Monitoring and review of the supervision process takes place regularly and includes student feedback on the quality of the supervision.
- xiv. 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

There are policies and procedures for monitoring student progress and for providing judgements and advice with respect to the quality of ongoing student research work in relation to established standards. There is an appropriate policy for the internal and external examination of dissertations and this is implemented in a manner that ensures the reliability, rigour and security of the assessment system.

Minimum standards

- i. Assessment criteria for the guidance of supervisors and examiners are of a suitably high standard for a master's degree by research and are aligned with the learning outcomes at programme and module level.
- ii. Procedures are in place and followed to receive, record, review and return student work within a specified time that allows students to benefit from feedback prior to the next stage of their work.
- iii. Student progress is monitored.
- iv. Suitably qualified external 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.
- v. 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.
- vi. Measures are taken to ensure the reliability, rigour and security of the assessment system. Assessment results are recorded securely and reliably.
 - vii. Policies for ensuring the integrity of certification processes for the qualification obtained are effectively implemented.
 - viii. There is a fair and effective procedure for settling student disputes regarding the results of the examination of their dissertations.

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

- ix. 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.
- x. 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 their particular fields of study.

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 cohort.
- 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 design strategy, 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. Results of user surveys, reviews and impact studies are utilised in a regular evaluation of all programme aspects and to develop improvement plans.