

BACKGROUND PAPER 4a

Criteria for Quality Distance Education in South Africa - 2003

A revision of:

*Criteria for Quality Distance Education in South Africa: Draft
Policy Statement, 1998 Compiled by Tessa Welch for the National
Association of Distance Education Organisations of South Africa
(NADEOSA)*

Introduction	2
1. Policy and Planning	3
2. Learners	4
3. Programme Development	5
4. Course Design	7
5. Course Materials	9
6. Assessment	11
7. Learner Support	12
8. Human Resource Strategy	14
9. Management and Administration	16
10. Collaborative Relationships	18
11. Quality Assurance	19
12. Information Dissemination	20
13. Results	21

INTRODUCTION

During 1996, SAIDE was part of a research team contracted by the national Department of Education to assist with the development of discussion document entitled *A Distance Education Quality Standards Framework for South Africa* (Directorate: Distance Education, Media and Technological Services, Department of Education, 1996). After extensive comment from members of the National Association of Distance Education Providers of South Africa (Nadeosa), a policy statement was prepared, *Criteria for Quality Distance Education in South Africa. A Policy Statement* (Department of Education, 1998). Finally in 2001, the distance education quality criteria were adapted for all education and training provision by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in its document, *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers* (October 2001).

The changes in distance education and in quality assurance both nationally and internationally in the last five years have given rise to the need for a revision of these criteria. In addition, the Department of Education and the Council on Higher Education are concerned to have a means to assess the quality of distance education. The Higher Education Quality Committee therefore requested SAIDE to produce a comprehensive set of criteria that may be used for self-evaluation by providers offering distance education programmes. But this revision was to be done in consultation with the South African distance education community.

SAIDE therefore revised the 1998 *Criteria for Quality Distance Education in South Africa* in the light of changes in the distance education landscape both nationally and internationally, growth in understanding of distance education through research and evaluation, and the emerging quality emphases in the HEQC's criteria for programme accreditation and institutional audit. We workshopped the revised document at the annual conference of Nadeosa on 28 August 2003, and distributed the document for comment to all participants after the conference to enable comment from the organisations which the participants represent. This document integrates the comments both during and after the conference.

The document therefore represents a comprehensive set of criteria for quality distance education agreed upon by the South African distance education community.

1. POLICY AND PLANNING

The educational provider has a clear sense of purpose and direction, which is informed by national priorities as well as by the quality demands of cost-effective educational provision. There are both a rationale and relevant systems for the use of distance education methods to achieve the purpose of the programme for the target learners.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

- 1.1 The mission statement of the educational provider sets out clearly and unambiguously goals and principles which are fit for its local, national and international context and which adequately provide for transformational issues.
- 1.2 Policy statements, strategic plans, slogans or mottoes are aligned with the mission, goals and principles of the educational provider.
- 1.3 There are policy statements and evidence of implementation of policies on
 - programme development;
 - course design;
 - course materials development;
 - services to and responsibilities of learners;
 - learner support, including tutors and mentors;
 - assessment;
 - recognition of prior learning and current competence;
 - where appropriate, integration of workplace learning into the theoretical curriculum (co-operative education);
 - language of teaching and learning, as well as of internal and public communication;
 - human resource strategy;
 - management and administration;
 - finances, fees and payment regulations;
 - quality assurance and review;
 - evaluation and research;
 - admissions and an enrolment management strategy to facilitate access for success;
 - marketing;
 - accreditation;
 - collaboration;
 - export of programmes; and
 - the use of information and communication technology (ICT).
- 1.4 The provider or programme management team can provide a rationale for the use of distance education or electronic learning methods for the delivery of the programme/course to the intended target learners.
- 1.5 Prior to offering programmes of study by distance education, 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.

- 1.6 There is a recognition that the use of electronic learning methods is likely to require greater levels of collaboration, both nationally and internationally, and therefore the provider has considered:
- Selection of an appropriate technical platform for design and delivery
 - Installation of technical infrastructure that is compatible with present or possible future partners
 - A process for the development and/or implementation of shared standards for online content across partners.
- 1.7 There is a published statement of the educational provider's commitment to learners and how this commitment will be measured.
- 1.8 Implementation plans are realistic, both in terms of learning and teaching goals and in terms of financial sustainability, and designed to enable targets to be met.
- 1.9 Policy statements and methods of implementing them are recorded, readily available, and fully understood by members of staff. There are mechanisms to support and monitor staff in the implementation of these policies.
- 1.10 There are monitoring procedures to ensure that all policies are implemented, evaluated, and amended as and when necessary.
- 1.11 Equal opportunities are ensured for all learners, staff and other clients.
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2. LEARNERS

There is up to date detailed information about past, present and potential learners. This is used to inform policy and planning of programme development, course design and materials development, learner support, and other relevant aspects of educational provision.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

- 2.1 The provider has developed a learner profile that identifies the characteristics and situation of students projected to study through distance education. This profile should include:
- demographic factors - for example, age, gender, geographic location, and occupation/employment;
 - language profiles - including language ability in main language of teaching and learning, language background, and multilingual language ability;
 - motivation for learning - for example, for career purposes or personal interest;
 - educational background/learning experience - for example, prior learning and experience, prior qualifications, experience of distance learning, learning skills and styles, and language background;
 - special needs - for example, barriers to learning, physical handicaps or learning difficulties;

- resource factors - for example, financial resources, place of learning, times available for learning, access to electricity, access to media and technologies;
 - experience and knowledge of technology; and
 - success rates of past and present learners.
- 2.2 The management of information system provides for the tracking of student performance (for example, in assignments, examinations, or even attendance at contact sessions) and can be used to identify at risk students and those students who, though registered, are inactive. It can also be used to determine completion and throughput rates.
- 2.3 Research into learners and their needs is a high priority and is used to inform all aspects of policy.
- 2.4 Learner information is used to design programmes, courses, materials, learner support, and counselling services that are flexible and learner-centred.
- 2.5 Mechanisms are in place for promoting access to learners from marginalised groups, inter alia, through the provision of academic development programmes.
- 2.6 Tutors have access to information about their learners and contribute to the collection of such information.
- 2.7 Systems exist to maintain the confidentiality of information about learners.
- 2.8 Special needs (for example, physical handicap) are considered in the design of course materials, assessment arrangements, and communication with tutors.
- 2.9 The educational provider is aware of and caters for learners with learning difficulties.
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3. PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

Programmes are flexible and designed with national needs as well as the needs of prospective learners and employers in mind; their form and structure encourage access and are responsive to changing environments; learning and assessment methods are appropriate to the purpose and outcomes of the programmes.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

Programme planning

- 3.1 The programme is developed in terms of a needs analysis based on an audit of existing courses and programmes, market research, liaison (where appropriate) with industry and professions, national and regional priorities, and the needs of the learners.
- 3.2 The programme is part of the provider's mission and plans.
- 3.3 For each programme, there is a publicly accessible description of
- the qualification to which the programme leads,

- the admission requirements,
 - purpose and outcomes,
 - target learners,
 - teaching and learning strategies (including, where appropriate, workplace learning),
 - features of the learning environment and resources,
 - assessment strategy,
 - courses or modules in the programme, and,
 - where appropriate, accreditation arrangements and articulation with other programmes offered by the educational provider, in the workplace or other educational providers.
- 3.4 There is a careful analysis of the most appropriate technologies to support
- The provision of course materials to learners
 - Other teaching and learning processes
 - Management and administration of the programme.
- The selection of technologies is based on the needs, resources and capabilities of the learners and the provider, and the purposes of the programmes on offer.
- 3.5 Wherever possible, courses are used in more than one programme.
- 3.6 Human resource planning is an integral part of programme development.
- 3.7 Programme planning and budgeting are aligned, with potential income clearly identified, and appropriate levels of resource set aside for course design and development, for administrative systems and for supporting learners.

Programme approval

- 3.8 Procedures for the approval of programmes meet the requirements of the relevant bodies, but are not cumbersome and allow for and encourage innovation and flexibility.
- 3.9 Where programmes are exported, procedures are established for reviewing legal programme approval requirements and also requirements under local law in respect of relevant matters including consumer protection, copyright, employment, packaging and postal despatch.

Programme curriculum

- 3.10 The outcomes, content, teaching and learning strategies and assessment methods in the programme are aligned and appropriate for the level and purpose of the programme.
- 3.11 In the case of professional and vocational programmes, work-based learning forms an integral part of the curriculum, and, where appropriate, placement in a work-based environment is an essential component of the programme.
- 3.12 The various courses of the programme are integrated.

- 3.13 To facilitate conceptual pathways through the programme, due attention is paid to the appropriate sequencing of modules/courses in a programme, and to the management of options.

Admissions and learner support

- 3.14 To facilitate access, entry requirements for the programme are as open as possible, and include recognition of prior learning and experience.
- 3.15 Where entry is open, care is taken to provide sufficient academic support to learners who may be underprepared. This may be by the provision of access or bridging courses, additional units within existing courses, or increased face-to-face support.
- 3.16 Numbers of learners enrolled on a programme do not exceed the capacity of the staff and the administrative infrastructure to provide for learner support and assessment needs in terms of the criteria in this document.
- 3.17 Care is taken that learners admitted to programmes which require the use of technology have sufficient access to that technology to make it possible for them to succeed in the programme.

Accreditation, articulation and flexibility

- 3.18 Wherever possible, programmes allow for flexible exit points.
- 3.19 Learners are made aware of credit requirements of the programme and the possibilities for transfer to other programmes in the same or other educational providers.
- 3.20 Where appropriate, assessment is linked to accreditation and fulfils the requirements of external quality assurance bodies.

Quality assurance

- 3.21 Clear and effective procedures are in place (including internal and external peer review) to monitor and evaluate programmes on a regular basis.
- 3.22 Review findings are disseminated appropriately and utilised for staff development, curriculum improvement and increasing learner access.
- 3.23 Should a decision be taken to discontinue the programme, due attention is given to meeting the provider's commitments to the learners registered on the programme.

4. COURSE DESIGN

The course curriculum is well-researched, with aims and learning outcomes appropriate to the level of study; content, teaching and learning and assessment methods facilitate the achievement of the aims and learning outcomes; there is an identified process of development and evaluation of courses.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

Course planning

- 4.1 The course is designed with national needs as well as the needs of prospective learners and employers in mind.
- 4.2 The elements of the course (see 4.3 and 4.4 below) and the relationships between them are consciously planned.
- 4.3 For each course, there is a publicly accessible and learner friendly description of the aims and learning outcomes; entry level skills, knowledge and experience; credit rating and/or notional hours of learning; target learners; teaching and learning strategies; content outline; items in the learning package (including elements such as study guides, textbooks, tutorial letters, audiotapes and videotapes and so on); assessment strategy; and a year plan containing key dates for learners.
- 4.4 Choice of media and technology is justified in the light of the aims of the course, required learning outcomes, learner needs, capacity to access and use the technologies, the physical features of the teaching sites and available facilities and services.
- 4.5 There is a stated language policy for the course which is based on the national language policy, language profiles of learners, career context and curriculum. The policy is implemented in course materials, assessment and learner support.
- 4.6 The list of courses offered by an educational provider is limited to a number that allows for quality investment in course design and development in the context of budgetary limitations. (Quality is defined by the criteria in this document).

Course curriculum

- 4.7 The amount and complexity of work required to complete the course merits the credits which it has been allocated. This also applies to the assessment for recognition of prior learning and experience.
- 4.8 Where a course is imported or exported, account is taken of the needs of local contexts, and, where necessary, the course is adapted accordingly (for example, by the inclusion of local case studies or a glossary of terms).
- 4.9 Content, teaching and learning strategies and assessment are carefully structured to facilitate the achievement of the learning outcomes.
- 4.10 Various forms of learner support are built into the design of the course.
- 4.11 Teaching, learning and assessment activities encourage critical thinking and independent learning.
- 4.12 The teaching and learning strategies of the course acknowledge learners' existing knowledge and experience, and provide opportunities for guided integration of new knowledge.
- 4.13 Where appropriate, experiential learning opportunities are designed into the course. There are suitable methods of recording and assessing this (such as portfolios, logbooks, project reports, student interviews, or reports from the mentor).

Quality assurance

- 4.14 The educational provider requires relevant competence of authors, consultants, and others that are brought into the course design and development process.
 - 4.15 The educational provider gives authors, consultants, and others involved in the course design and development process necessary guidance and training regarding aspects of distance education in order to assure quality in their work.
 - 4.16 An appropriate infrastructure exists within the educational provider to administer the range of elements of the course efficiently.
 - 4.17 There is a timetable for the regular revision and updating of courses.
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5. COURSE MATERIALS

The content, assessment, and teaching and learning approaches in the course materials support the aims and learning outcomes; the materials are accessibly presented; they teach in a coherent way that engages the learners; there is an identified process of development and evaluation of course materials.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

Materials development planning

- 5.1 The development of course material is based on a project plan which describes, for example, finances and other resources, the delegation of responsibility among those involved, and an adequate time schedule for the work.
- 5.2 If existing course material is used for a particular course, its suitability is evaluated in terms of required learning outcomes, the appropriateness of the teaching and learning approach, and its relevance for the target learners.
- 5.3 If existing course material is used for a particular course, there is proper acknowledgement of the source of all quotations and no breach of local or international copyright laws.
- 5.4 While the provider holds copyright for course materials developed by employed or contracted staff, the individual author's intellectual property rights are also respected.

Quality course materials

- 5.5 Materials are developed and reviewed in terms of the following criteria:
 - 5.5.1 There are clearly laid out aims and learning outcomes, and an explicit indication of study time (notional study hours per section of the material) which allow learners to adopt sensible study plans.
 - 5.5.2 The content and teaching approach support learners in achieving the learning outcomes.

- 5.5.3 Learner friendly introductions, linking and summarising passages motivate the learners and provide coherence to the materials.
- 5.5.4 The content of the course is accurate, up-to-date, relevant to aims and outcomes, free of discrimination, and reflects awareness of the multilingual and multicultural reality of South African society.
- 5.5.5 The language level of the materials is appropriate for the target learners and the materials assist learners with the particular difficulties that learning-through-reading and learning at a distance require.
- 5.5.6 Care is taken to understand the contexts in which learners live and work, as well as their prior knowledge and experience. This knowledge is used in the design of the materials.
- 5.5.7 Active learning and teaching approaches are used to engage learners intellectually and practically, and cater for individual needs.
- 5.5.8 Content is presented in the form of an unfolding argument, rather than discrete bits of information that have no obvious connection.
- 5.5.9 The various elements of the course materials and different media are integrated, and the integration is clearly sign-posted.
- 5.5.10 The course materials are designed in an accessible way. Access devices (such as contents pages, headings), graphic presentation of information, and layout facilitate use by the target learners.
- 5.5.11 The overall technical quality of the materials facilitates learner use.
- 5.5 In web-based/online courses, the following additional criteria apply:
 - 5.6.1 The service is speedy and reliable: it is easy to connect to the site, and the site loads quickly with a minimum number of crashed sessions.
 - 5.6.2 Pages and text are designed for consistency, readability and attractiveness.
 - 5.6.3 The site is easily navigable, has a sitemap with clearly marked links, and the different elements integrate seamlessly with each other.
 - 5.6.4 The site is up to date, with minimum technical faults, and continuously under development.
 - 5.6.5 The site clearly displays its institutional links and acknowledges sources of material used.
 - 5.6.6 Support in the use of the various functions on the site is provided both in the site itself and from external technical assistance.
 - 5.6.7 The site encourages interactions with other learners as well as with the tutor/mentor.

Quality assurance

- 5.7 The materials development plan includes provision for evaluation during the developmental process in the form of critical commenting, developmental testing, or piloting.

- 5.8 The materials are periodically reviewed in the light of ongoing feedback from learners and tutors and advances in knowledge and research.
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6. ASSESSMENT

Assessment is an essential feature of the teaching and learning process, is properly managed, and meets the requirements of accreditation bodies and employers.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

Assessment design

- 6.1 Assessment is recognised as a key motivator of learning and an integral part of the teaching and learning process. It is used to inform teaching practice and improve the curriculum.
- 6.2 Assessment information (including learning outcomes, assessment criteria as well as assessment procedures and dates) is provided in all courses, modules or topics.
- 6.3 The level of challenge of the assessment in a programme is appropriate for the level of the qualification to which it leads.
- 6.4 There are a range of formative and summative assessment tasks and methods which ensure that all learning outcomes are validly assessed.
- 6.5 Assessment, especially of experiential or workplace learning, is assessed in terms of predetermined outcomes and criteria.
- 6.6 A range of parties is involved in assessment of learners: for example, there might be self-assessment, peer assessment, tutor assessment and/or assessment by workplace mentors.
- 6.7 For each programme, there is at least one integrated assessment procedure which is a valid test of the key purposes of the programme.
- 6.8 There are effective procedures for recognising prior learning and for assessing current competence.
- 6.9 In distance education delivery between countries, care is taken that the assessment activities are designed and administered in ways that do not disadvantage learners in a range of contexts.

Quality assurance of assessment

- 6.10 Staff involved in assessment are assessment literate and competent to assess student learning at the level required by the programme.
- 6.11 Where part-time tutors are involved in assessment, they are trained for the task, and academic staff monitor and moderate both formative and summative assessment to promote reliability and fairness.

- 6.12 The assessment strategy includes systems for internal and external moderation that meet the requirements of the accreditation body.

Assessment management

- 6.13 Marking procedures for both formative and summative assessment ensure consistency and accuracy of marking and grading, and the provision of helpful feedback to learners.
- 6.14 There are clear procedures to receive, record, process, and turn around assignments within a timeframe that allows learners to benefit from formative feedback prior to the submission of further assessment tasks.
- 6.15 An appeal system is in place for when students have a complaint about the fairness of the assessment.

Security

- 6.16 Arrangements for locally-administered summative assessments are secure.
- 6.17 Particularly when electronic methods are used, there are adequate systems to ensure security of personal information and security of identity during assessment processes. However, the security solutions are flexible enough to accommodate different programmes and styles of teaching and learning.
- 6.18 Documented procedures assure that security of personal information is protected in the conduct of assessments and evaluations and in the dissemination of results.
- 6.19 Assessment results are recorded securely and reliably and are available to all stakeholders including learners (as is appropriate).
- 6.20 Clear and efficient arrangements are in place to ensure that the integrity of certification processes is not compromised.

7. LEARNER SUPPORT

Learners are provided with a range of opportunities for real two-way communication through the use of various forms of technology for tutoring at a distance, contact tutoring, assignment tutoring, mentoring where appropriate, counselling (both remote and face-to-face), and the stimulation of peer support structures. The need of learners for physical facilities and study resources and participation in decision-making is also taken into account.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

Academic support

- 7.1 Learners are encouraged to create and participate in 'communities of learning' in which the individual learner thinks and solves problems with others engaged in similar tasks. This is facilitated through a range of learner support mechanisms -

- peer support sessions, tutorials/contact sessions, teaching on assignments, support in the workplace (mentoring), email and internet communications, and so on.
- 7.2 Academic support is built into the design of the course materials.
 - 7.3 Learners are carefully oriented to the teaching and learning methods on the programme, particularly if electronic learning methods are used.
 - 7.4 Where appropriate, the development of competence in the use of information and communication technologies is built into the learning outcomes of the programme.
 - 7.5 In selection of venues and times for contact sessions, travel time and expense for learners are considered. Care is taken to place suitable sites of learning close to where students live/work.
 - 7.6 Tutors are selected and trained for their role of mediating learning from the course materials. The training places particular emphasis on equipping tutors to analyze and assist learners with language and learning difficulties.
 - 7.7 Tutors are trained to teach on assignments by giving constructive feedback.
 - 7.8 The tutor/learner ratio is sufficiently small to enable tutors to know their learners as individuals, be able to support them in their study and monitor their progress.
 - 7.9 There are sufficient contact sessions to ensure that the learners are able to achieve the outcomes of the course. These contact sessions are integrated into the course design, rather than being an add-on extra.
 - 7.10 The teaching and learning activities at contact sessions acknowledge learners' existing knowledge and experience, and provide opportunities for guided integration of the new knowledge and skills as contained in the course materials.
 - 7.11 There are opportunities for individual academic support for learners either by telephone, by appointment, or online.

Counselling support

- 7.12 Learners have access to counselling for personal difficulties/advice related to their study before and during their course or programme, as well as after its completion.

Administrative support

- 7.13 Administrative staff are trained to be helpful, clear and consultative in the way they relate to and make arrangements for learners.
- 7.14 The obligations and responsibilities of the learners and the educational provider are made clear at registration. It is clear what resources and equipment the provider will supply, and what the learner will have to supply himself or herself.
- 7.15 Where possible, arrangements are made to meet learners' needs for physical facilities for study, tutorial, and resource space.
- 7.16 Learners have access to the facilities (for example, libraries) and equipment that are necessary for their successful learning.
- 7.17 Learners are provided with technical support for each educational technology hardware, software, and delivery system required in a programme.

Learning centres as part of learner support

- 7.18 Both the academic and the administrative functions of learning centres are taken care of in the way that learning centres are managed.
- 7.19 Learning centres, to the extent that they become fixed structures, and particularly fixed structures with technological equipment, are accessible to the broader community, rather than merely to a provider offering a formal programme.

Monitoring/quality assurance

- 7.20 Learner performance is monitored and learners at risk identified. Timeous educational intervention is provided for such learners.
 - 7.21 Performance of tutors and attendance of both tutors and learners at contact sessions is monitored regularly. The work of mentors in supporting and assessing learners in the workplace is also monitored by the provider. Monitoring data is analysed and acted upon.
 - 7.22 Feedback is sought from tutors/mentors as well as from learners for the review of courses and programmes.
 - 7.23 Learner structures such as student representative councils and faculty associations are established, recognized and empowered to represent learners on structures of institutional governance.
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8. HUMAN RESOURCE STRATEGY

The staff structure as well as the experience, qualifications, responsibilities and job descriptions of staff are appropriate for the education and training services provided; staff development programmes equip staff to perform their roles and tasks effectively.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

Staff complement

- 8.1 Distance education teaching tasks are distributed among separate functional responsibilities; for example, course design, instructional design/course materials development, electronic media use, editing, tutorial support for learners, monitoring of tutors, counselling, assessment, and management of the distance education learning system.
- 8.2 The main responsibility for programme development, course design and monitoring of programme delivery is that of properly qualified academic staff.
- 8.3 Course design/development staff are suitably qualified (at least 2 levels above the level of the course).
- 8.4 The number of full-time academic staff in the educational provider is as small as possible, but the number of tutors (mostly employed on a part-time basis) is sufficient to provide for the individual needs of the learners.

- 8.5 The educational provider employs sufficient administrative and technical staff to handle the specialized tasks of registry, despatch, management of assignments, administrative support, as well as technical support to learners and staff with required IT hardware and software.

Staff development

- 8.6 Staff are trained, monitored, and supported for the specialized roles and tasks they perform, including the design, management and delivery of electronically offered programmes.
- 8.7 Staff engaged in online tutoring and the moderation of online discussions are qualified and trained for the intensive engagement and direction which is required.
- 8.8 Staff development is regarded as the responsibility not only of the individual, but also of the particular department and educational provider in which the individual works.
- 8.9 There are systems for the dissemination of newly acquired skills and information.

Workload

- 8.10 Academic workload is measured in terms of the following:
- course design
 - preparation of course materials
 - piloting of courses
 - devising and participating in assessment strategies
 - tutoring, particularly online tutoring
 - supervision of tutors/markers/other staff
 - management of courses
 - monitoring the success of the course
 - research and evaluation
 - contact hours with learners.
- 8.11 In planning workloads, it is recognised that more time is needed for research and development of electronically offered programmes because of the complexity and expense of virtual education.
- 8.12 The workload of staff involved in online support for learners is carefully monitored.

HR systems

- 8.13 Arrangements are in place for the proper recruitment, training, monitoring and payment of the necessary part-time and contract staff.
- 8.14 Staff selection and promotion criteria give priority to quality of performance in course development, teaching, and management of learning.
- 8.15 There is an effective performance management and appraisal system for all staff.
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9. MANAGEMENT AND ADMINISTRATION

There is effective, transparent and democratic management of communication and information as well as human and material resources; efficient administrative systems support the activities of the educational provider; the educational provider is financially sound and can make reliable educational provision.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

Accountability and governance

- 9.1 There are clear lines of accountability within the educational provider, between the educational provider and its governing structures, and between the governing structures and the community.
- 9.2 Proper accountability structures and mandates for responsible officers are in place.
- 9.3 Staff and students and external stakeholders are represented on governance structures.
- 9.4 Mechanisms are in place to prevent staff from using their position of power within the institution to generate extra revenue for personal benefit or double payment for the same work.

Management of communication

- 9.5 There are effective systems for communication with current and potential learners, with key outside bodies, with governance structures, and with all staff and tutors involved in courses.
- 9.6 Enquiries, applications and complaints are dealt with quickly and clearly within a structured administration system.
- 9.7 Learners' questions are answered quickly, clearly, and supportively.

Management of the curriculum

- 9.8 Appropriate schedules are developed for all activities forming part of the distance education system, with due attention given to lead times needed to meet deadlines.
- 9.9 The enrolment practices include provision of accurate, helpful information to prospective learners, as well as efficient handling of money and registration information.
- 9.10 The production and delivery of course materials is fast, accurate, and reliable. Where existing systems prove inefficient, creative alternatives are found.
- 9.11 There are systems to organise decentralised support for remote learners - grouping of learners, allocation of tutors, location of suitable sites of learning.
- 9.12 There are clear procedures to receive, record, process, and turn around assignments.

- 9.13 The turnaround time on assignments is kept to a minimum.
- 9.14 The examination system, where it is necessary, is reliable and valid.

Management of information

- 9.15 Learner records (for example, contact details, assessment results) are detailed, up to date, and accessible to tutors, academic and administrative staff.
- 9.16 Tutor records (for example, qualifications and experience of tutors) are detailed for each tutor and available to tutor-monitors.
- 9.17 Records of course results and other management information can be analyzed to
- Give completion rates for each group of learners
 - Identify at risk learners
 - Identify inactive learners.

Management of facilities and equipment

- 9.18 Facilities and equipment support the learner and are appropriate for the education and training services provided.
- 9.19 In the case of electronically offered programmes, the provider ensures the reliability and predictability of a 'fit-for-purpose' teaching and learning delivery platform, and there is a budget for regular upgrading.
- 9.20 Equipment and facilities are well managed and maintained and secure against damage or theft.
- 9.21 There are emergency methods of communication for use in the event of a failure of the primary channel of communication, and these are fail-safe.
- 9.22 Staff and learners are trained in the use of the equipment, facilities, and communication and information systems.

Management of finances

- 9.23 Proper budgetary processes are in place to ensure that the allocation of resources reflects the goals, values and principles of the educational provider.
- 9.24 Financial procedures (for example, handling of fees, orders, accounts, receipt of external funds, and part-time and full-time salaries) are known and adhered to.
- 9.25 There are budgeting procedures in place to deal with the allocation of resources and monitoring of expenditure. The budgeting procedures are flexible enough to promote and enable constructive experimentation in design and delivery methods.
- 9.26 Proper evaluation systems are in place to compare estimated goals and budgets with actual achievements.
- 9.27 Clear decision-making structures exist for seeking and receiving funds and the allocation and control of resources.
- 9.28 Financial aid and information about criteria for its allocation are provided for learners, external funding and donations permitting. Information about financial aid is clear to all learners.

10. COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS

In the interests of cost-effective provision of education and training, collaborative relationships are formed and collaborative projects are undertaken wherever possible.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

- 10.1 Wherever possible, collaborative relationships (involving public and private institutions, governmental and non-governmental educational providers, stakeholders and/or community structures as well as agencies or providers outside of the country) are formed for:
- sharing developed courses;
 - jointly developing new courses;
 - sharing facilities such as libraries and learning centres;
 - sharing regional centres for learner registration, distribution of study material, and examinations;
 - jointly delivering programmes;
 - collaborating in research.
- 10.2 The membership of relevant associations and forums is encouraged.
- 10.3 The programme plan includes criteria for selecting partners and contractors and the means to monitor and evaluate their work¹. This is particularly crucial for electronically offered programmes in which a much greater degree of collaboration in programme development is necessary.
- 10.4 To facilitate workplace learning, partnerships are built with employers that enable productive experiential learning opportunities for learners.
- 10.5 In the organization of consortia for programme development or delivery, structured contractual relationships are formed to protect the interests of all parties including the learners. Performance expectations are defined in contracts and agreements.
- 10.6 In cases in which providers offer programmes developed externally (either by an e-university or other external sponsoring agencies), there are clear procedures for programme approval in which the quality assurance requirements of both provider and the external body are dovetailed.
- 10.7 In programmes delivered collaboratively, the responsibility for performance remains with the provider that certifies the learners.

¹ This is particularly crucial for electronically offered programmes in which a much greater degree of collaboration in programme development is necessary.

- 10.8 In the case of public private partnerships, the public partner takes full academic and quality management responsibility, and ensures that student rights are protected².

11. QUALITY ASSURANCE

There is an integrated framework at a policy and practice level that informs a clear cycle of planning, implementing, monitoring, reflection and action to ensure that learners' and staff needs as well as the needs of other clients are met.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

- 11.1 The provider ensures that day-to-day activities are aligned with its mission, goals, principles and policies in relation to national and/or regional priorities.
- 11.2 Internal quality assurance processes are articulated with external processes as laid down by the relevant quality assurance bodies.
- 11.3 There is a clear cycle of planning, development, documentation, reporting, action, and review of policy and procedures.
- 11.4 In the case of electronically offered programmes, mechanisms for monitoring learner participation and performance are designed into the technical platforms used in electronically delivered programmes. For example, systems may be designed to track
- the time spent by different learners on components of the materials;
 - the sequence of choices made by learners in accessing web-based files; or
 - learner participation in online discussions.
- 11.5 The provider engages in benchmarking and uses appropriate monitoring and evaluation techniques to gather and analyse data to use as a basis for setting priorities and planning for quality improvement.
- 11.6 There are demonstrable processes and ongoing efforts to improve the quality of teaching and learning according to priorities identified in through monitoring and evaluation processes.
- 11.7 Staff development is a fundamental strategy to promote quality service provision.
- 11.8 Staff, learners, and other clients are involved in the process of quality assurance and quality review. There are clear routines and systems for quality assurance and staff is familiar with those that relate to their work.

² In June 2001, the South African University Vice Chancellor's Association produced a Code of Conduct for Public/Private Partnerships in Higher Education. This element represents a much condensed version of this Code of Conduct which contains statements under the following headings: Student Rights and Obligations, Dispute Resolution, Intellectual Property, Employment of Academic Staff, Student Support, Quality Assurance, Marketing, Assessment, Enrolment reporting.

- 11.9 Quality management mechanisms are in place to ensure that exported programmes are of equivalent quality to those offered in South Africa, and that there is compliance with the national quality criteria and other requirements of the importing country.
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12. INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

The education and training services of the educational provider are effectively and accurately promoted in a variety of ways.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

- 12.1 The publicity provided for each programme is accurate and sufficiently detailed to enable applicants to make an informed choice. (The following is a suggested list of such information: target learners, entry requirements, aims and learning outcomes, content, learning material, teaching and learning activities, scope of programme, learner support services, assessment and accreditation procedures, price, payment conditions, right to return course materials, recommended time limits for completion, and terms regarding interruption/postponement).
- 12.2 In the case of programmes using electronic methods, the learner is informed regarding access to technologies used in the programme, the technical competence required, and the nature and potential challenges of learning in the programme's technology-based environment.
- 12.3 Employers and others who enter into collective agreements regarding education or training have received sufficient and correct information about the content and outcomes, entry requirements, implementation and aims of the programme.
- 12.4 The provider's advertisements are truthful, objective and informative and meet the clients' needs.
- 12.5 In the case of public private partnerships, public partners monitor the advertisements of private partners to ensure alignment.
- 12.6 Information about programmes reaches as many as possible of those who can be expected to have a need or use for these programmes, given limitations imposed by resources and available information channels.
- 12.7 The institution uses effective learner recruitment, selection, support and development procedures to ensure that sufficient numbers of adequately prepared learners enter and succeed in the programmes. These strategies form part of the institution's management of information system and are subjected to institutional cyclical reviews.
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13. RESULTS

The educational provider fulfils its mission and the individual programmes achieve valid teaching and learning goals in cost-effective ways that have a positive impact on society and meet the needs of clients and national priorities.

ELEMENTS OF THE CRITERION

- 13.1 The educational provider is fulfilling its mission and attaining its transformation goals.
- 13.2 Learners are attaining the intended outcomes specified by the provider in the design of the programme. Expert peers/professional bodies are satisfied with the relevance and quality of learning achieved by learners on the programme.
- 13.3 Learners and recent graduates are generally satisfied with the programme (in particular it learner support and assessment practices) and its staff.
- 13.4 Employers/ the professions/ the community (as appropriate) are satisfied with the quality of the graduates from the programme.
- 13.5 The programme team is satisfied with the leadership and management of the programme, as well as the resources and facilities allocated to them to run the programme.)
- 13.6 Staff are all involved in a co-ordinated way in continuous improvement of the programmes, courses, course materials, administration, and support services.
- 13.7 Sufficient numbers of learners complete the individual programmes and courses successfully to justify the cost in time and personpower for the design of the programmes, courses and learner support system. Pass, throughput and retention rates are monitored.
- 13.8 The provider has financial results that afford the learners a reasonable prospect of completing their studies, and sufficient surpluses to ensure the future development of products and services.
- 13.9 Programmes are achieving equity in access, retention and success rates for graduates in terms of the requirements of the relevant authorities.
- 13.10 The feedback and results of the programme review/evaluation are used to effect improvements in the programme's design and delivery and to develop further the educational expertise of academic staff.