

Norms of Certification for the Higher Education Sector within the context of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework





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the Context of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-
Framework**

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A draft version of the document was reviewed and edited by Dr Derek Swemmer who has over 20 years of experience as a Registrar in two universities in South Africa where he was responsible for, among other things, certification.

An earlier draft version was sent to higher education institutions for comments, and valuable inputs were received that helped refine the document further.

The Management Committee (MANCO) of the CHE, and the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) assisted in streamlining earlier iterations, and in shaping the final output.

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Foreword

Norms are a set of principles, rules and practice that are accepted as being good or correct within a particular sector, industry or profession. The norms presented in this handbook are a set of principles, rules and practices related to certification which are accepted as good or correct within the higher education sector.

Unlike the other two quality councils (QCs), Umalusi and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO), which are mandated to certify candidates who meet the requirements for qualifications within the general and further education and training qualifications sub-framework, and the trades and occupations qualifications sub-framework, respectively, the Council on Higher Education (CHE), as the QC for higher education, does not have a direct mandate for certification. The Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended) has vested in the higher education institutions the authority to confer higher education qualifications and issue the associated certificates to suitably qualified candidates.

The above notwithstanding, in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended), the CHE is mandated to assure the quality of provision of education and training within its qualifications sub-framework, namely the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). The definition of provision of higher education as provided in the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended) includes conferring higher education qualifications and certification. It therefore follows that the CHE has an oversight role to play in ensuring the highest credibility and integrity of the higher education qualifications conferred, and the certificates issued by higher education institutions in South Africa.

An effective mechanism for exercising oversight as it pertains to certification is to provide guidance to higher education institutions on the principles, rules and practices which, when adopted by the higher education institutions, could foster and enhance the credibility, integrity, reliability and validity of the systems and processes for conferring qualifications and issuing certificates. It is this understanding that informed the compilation of this handbook on the '*Norms of Certification for the Higher Education Sector within the Context of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework*'. Hitherto, higher education institutions have developed and implemented their institutional policies on certification without a national point of reference.

In effect, the norms are national benchmarks that higher education institutions are expected to measure against in the development and implementation of institutional policies, practices, rules and guidelines for conferring qualifications and issuing certificates. If adopted by higher education institutions across the board, the norms would contribute towards steering the higher education sector in the direction of a single, integrated and coordinated higher education sector, as envisioned by the HEQSF and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

As cases of misrepresentation of qualifications, and the alleged fraud in the processes of issuing certificates increase locally and globally, it is necessary that students, graduates, potential employers and other basic stakeholders are made aware of the basic requirements of credible practices for certification, and also of

the standard features of legitimate and authentic certificates. Such awareness is critical to prevent students from falling prey to unscrupulous certification processes that compromise the credibility and integrity of qualifications to which they are entitled. Similarly, such awareness is important to employers and other stakeholders as it would assist in building trust in the *bona fides* and currency of higher education qualifications and the processes of certification.

The norms are anchored in the provisions of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended), the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended), institutional statutes of public universities, and other relevant pieces of legislation.

The process of developing the norms involved engagement with higher education institutions and other stakeholders. The CHE also plans to run workshops for higher education institutions to help them develop clear understanding of the norms and their implications to current practices, processes and procedures. Furthermore, the CHE will provide advisory support to the higher education institutions as they develop and/or update their institutional certification policies, rules, practices and procedures.

The handbook is a 'living document' and the CHE will review and revise it in response to changes in the relevant legislation and other national regulatory frameworks. It may also be amended in light of other compelling grounds as informed by research and feedback received from stakeholders. To this end, higher education institutions are urged to provide feedback on their experiences with translating the norms into practices.

Prof Narend Baijnath
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Acronyms

CAT:	Credit Accumulation and Transfer
CHE:	Council on Higher Education
CMSA:	Cheque and MICR Standards Authority
DHET:	Department of Higher Education and Training
ENQA:	European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education
ENIC:	European Network of Information Centres
ETQA:	Education and Training Quality Assurer
HE:	Higher Education
HEQSF:	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HEQC:	Higher Education Quality Committee
NARIC:	National Academic Recognition Information Centre
NQP:	Not for Qualification Purposes
NQF:	National Qualifications Framework
NZQA:	New Zealand Qualifications Authority
OECD:	The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OQSF:	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
PhD:	Doctor of Philosophy
QC:	Quality Council
QCTO:	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
RPL:	Recognition of Prior Learning
SADCQF:	Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework
SAQA:	South African Qualifications Authority
UK:	United Kingdom
UNESCO:	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation

Academic transcript is an official complete record of a student's progress and achievements in a learning programme leading to a specified qualification.

Admission is the act of, or system for, allowing eligible applicants to pursue studies in learning programmes in an institution.

Advanced standing is the status granted to a student at admission to allow her or him to enter a learning programme at a higher level because of recognition of prior learning or credit transfer.

Certificate is a document issued by a higher education institution to a candidate upon successful completion of a learning programme that leads to a specified qualification on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), which serves to attest that the person was duly conferred the specified qualification by the higher education institution in question, in terms of section 65B of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended) and institutional statute.

Certification is a chain of related processes that culminates in a higher education institution issuing a certificate to a person upon whom the institution has duly conferred a specified qualification in terms of section 65B of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended) and the institutional statute.

Credit is a measure of a contributing volume of learning that counts towards the full volume of learning required for a specified qualification on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). It is quantified as a contributing number of notional hours of learning required for achieving the learning outcomes specified for a qualification. One (1) credit is earned after (10) notional hours of learning.

Credit accumulation and transfer is the practice of accumulating credits from one or more cognate learning programmes in an institution, and transferring those credits to be recognised towards a qualification in the same or a different institution.

Course is a part of a learning programme that is normally self-contained and is assessed separately.

Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework is the sub-framework of the National Qualifications Framework, which focuses on higher education qualifications. It is developed and managed by the Council on Higher Education under the aegis of the South African Qualifications Authority.

Institution refers to a higher education institution, whether public or private, recognised as such in terms of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended). A public higher education institution comes into being through a government declaration in terms of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended); whilst a private higher education institution is legitimate only if it is registered or provisionally registered as such by the Department of Higher Education and Training.

Learning programme is a structured and purposeful set of learning experiences comprising courses or modules and other learning activities, which, together contribute towards the achievement of specified learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes are contextually demonstrated results of specific learning processes. They include knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

Module is a separate and coherent block of learning that forms part of a modular learning programme where the curriculum is divided into a range of similarly sized segments.

Norms are a set of principles, rules and practices that are accepted as being good or correct within a particular sector, industry or profession. The norms presented herein are a set of principles, rules and practices related to certification that are accepted as good or correct within higher education.

Not for qualification purpose (NQP) course or module is a course or module that is part of a learning programme for a formal qualification, but for which a student elects to enrol and pursue without necessarily registering for the formal qualification.

Post-nominal is a set of letters of the alphabet written or printed after the name of a person to indicate that the individual holds a qualification or qualifications.

Qualification is a formal status or title that a higher education institution confers on a person who completes a prescribed learning programme and attains a specified level of achievement in relation to the learning outcomes of the programme. The achievement is evaluated through a combination of formative and summative assessment tools and methodologies. The higher education institution confers the qualification in terms of the authority that it derives from section 65B of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended) and its institutional statute.

Quality assurance is the development and implementation of frameworks, mechanisms, processes and procedures for assuring that the specified standards or minimum requirements of quality in education are met.

Quality management is the sum of institutional arrangements for assuring, supporting, developing and enhancing, as well as monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.

Recognition of prior learning refers to the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission to educational programmes or for appropriate recognition.

1. Preamble

- 1.1 Higher education institutions issue certificates to qualifying candidates to attest to the fact that the candidates were duly conferred higher education qualifications. According to the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework¹ (HEQSF), the following are the types of higher education qualifications in South Africa: Higher Certificate, Advanced Certificate, Diploma, Advanced Diploma, Postgraduate Diploma, Bachelor's Degree, Bachelor's Honours Degree, Master's Degree and Doctoral Degree.
- 1.2 The qualifications and the associated certificates, confer special status and privileges on the recipients. They accord the holders competitive advantage in the job market² and some of them make the holders eligible for registration to practise in specialised professions. Some may also qualify the holders for admission to higher levels of study in higher education institutions. Furthermore, in most societies, higher education qualifications and certificates serve as status symbols³.
- 1.3 Society traditionally attaches value to higher education qualifications and certificates on the understanding that these are conferred and issued at the end of a chain of rigorous processes of knowledge and skills acquisition; and well-established, credible, incorruptible and transparent academic administration procedures.⁴
- 1.4 Increasingly, however, there are instances in global society which raise questions about the levels of rigour, credibility, integrity and validity of the processes and practices of teaching and learning in higher education. In addition, doubt is then cast upon the academic administration processes that lead to the higher education qualifications being conferred, and the associated certificates being issued. Not surprisingly, therefore, the global society is also increasingly becoming suspicious of some higher education qualifications and certificates.⁵
- 1.5 The latter point is a matter of serious concern to higher education regulatory authorities across the world; and most of them are taking the initiative to develop and implement interventions aimed at protecting and enhancing the integrity of the higher education qualifications and certificates, in order to prevent further erosion of the value that society attaches to them.⁶

¹ Council on Higher Education (2013). *The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework*, Pretoria: CHE

² Arkes, J (1999). What do educational credentials signal and why do employers value credentials? *Economics of Education Review*, 18(1): 133 - 141

³ Schofer, E., and Meyer, J. W. (2005). The worldwide expansion of higher education in the twentieth century. *American Sociological Journal*, 70(6): 898 - 920

⁴ Vuolo, M; Mortiner, J. T., and Staff, J. (2016). The value of educational degrees in turbulent economic times: evidence from the youth development study. *Social Science Research*, 57: 233 - 252

⁵ Marklein M.B. (2016) Credentials fraud now a global threat for universities. University World News. Online at <http://www.universityworldnews.com/article.php?story=20160603175611493>. Accessed on 11 October 2018

⁶ Eckstein M. (2003) *Degrees of Integrity: The Threat of Corruption in Higher Education*. Rome: International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO

2. Background and Context

- 2.1 The Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended) (hereinafter referred to as the HE Act), defines 'higher education' as all learning programmes registered in accordance with the provisions of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended), and which lead to qualifications or part qualifications on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF).
- 2.2 The HE Act, identifies public and private higher education institutions (hereinafter referred to simply as 'institutions' or 'institution') as the legitimate providers of higher education in the country. It further defines the term 'provide higher education' as the performing of any or all of the following functions:
- a) registering of students for higher education;
 - b) taking responsibility for the provision and delivery of higher education;
 - c) assessing students' performance in higher education programmes; and
 - d) conferring higher education qualifications.
- 2.3 Conferring higher education qualifications, and the subsequent issuing of certificates to the persons on which the qualifications are conferred, are therefore integral to the provision of higher education.
- 2.4 Public institutions confer higher education qualifications in accordance with the stipulations of their respective institutional statutes, and also subject to Sections 65B, 65BA, 65C and 65D of the HE Act. Private institutions confer higher education qualifications in accordance with the terms and conditions of their registration with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET)⁷, and also subject to Sections 65B, 65BA, and 65D of the HE Act.
- 2.5 The National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended)- (hereinafter referred to as the NQF Act)- governs the further development, organisation and governance of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) as a single integrated national framework for learning achievements. This Act designates the Council on Higher Education (CHE) as the Quality Council (QC) for higher education. Sections 5(3) (b) and (c) of the same Act mandate the CHE, as the QC for higher education, to work collaboratively with the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to ensure that the higher education qualifications conferred by institutions in the country meet appropriate criteria, are of acceptable quality and are also internationally comparable.
- 2.6 Accordingly, while the institutions have the authority to confer qualifications and issue certificates, the CHE as the QC for higher education has a role to play in ensuring that the qualifications conferred, and certificates issued by the institutions, are credible and internationally comparable. Furthermore, section 27(e) of the NQF Act requires the CHE to develop and manage the implementation of the HEQSF; and section 27(i) enjoins the CHE to ensure that

⁷ Department of Higher Education and Training (2016) *Regulations for the Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions*, Pretoria: DHET

quality assurance, as is necessary for the sub-framework, is undertaken; including developing relevant policies, criteria and norms.

- 2.7 It is the context described above, in particular Paragraphs 2.5 and 2.6, which provide justification for the development of the norms for certification within the context of the HEQSF. The development and publication of the norms confirm that the CHE accepts the responsibility to provide guidance to institutions on principles, practices and rules for protecting and enhancing the credibility and integrity of their systems and processes for conferring qualifications, and issuing certificates.

3. Purpose of the Norms

- 3.1 The main motivation for developing and publishing the norms is the understanding and recognition of the absolute necessity for maintaining the integrity and credibility of higher education qualifications and certificates. Conventionally qualifications and their associated certificates attest to the skills and knowledge, competencies and values that students acquire through particular programmes of study. Society has always had faith in the qualifications and the certificates thereof, on the grounds that they provide an objective mechanism for assessing candidates for the purpose of enrolment in further education programmes, job opportunities, and registration to practise in some professions.⁸ In addition, qualifications establish the position, authority and identity of the bearers and thus they confer status⁹. In the increasingly knowledge-driven society, academic qualifications are effectively the *de facto* passports that provide individuals with entry into and participation within the knowledge economy.
- 3.2 The norms articulate principles, rules and practices that foster and enhance the credibility, integrity, reliability and validity of the systems and processes for conferring qualifications and issuing certificates. The norms are, in effect, national benchmarks that institutions are urged to measure against in the development and implementation of institutional policies, practices, rules and guidelines on conferring qualifications and issuing certificates.
- 3.3 Once the norms are adopted by higher education institutions across the board, as is expected, the institutions will, in effect, have common and shared practices for conferring qualifications and issuing certificates. Having such common and shared practices, while still allowing individual institutions to take advantage of technological innovations and make the system and process improvements they deem necessary, is essential for the nation to move towards

⁸ Eckstein M. (2003). *Degrees of Integrity: The Threat of Corruption in Higher Education*. Rome: International Institute for Educational Planning, UNESCO, Rome

⁹ Brown G.M., (2005). *Recognition and Authentication of Higher Education Qualifications in a Transnational Market: Sorting the Cyber wheat from the Digital Chaff*. Online at [http://isana.proceedings.com.au/docs/2005/papers%20\(pdf\)/fri_1400_brown.pdf](http://isana.proceedings.com.au/docs/2005/papers%20(pdf)/fri_1400_brown.pdf). Accessed on 12 September 2018

the ideal of a single, integrated and coordinated higher education sector, in line with the objectives of the HEQSF and the NQF.

- 3.4 The norms also seek to make students, graduates, potential employers and other stakeholders aware of the basic requirements of credible practices for conferring qualifications and issuing certificates; as well as the minimum standard features of the certificates and their supporting documentation. Such awareness would empower students, in a timely manner, to identify any malfeasances that compromise the credibility and integrity of the qualifications to which they are entitled. It is only when the students are informed that they can take necessary steps to engage the relevant authorities and urge them to intervene and correct any malpractice. For potential employers and other stakeholders, such awareness is critical in building confidence in the value of higher education qualifications and their certification in the country.

4. Scope

- 4.1 The primary focus of the norms is to articulate the minimum requirements for the credible conferment of qualifications and issuing of certificates within the HEQSF band of the NQF. The norms also cover the issuing of supporting documentation including academic transcripts and transcript supplements.
- 4.2 The norms further provides guidance on the difficult matters of withdrawal and revocation of qualifications, the issuing of duplicate or replacement certificates and the introduction of digital certificates.
- 4.4 While the HE Act permits higher education institutions to offer programmes leading to qualifications on the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) in addition to those leading to qualifications on the HEQSF, the norms herein do not necessarily cover the systems and processes for conferring qualifications, and issuing certificates on the OQSF. The qualifications on the OQSF are conferred, and their certificates are issued by the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) in line with its policies.¹⁰
- 4.5 Similarly, the norms herein do not provide guidance on conferring honorary degrees as contemplated in section 65C of HE Act, on conferring joint degree qualifications, as well as on the issuing of certificates for short learning programmes that do not lead to qualifications registered on the NQF. Guidelines on certification for short learning programmes that do not lead to qualifications are presented in the good practice guide on the quality management of short courses which was published in 2016.¹¹

¹⁰ Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (2018a). *Policy for the Certification of Learner Achievements for Trades and Occupational Qualifications on the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF)*. Pretoria: QCTO.

Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (2018b). *Policy on Certificate Printing and Storage of Certificate Background Paper*. Pretoria: QCTO

¹¹ Council on Higher Education (2016). *A Good Practice Guide for the Quality Management of Short Courses Offered Outside of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework*. Pretoria: CHE

- 4.6 Furthermore, the norms do not cover the certification of achievements in co-curricular programmes of activities. This is so because, while co-curricular programmes of activities complement and enhance the learning experience of students in the programmes that lead to formal qualifications, in essence, they are not classified as academic programmes in terms of the HEQSF.

5. Regulatory Framework

- 5.1 The norms are anchored in the provisions of the NQF Act as alluded to earlier in Paragraphs 2.5, 2.6 and 2.7 above.
- 5.2 The norms are delimited by the parameters set by the provisions of all other relevant pieces of legislation, notably the ones listed below:
- Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Act No. 108 of 1996);
 - Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended);
 - Institutional Statutes of public universities;
 - Promotion of Access to Information Act (Act No. 2 of 2000);
 - Protection of Personal Information Act (Act No.4 of 2013);
 - National Archives and Records Service Act (Act No. 43 of 1996);
 - Electronic Communications and Transactions Act (Act No. 25 of 2002); and
 - Regulation of Interception of Communications and Communicative-related Information Act (Act No. 70 of 2002).
- 5.3 The document on the norms has some links to, and should be read and applied in conjunction with the following CHE policies, frameworks and guidelines:
- Criteria for Institutional Audits (2004);
 - Criteria for Programme Accreditation (2004);
 - HEQC Framework for Delegated Functions (2008);
 - The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (2013);
 - The Policies on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and Assessment (2016);
 - A Good Practice Guide for the Quality Management of Short Courses Offered Outside of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (2016);
 - Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education (2013); and
 - Framework for National Review of Programmes in Higher Education.

6. Norms

6.1 Governance

- 6.1.1 In a public institution, qualifications are conferred, and certificates are issued under the authority of the Senate after receiving recommendations from the Faculty or School Academic Boards. In a private institution, qualifications are conferred, and certificates are issued under the authority of the highest decision-making structure on academic matters after receiving recommendations from its substructures.
- 6.1.2 The recommendations of the Faculty or School Boards to the Senate of a public institution are properly documented and secured to serve as audit trail. The same applies to the recommendations of the academic substructures to the highest decision-making structure on academic matters in a private institution.
- 6.1.3 Within each institution, an office is designated as the dedicated custodian of the certification system including the associated administrative processes and procedures. Such office ideally falls within the portfolio of the Registrar or any such equivalent office-bearer of the institution.
- 6.1.4 Once Senate or the equivalent structure in a private higher education institution approves the lists of successful students to have qualifications conferred upon them, the dedicated office referred to in 6.1.3 above, verifies the information against the institutional data. It also designs and type-sets the certificates, procures the requisite stationery, prints the certificates or secures the services of an accredited service provider to print the certificates, and securely stores the printed certificates.
- 6.1.5 The dedicated office, under the direction of the Registrar organises graduation ceremonies, at which the qualifications are conferred on, and the certificates are issued to the successful candidates. It furthermore enters the certificates issued into a register. The information recorded in the register includes the full titles of the qualifications, full names and enrolment or registration details of the conferees of the qualifications and recipients of the certificates, and date on which the qualifications are conferred, and the certificates issued. The record of the register is maintained in accordance with the institution's data and records management policy.
- 6.1.6 Certificates produced and/or printed in error are also entered into another register, and are cancelled and/or destroyed after verification by a duly delegated official within the institution.

6.2 Requirements for eligibility

6.2.1 A person is eligible for a qualification to be conferred upon him or her, and thereby to be issued with a certificate, only after she or he satisfies the following conditions:

- secures admission to a learning programme that leads to the specific qualification in a particular institution;
- duly registers to pursue studies in the learning programme for a prescribed period;
- completes the learning programme;
- attains the specified levels of achievement in the assessments attached to the learning programme;
- earns the required minimum number of credits towards the qualification as stipulated in the HEQSF;
- complies with all other requirements as laid down by the institution; and
- submits all documents that are required for graduation, which include identity documents.

6.2.2 The *Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) Policy (2016)* makes provisions for an institution to recognise credits that students earn from another institution or other institutions for modules or courses in cognate learning programmes, when they transfer from the other institution(s). CAT therefore allows the minimum number of credits required for any particular qualification to be earned and accumulated from more than one institution.

6.2.3 According to the '50% residency rule' of the joint statutes and joint regulations and rules made in terms of the Universities Act (Act No. 61 of 1955), and the Technikons Act (Act No. 125 of 1993), a student who transfers from one institution to another, is required to complete 50% of the courses or modules leading to the target qualification in the institution that is going to confer the qualification and issue the certificate. This rule is implemented in a more nuanced manner by individual institutions taking into consideration any other pertinent rules within an institution.

6.2.4 Although the Universities Act (Act No. 61 of 1955), and the Technikons Act (Act No. 125 of 1993) were repealed by the HE Act, section 74(2) of the HE Act extended the legitimacy and validity of the joint statutes and joint regulations and rules until the Minister responsible publishes a notice, in a Government Gazette, indicating that the transitional arrangements are no longer valid. Since such a notice has not yet been published, the joint statutes and joint regulations and rules, of which the '50% residency rule' is but one, remain legally valid.

6.2.5 In cases where students register for and take courses or modules on a 'not for qualification purpose', but where such courses or modules are part of learning programmes that lead to qualifications, the credits earned by the students from such courses or modules are transferrable to, and recognised towards the relevant qualifications within the same or a different institution.

- 6.2.6 Students who, through recognition of prior learning (RPL), are granted advanced standing at the time of admission to learning programmes that lead to qualifications, meet the requirements for the qualifications after having completed fewer modules or courses than normally prescribed. In this regard, the qualifications are conferred on, and the certificates are issued to those particular students not only on the basis of the formal prescribed course of study, but also, in part, on the basis of RPL.
- 6.2.7 Short courses or learning programmes that are offered outside the domain of the HEQSF are non-credit bearing, and therefore do not directly contribute credits towards particular qualifications. However, the learning acquired from such short courses or learning programmes becomes part of an individual's body of 'prior learning' that one is allowed to present in support of applications for RPL for admission and/or advanced standing.
- 6.2.8 Institutions communicate formally with students who successfully complete the studies towards qualifications, informing them that they have fulfilled the requirements for the specified qualifications. They are also informed about the date on which the qualifications to be conferred on, and the certificates issued to them.
- 6.3 Student academic records
- 6.3.1 Student academic records are a subset of a broader set of data and information pertaining to students that institutions collect, capture and maintain for various purposes. Student academic records include information on:
- particulars and contact details of the students;
 - admission and enrolment details;
 - details about registration for the various components of the learning programmes;
 - achievements from the various assessments associated with the learning programmes;
 - progression through the different levels of study in the learning programmes; and
 - fulfilment of the requirements for the qualifications in question.
- 6.3.2 Student academic records play a critical role in providing the basis for decisions to confer qualifications on, and issue certificates to the successful students. The credibility and integrity of the student academic records are therefore of paramount importance.
- 6.3.3 The integrity of the student academic records is ensured by establishing and maintaining complete, accurate, up-to-date and verifiable databases; and by putting in place administrative and physical safeguards to secure them from possible unauthorised access, alteration, use or disclosure, and accidental loss or destruction.

- 6.3.4 Necessary measures are also implemented to ensure that staff members who work with the student academic records do not undertake unauthorised downloading and/or transmission, in part or in full, of the academic records of any student, to their personal mobile phones, tablets, laptops, memory sticks and any other data storage devices, including virtual storage or any other data transfer devices.
- 6.3.5 The student academic record database is structured and formatted in line with the stipulations of authorities that conduct data and/or record audits, provided that the stipulations are determined in consultation and agreement with the institution, and are reasonably feasible. Furthermore, arrangements are made that the student academic record database is audited at regular intervals.
- 6.3.6 Access to the student academic records database is controlled with strict segregation of roles and delegation of authority. For example, the capturing of records into the system, the verification of the information, and the approval thereof, are three different responsibilities assigned to different individuals or parties with properly delegated authority. Staff, contractors and agents are granted access only to those parts of the student academic records that are necessary for them to fulfil their respective duties.
- 6.3.7 Staff members that are authorised to capture, verify, manage and make use of student academic records, are properly trained and security cleared. They are also committed to ensuring confidentiality and information security. They are similarly committed to reporting security breaches or suspected security breaches, promptly.
- 6.3.8 Student academic records are used in accordance with the rights of the students as data and/or information subjects under the Protection of Personal Information Act (Act No.4 2013), the Promotion of Access to Information Act (Act No. 2 of 2000) and the National Archives and Records Service Act (No. 43 of 1996). They are also used in compliance with other relevant rules and policies of the institution.
- 6.3.9 The student academic records are maintained permanently, whereas the supporting documentation, such as marked examinations scripts, are maintained for periods of time determined by the institution taking into consideration the stipulations of the National Archives and Records Service Act (No. 43 of 1996), the institution's own data and records management policies, as well as the requirements of the relevant professional bodies.

6.4 Certificates

- 6.4.1 An institution issues certificates for qualifications only for those qualifications that are registered on the HEQSF and the NQF; and whose associated learning programmes are accredited by the HEQC of the CHE. Furthermore, where a qualification is linked to a statutorily regulated profession, the endorsement of

the associated learning programme by the relevant professional council or body is essential.

6.4.2 At a minimum, a certificate for a qualification bears the following features and/or information:

- unique identification of the issuing institution, in the form of a logo or coat of arms;
- name of the institution;
- full names of the recipient as reflected in his or her identity document or passport;
- name of the qualification whose conferment is being certified;
- SAQA ID number of the qualification;
- Qualification NQF level and credit value;
- an indication of whether the qualification is obtained with distinction, where applicable;
- signatures of the relevant duly delegated officials of the institution, and their official designations;
- unique certificate number
- date of on which the certificate is issued; and
- clear imprint of the official seal of the institution.

6.4.3 Certificates of the candidates who are conferred teacher education qualifications also bear the following information:¹²

- Teaching subjects and/or support role specialisations;
- Language(s) of Teaching and Learning; and
- Language(s) of Conversational Competence.

6.4.4 The name of the qualification reflected on the certificate conforms to the nomenclature specified in the HEQSF, including the designators and qualifiers, where applicable.

6.4.5 The full names of the recipient reflected on the certificate are those recorded at admission and/or first enrolment to the relevant learning programme. An exception is allowed where the recipient has undergone legal change in one or more of her or his names prior to completing the studies leading to the qualification, and where such change is duly brought to the attention of the institution prior to the issuing of the certificate.

6.4.6 Requests to change names that already appear on an issued certificate are normally not entertained, as doing so requires changes to the entire set of student academic records of the recipient of the certificate; and this carries a high level of risk of compromising the integrity of student academic records. However, as technology developments advance, and where such permit change in the names of holders of qualifications without compromising the integrity of student academic records, an institution may use its discretion to accept applications for change of names on certificates issued previously.

¹² DHET (2019) Communiqué to Higher Education Institutions regarding printing of endorsements on teaching qualification certificates (Issued by the Deputy Director-General: University Education on 4 April 2019)

- 6.4.7 Qualifications are conferred on, and certificates issued to those who meet the requirements, at institutional graduation ceremonies organised by the institutions. Qualifications are conferred in absentia on those who meet the requirements but fail to attend the graduation ceremonies. Arrangements are made for those who are conferred qualifications in absentia to collect their certificates at their convenience, or to have their certificates couriered or securely posted to them.
- 6.4.8 In the event that, a student who has met all requirements for a qualification passes away before the graduation ceremony at which the qualification would have been conferred takes place, the institution has authority to confer the qualification and issue the certificate posthumously.
- 6.4.9 When a qualification is conferred and a certificate issued posthumously, the institution may, out of courtesy, invite a representative of the family of the deceased, to attend the specific graduation ceremony to receive the certificate on behalf of the deceased.
- 6.5 Security arrangements for print certificates
- 6.5.1 Although advances in digital technologies suggest that institutions are likely to adopt digital certificates in the future, the current state of affairs globally is that certificates are predominantly issued in print form.
- 6.5.2 Unfortunately, there are serious security risks at the different stages in the process of designing and producing the printed forms of certificates. Mitigating the risks is therefore essential to ensure security at each stage of the process.
- 6.5.3 Overt and covert security design features are used to make it difficult for anyone to reproduce, forge or counterfeit printed hard copies of certificates. They also facilitate the traceability and authentication of the certificates.
- 6.5.3.1 Overt security design features enable holders of those certificates to verify their authenticity. Such features are normally prominently visible on the certificates but are either difficult or costly to mimic and reproduce.
- 6.5.3.2 Covert security design features are known by the relevant officials within the institution but remain unknown to the general public. The covert features enable the institutions to identify counterfeited certificates.
- 6.5.4 The choice of the quality of print paper has security implications as well. High quality paper is used as a security measure because such paper is normally not readily available, and thus it is not easily accessible to counterfeiters.
- 6.5.5 The use of special ink enhances the security of certificates. These include thermos-chromic ink, colour changing ink and taggant ink.
- 6.5.6 Unique patterns such as guilloche and numismatic patterns, and unique texts such as micro or nano texts, are also used as additional security features. Unique

serial numbers are added to the certificates to allow each certificate to be uniquely identified.

- 6.5.7 Only designated individuals are involved in the ordering and securing of stationery for printing certificates. The same applies in the actual process of printing of certificates and in the safe keeping of printed copies. Detailed and accurate records of the quantities of blank stationery and/or printed certificates are captured and maintained at each stage in the process.
- 6.5.8 Certificates are preferably printed in-house in designated secure places within an institution. This brings the process under the full control of the institution and thus limits the risk that comes with the involvement of third parties.
- 6.5.9 If the situation makes it necessary to outsource the printing process, then only those printing companies that are accredited by relevant authorities such as PrintSecure, and Cheque and MICR Standards Authority (CMSA), are appointed to print the certificates on behalf of an institution.
- 6.5.10 In the process of printing certificates, the spoilt print-outs are properly recorded, filed for specified time periods, and later disposed of in accordance with the policies and rules of the institution. This process is audited from time-to-time.

6.6 Possible shifts to digital certificates

- 6.6.1 The digital revolution is changing the delivery of higher education globally. Support services responsible for certification are also affected. In fact, there are already indications that some institutions are looking forward to shifting from issuing printed hard copies of certificates, to digital ones, in future.¹³
- 6.6.2 One of the main attractions of a digital certification system is that it has the potential for saving institutions from the increasing cost of investing in large physical spaces to store both blank stationery for use in printing the certificates, as well as the printed copies of certificates. Other attractions are that digital certificates are relatively easy to store and retrieve at will by both the holders as well as the institutions. They also enable real-time verification by employers and/or verification agencies such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and similar bodies in other countries. Most importantly, it is generally accepted that digital certificates are not easily forged, and are also backed up to guard against loss.¹⁴
- 6.6.3 As a first step, an institution conducts research or a feasibility study before making a complete shift to a digital certification system, and adapting processes. This is necessary in order to ensure that decisions to invest in such systems are informed and supported by hard facts.
- 6.6.4 An institution adopts such a digital system if the feasibility study establishes that:

¹³ Grech, A., and Camillieri, A. F. (2017) Blockchain in Education, *Joint Research Centre Science for Policy Report*, Online, <https://ec.europa.eu/jrc/en/open-education>. Accessed on 11 October 2018.

¹⁴ Ibid

- The digital system allows third party verification of both the issuing institution and the holder of the certificate. This creates employer and public trust in the system;
- The process of issuing the digital certificate is standardised and maintains a high level of integrity;
- The process is fully regulated and quality controlled, and has inbuilt mechanisms for verifying that everyone involved acts in good faith. It is also designed with the capability for exposing those that do not act in good faith;
- The system has demonstrably sufficient and effective security features, and enables a third party to establish whether or not the certificate is authentic, and not counterfeited or forged; and
- The digital certificate generated through this system is able to provide the type of information that potential employers, verification agencies and other institutions look for in a certificate.

6.6.5 Before making a complete switch from the print to the digital system of certification, an institution pilots the digital certification technology on a limited scale involving certificates for a few qualifications within one Faculty or School.

6.6.6 A successful pilot helps to identify possible risks and develop appropriate measures to mitigate them. Similarly, it ought to help in validating the expected benefits of the digital certification technology. Success with the pilot also assists in overcoming scepticism and/or resistance among students or graduates, academics and other staff members in the institution, as well as among employers, other stakeholders and the general public.

6.7 Issuing duplicate and replacement certificates

6.7.1 Higher education institutions exercise their discretion to issue duplicate and/or replacement certificates while they reserve their right to turn down requests to issue such.

6.7.2 Duplicate certificates are issued after considering each request on its own merits, taking into cognisance the security risks involved.

6.7.3 Duplicate certificates are either identical to the original certificates or contain affirmation that the details reflected are as on the original certificates, but not necessarily in the same design. In addition, they are endorsed with the word 'Duplicate' which is clearly and prominently imprinted on them.

6.7.4 Duplicate certificates are ordinarily issued when it is established that the originals are lost, stolen, damaged or destroyed by fire and/or other forms of *force majeure*.

6.7.5 The main condition for issuing duplicate certificates is that the affected persons furnish verifiable proof that their original certificates were lost, stolen or destroyed. Such proof is mostly in the form of sworn affidavits or Police case numbers.

- 6.7.6 Replacement certificates are issued when it is identified that the original had been printed with errors. This is done in recognition of the fact that errors occasionally occur, despite extensive checks and verification.
- 6.7.7 The issuing of replacement certificates is contingent on the original ones being returned to the institution. The original ones referred to here are the ones with printing errors on them. Once returned, the original certificates are cancelled and/or destroyed by a duly delegated official within the institution.
- 6.8 Withdrawal and revocation of qualifications and certificates
- 6.8.1 Certificates signify the issuing institution's attestation of the educational achievements of the recipients. They also serve as the institution's confirmation that the recipients meet both the academic and professional conduct standards of the institution.¹⁵ As such the certificates are the property of the issuing institution, and they remain so even after being issued to the eligible persons. Accordingly, the issuing institution retains the right to withdraw and revoke qualifications conferred, and certificates issued when there are justifiable grounds to do so.
- 6.8.2 The institution spells out clearly the grounds for withdrawal and revocation of qualifications and certificates, and makes these grounds known to all students and graduates as part of the institution's statute and/or rules.
- 6.8.3 Section 65BA of the HE Act makes provision for institutions to withdraw and revoke qualifications conferred, and certificates issued in error, provided that such withdrawal and revocation takes place within two years from the date on which the qualifications were conferred, and the certificates issued. It also provides for withdrawal and revocation of qualifications and certificates if it is established that some fraudulent or dishonest practices were involved in the processes leading to the conferment of the qualifications, and the issuing of the certificates.
- 6.8.4 The following steps are followed in the process of withdrawal and revocation of qualifications and certificates:
- providing notice of withdrawal or revocation of the qualification and certificate, as well as the reasons for such declared intention, to the person concerned;
 - allowing the person concerned an opportunity, within a specified time, to respond to the notice of withdrawal or revocation, or to make representations, with or without the assistance of a legal representative;
 - considering these representations according to the principles of fairness and natural and administrative justice; and,

¹⁵ Connell, M. A. (2005). *The Right of Educational Institutions to Withhold or Revoke Academic Degrees*. Stetson University College of Law Twenty-Sixth Annual National Conference on Law and Higher Education. Online: www.stetson.edu/law/conferences/highered/archive/2005/RevokeDegrees.pdf. Accessed on 9 November 2018

- making the final determination whether or not to confirm the withdrawal and revocation.

- 6.8.5 Once the withdrawal and revocation of the qualification and certificate is confirmed, the concerned person is obliged to return the original certificate to the institution within a prescribed time period. The person is also instructed to remove all references to the qualification in her or his *curriculum vitae*; and to inform her or his employer of the withdrawal or revocation of the qualification and certificate.
- 6.8.6 When withdrawal and revocation of any qualification and certificate is confirmed, the institution formally writes to the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to inform it of the decision and provide it with the relevant details and information so that SAQA is able to flag the relevant records in the National Learners Records Database (NLRD).
- 6.8.7 The institution enters the withdrawn and revoked qualification and certificate into a special register. It also makes the necessary changes to the student academic records, and adds the remarks that the qualification was withdrawn and revoked, as well as the reasons for the action taken.
- 6.8.8 By withdrawing and revoking qualifications and certificates, the supporting documentation such as transcripts and the transcript supplements are also withdrawn and revoked. Thus, it is a requirement that the originals of these supporting documents are also returned to the institution.
- 6.8.9 In cases where the reasons for the withdrawal and revocation are that fraudulent and dishonest practices were involved in getting the qualifications conferred and certificates issued, the institution concerned is obligated to report the matter to the relevant law enforcement authorities for criminal investigation.
- 6.8.10 An institution also has the prerogative to withdraw and revoke qualifications conferred, and certificates issued, if it establishes that the concerned candidates committed breaches of academic integrity, such as plagiarism, cheating in assessments and ghost writing or collusion. Matters about breaches of academic integrity are the preserve of the institutions concerned.

6.9 Academic transcripts

- 6.9.1 Along with the certificate, each graduate is issued with a free complimentary academic transcript which forms part of the official set of qualification documents. The academic transcripts are issued either in hard copy or digital form.
- 6.9.2 The complimentary academic transcripts are issued to graduates at the congregation or award ceremony organised by the institution. Those who graduate in absentia make arrangements with the institution to collect the complimentary academic transcripts later. Alternatively, they make

arrangements to have the academic transcripts couriered or securely posted to them together with the certificates.

- 6.9.3 Additional original copies of academic transcripts are issued to graduates on request and upon payment of the relevant fees to the institution, where such is a requirement.
- 6.9.4 As the academic transcripts are an integral component of the official qualification documents, their design and printing also incorporate security features such as watermarks, microprint, holograms and unique serial numbers.
- 6.9.5 At a minimum, an academic transcript issued upon completion of a programme of learning bears and presents the following sets of information:
- Name and logo of the institution;
 - Full names and identification number of the recipient (to appear on each page of the academic transcript);
 - Registration details of the recipient;
 - Title of the qualification, including the designator and qualifier, where applicable, and in line with the specification of the HEQSF;
 - NQF level and credits;
 - The equivalent level on the Southern African Development Community Qualifications Framework (SADCQF);
 - The minimum time (expressed as years) that it takes a student to complete the learning programme leading to the qualification;
 - List of modules and other learning activities registered for in the course of the learning programme;
 - Final assessment scores or grades obtained for each module or learning activity, and explanation of the grading scheme used;
 - Credits earned for each successfully completed module or learning activity;
 - Modules or learning activities exempted either because of RPL or CAT. In the case of CAT, the number of credits transferred from the other programmes of learning and/or institution(s) are also reflected;
 - Total credits earned at each level of study and also the total cumulative credits;
 - Remarks about progression from one level of study to another, academic honours or awards achieved at each level of study, and any other relevant remarks regarding academic performance or achievements;
 - Confirmation that the recipient met all the requirements for the qualification and the date on which the qualification award was conferred and issued;
 - Overall classification of the qualification obtained (for example, with distinction);
 - Remarks on the conduct of the recipient; and
 - An attestation as to the accuracy of the academic transcript with the confirmatory signature(s) of the duly delegated official(s) within the institution, and her or his designation, or their designations.

- 6.9.6 Copies of the academic transcripts are also provided to third parties such as potential employers and professional bodies on request, but only after receiving written consent and, where appropriate, payment of the fee required, from the graduates concerned.
- 6.9.7 The privacy of current and former students, and the confidentiality of their academic transcripts are safeguarded at all times. Furthermore, it is ensured that individuals with access to student academic transcripts have an affirmative responsibility not to release that information to third parties without the prior consent of the students or graduates concerned.
- 6.10 Transcript supplement
- 6.10.1 The HEQSF¹⁶ stipulates that each academic transcript issued by an institution to a current or former student ought to have attached to it an official supplement that provides a description of the nature, level, content and context of the studies pursued by the student.
- 6.10.2 The transcript supplement is akin to the 'Diploma Supplement' of the European Higher Education Area¹⁷, the Australian 'Higher Education Statement'¹⁸, and the New Zealand's 'Tertiary Education Qualification Statement'¹⁹. These are all documents that are issued to graduates by the awarding institutions in addition to the certificates and the academic transcripts. They describe the qualifications conferred to graduates in more detail and in a standard format that is designed to be easily understood and straightforward enough to enable comparison with other qualifications from other institutions locally and internationally.²⁰
- 6.10.2 The purpose of the transcript supplement is to make the qualification more portable and its value more transparent by providing a description of the nature, level, context and status of the learning programmes completed by the graduate, as well as the information about the education system to which the qualification belongs.²¹
- 6.10.3 The transcript supplement addresses challenges faced by employers, qualification verification bodies and institutions when seeking information about qualifications from other countries for the purpose of determining their equivalence to local qualifications. By including information about the features

¹⁶ Council on Higher Education (2013). *The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework*, Pretoria: CHE

¹⁷ Aelterman, G., Curvale, B., Erdogan, A., Helle, E., Karki, S., Niles, C. and Profi, F. (2008). *Study on the Diploma Supplement as Seen by its Users*, European Network of Information Centres – National Academic Recognition Information Centres (ENIC-NARIC) and European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)

¹⁸ Australian Government (2013). *Guidelines for the Presentation of the Australian Higher Education Statement, Australian*, Canberra: Department of Education

¹⁹ New Zealand Qualifications Authority (2009). *Guidelines for Implementing a Tertiary Education Qualification Statement in New Zealand*. Canterbury: NZQA

²⁰ Europe Unit (2006). *Guide to the Diploma Supplement*. London: Universities UK

²¹ Watt, I. and Gregory, H. (undated). *The Diploma Supplement in Australia*, Online, www.aiec-idp.com/uploads/pdf.watt-p.pdf. Accessed on 22 October 2018

of the education system in its entirety, the transcript supplement also promotes a broader understanding of the higher education systems from which the qualifications originate.²²

- 6.10.4 A significant advantage of issuing transcript supplements is that the institution communicates to interested parties the details of its programmes. Furthermore, the transcript supplement makes the interested parties more aware of the rich and unique blend of learning experiences the institution offers to its students. Thus, the transcript supplement also serves as promotional material that assists in raising the visibility and public profile of the institution and its graduates.
- 6.10.5 Issuing transcript supplements also reduces significantly the volume of requests to the institution to confirm details regarding an individual's graduation, qualification type, level and classification of qualification awards. Such requests are normally received from potential employers and other interested parties. In addition, issuing transcript supplements reduces the number of requests for references that are normally directed to academic and research staff in an institution.²³
- 6.10.6 In this era of internationalisation of higher education, the role that transcript supplements play in facilitating mobility of students, academics, researchers and personnel with skills in high demand, cannot be overemphasised. Graduates seeking to further their studies or work in a different country normally find that the transcript supplements are valuable in more ways than the actual certificate. Issuing transcript supplements is therefore a critically important service that institutions render to their graduates.
- 6.10.7 The transcript supplement is not a substitute to the certificate or the academic transcript. It is rather a supplement to both. It therefore conveys information that complements and supplements that which is presented on the certificate and academic transcript.
- 6.10.8 Among other sets of information, a transcript supplement for a research-based master's or doctorate degree programme, includes the full title of the thesis of the graduate.
- 6.10.9 The transcript supplement is issued either in hard copy or digital forms. When issued in hard copy form, it is normally printed on the same type of paper as the academic transcript and bears similar security design features.
- 6.10.10 Additional or replacement copies of the transcript supplement are issued on request, and upon payment of specified fees to the institution, where applicable.

²² European Higher Education Area (2018) Europass Diploma supplement, Online www.europass.cedefop.europa.eu/documents/diploma-supplements. Accessed on 22 October 2018

²³ Implementation Steering Group (2012). *Bringing it all Together: Introducing the Higher Education Achievement Report (HEAR)*, London: Universities UK

6.11 Use of post-nominal initials by recipients of certificates

- 6.11.1 Post-nominal initials, also known as 'post-nominal letters' or 'designatory letters' are written and/or printed immediately following the name of a graduate to indicate that he or she holds a certain qualification. They take the form of the abbreviation of the qualification type and field of study or discipline. For example, the post-nominal initials 'BSc Chem' denote that the graduate holds a Bachelor of Science Degree in Chemistry.
- 6.11.2 Policies or rules are developed and published by an institution to provide guidelines on the use of post-nominal initials, including their acceptable abbreviations. Such policies or rules also specify the order of presentation of the post-nominal initials in cases where the graduate holds several qualifications from different institutions, or in cases where the graduate also has post-nominal initials from the military or other fields.
- 6.11.3 Persons who are conferred doctoral level qualifications, for example Doctor of Philosophy (PhD), are within their rights to either use the post-nominal initials 'PhD' after their names, or the title 'Doctor' (Dr) before their names; but not both at the same time.
- 6.11.4 Honorary degrees are not formal qualifications within the HEQSF. Recipients of honorary degrees are required to add the words '*honoris causa*' after the post-nominal initials to signify that the degrees are honorary.
- 6.11.5 Only the institution that confers an honorary doctorate to a person addresses such person, orally and in writing, as 'Doctor' (Dr).

7. Use and Review of this Document

- 7.1 The process of developing the norms involved consultations with institutions and other stakeholders. Once the document is published, the CHE will run workshops for institutions to provide insights on the norms. It will also provide advisory support to institutions when they are developing and/or revising their certification policies, rules, practices or procedures, to ensure that these conform to the norms.
- 7.2 The responsibility of institutions in relation to the norms is to make use of them as benchmarks in the processes of developing and/or updating their certification policies, rules, practices and procedures. The institutions would also be expected to provide feedback to the CHE regarding the challenges, if any, that they may face in conforming to the norms. Such feedback should be forwarded to the ceo@che.ac.za.
- 7.3 Students would need to familiarise themselves with the norms and ensure that the institutions from which they graduate follow certification processes and procedures that conform to the norms. They need to engage the relevant authorities in institutions where the certification processes and procedures

followed are materially at variance with the norms, especially where the students and graduates are disadvantaged by such practices.

- 7.4 Employers and qualification verification agencies have the responsibility to check and verify that certification documents presented to them by the holders conform to the minimum requirements set out in this document.
- 7.5 The CHE will review and revise the document as and when necessary as research reveals new international developments in the area of certification. A review may also be necessitated by changes in legislation and other national regulatory frameworks; as well as by feedback received from institutions and interested and/or affected parties.

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