MANUAL AND CRITERIA FOR A THEMED REVIEW:

Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision

3 July 2025

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

CHE	Council on Higher Education, the Council
DE	Distance Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ERTL	Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning
EQA	External Quality Assurance
HEI	Higher Education Institution (including public and private institutions)
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information System
HEPS	Higher Education Practice Standard
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
ICTs	Information and Communication Technologies
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NQF Act	National Qualifications Framework Act, 67 of 2008, as amended
PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
SER	Self-Evaluation Report
TQR	Themed Quality Review

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Agency in Higher Education involves intentional and purposeful actions in learning, indicating a socially mediated system connected to autonomy. It reflects students' willingness to initiate acts for learning, emphasising their active role in the educational journey.

Asynchronous, digital modality involves education, instruction, and learning experiences that occur at different times and often in different locations. Participants in asynchronous settings engage in activities without the constraint of real-time interaction, allowing for flexibility in when individuals contribute to discussions or complete coursework. In this modality, interactions and communication occur with a time lag, enabling participants to be geographically dispersed or situated in the same physical space. Asynchronous learning allows for a more flexible schedule, as faculty and students interact over an extended period, such as days or weeks, providing latitude in scheduling coursework and interactions. However, asynchronous modalities do not cater for real-time, immediate engagement.

Blended learning refers to the provision of structured learning opportunities using a combination of contact, distance, and/or ICT supported opportunities to suit different purposes, audiences, and contexts (DHET, 2014). Blended learning is not a mode of provision, it is a strategy or approach. Blended learning involves purposefully integrating technology-mediated activities to support face-to-face learning, teaching, and assessment. It can involve different approaches, such as the flipped classroom. Thus, the term *blended* learning implies that the dominant mode of learning is enhanced with supplemented learning which may be enabled by technology, contact, or tools.

Coherence refers, in the context of a quality management system, to a reasonable and functional relationship among the components of the quality system.

Contact mode refers to courses involving face-to-face or personal interaction with institutional teachers or institutional supervisors, through lectures, tutorials, seminars, practicals, supervision, or other forms of required work, which occurs at the institution's premises or at a site of delivery of the institution (CHE, 2022). All teaching, learning, and assessment (TLA) is facilitated and designed for face-to-face interaction on campus and generally follows a conventional timetable. This is also known as in-person, face-to-face or on-site teaching, as the educator and students are in the same physical space at the same time. Contact mode includes all learning environments and activities such as lectures, seminars, fieldwork, laboratories, and tutorials.

Core academic functions are learning and teaching, research, and community engagements, with the understanding that individual institutions may focus differently on various aspects of these functions, based on their vision, mission, and strategic goals.

Curriculum is a structure that distributes access to knowledge and to knowing by specifying what is taught, who is taught, who teaches, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed. The curriculum is therefore politically, socially, and culturally constructed. The term 'curriculum' encompasses: knowledge, such as the list of subject areas, topics and resources included in a course of study; ways of knowing, such as skills, values, and practices; teaching methodologies, including modes of provision; and assessment practices. All curricula are informed by the nature of the discipline or field, the philosophical beliefs of the designer(s), who the students are, the institution and its identity, and the broader context in which the curriculum is enacted. A curriculum encompasses the planned process, the actual implementation of the teaching, and the students' experiences of the learning process. It also includes awareness of the 'hidden curriculum', that is, the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that a curriculum promotes and enacts.

Differentiation, in the context of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), refers to institutional functional differences and their differences in respect of identities, missions, and internal quality assurance (IQA) functionality. Differentiation is also implicated in terms of the configuration of the mode(s) of provision and plays out in relation to the dimensions (i.e., time-pace-space, preparedness, responsiveness, integrity, and institutional support).

Distance education (DE), as a mode of provision, is defined by DHET as the interaction with institutional teachers or supervisors which is undertaken through distance education techniques such as correspondence, telematics, learning support centres, or the internet. The DE Policy acknowledges continua of pedagogy and modes and does not consider online as essential to distance education (DHET, 2014). DE is based primarily on a set of teaching and learning strategies (or educational methods) that can be used to overcome spatial and/or transactional distance between educators and students. It avoids the need for students to discover the curriculum by attending classes frequently and for long periods. Rather, it aims to create a quality learning environment using an appropriate combination of different media, tutorial support, peer group discussion, and practical sessions. Institutions opting for distance education as a mode of delivery need to establish systems and processes for decentralised distribution of learning resources, communications, student and learning support, as well as formative and summative assessment. The term 'distance education' as a mode of provision therefore refers to provision in which students spend 30% or less of the stated notional learning hours in undergraduate courses at NQF Levels 5 and 6, and 25% or less in courses at NQF Level 7 and initial postgraduate courses at NQF Level 8, in staff-led, face-to-face, campus-based structured learning activities (DHET, 2014).

Educational context refers to the environment where learning takes place in the realm of learning and teaching, and refers to the intricate interplay of factors that shape the learning experience. It involves being contextually responsive, incorporating culturally responsive pedagogy, and refers to the various factors that influence the learning experience, including cultural, social, economic, and physical aspects. It involves adapting teaching methods, content, and the learning environment to meet the specific needs of learners and recognising the dynamic interplay of these factors. A context-aware approach ensures that education is inclusive, relevant, and responsive to the diverse needs of students, considering not only the content but also the timing, location, and modalities of instruction.

Effective, in the context of a quality management system, refers to a system that accomplishes its intended purpose.

Efficient, in the context of a quality management system (QMS), refers to a system that accomplishes its intended purpose while using time, effort, and resources well; that is, the QMS provides value for money to the institution.

External quality assurance (EQA) is the way that an external quality agency, such as the CHE, assures that an institution has internal quality assurance (IQA) systems in place that manage the quality of its activities and educational provision.

Graduate attributes are the qualities, knowledge, skills, and values that students can reasonably be expected to acquire at an institution through their varied experiences and efforts, and which include critical thinking, the ethical and professional behaviour required of a graduate, and a capacity to take what has been learnt beyond the site of learning in order to become an active citizen.

Guidelines indicate why a particular standard is important, describe its salient features, and indicate how standards could reasonably be interpreted and implemented in different contexts.

Hybrid learning, as a combination of both synchronous and asynchronous modalities, integrates elements of real-time interaction and flexibility. This approach allows for a blended educational experience where students and faculty can engage both synchronously, at scheduled times, and asynchronously, with the freedom to participate at different times. Hybrid learning provides a balance, leveraging the advantages of both modalities to accommodate various learning styles and preferences. The synchronous component involves simultaneous interactions, akin to traditional classroom settings, while the asynchronous aspect allows for individualised learning schedules and increased flexibility in accessing educational materials. In a hybrid mode, learning, teaching, and assessment involves a purposefully designed combination of face-to-face and online or virtual learning. Different forms may include block release (blocks of contact time interspersed with periods

of fully online learning, teaching, and assessment); dual delivery (teaching happens face to face and online at the same time); hyflex (students can choose to participate synchronously in-person or online, or asynchronously in their own time).

Institutional audit/review refers to an external quality review process of an institution's quality management system and its constituent elements, based on that institution's identity, nature, context, and strategic goals. Such a review systematically and objectively evaluates the system's appropriateness, coherence, and effectiveness in assuring the quality of institutional delivery of higher education's core functions.

Institutional culture refers to a set of interrelated assumptions, attitudes, values, and behaviours shared by most stakeholders at an institution.

Internal quality assurance (IQA) is the integrated institutional system of people, policies, processes, and practices used to manage and strengthen the quality of its delivery of the core academic and associated functions, as determined by its vision, mission, and strategic goals.

Learning management system (LMS) is a platform or software that assists in the delivery of content online for learning purposes and is therefore used to organise and distribute e-learning materials, assignments, and assessments; track and calculate grades; and facilitate communication among students and teachers. An LMS integrates interactive learning environments and administration and facilitates customised online instructional materials. An LMS can be a web-based software application using a database on which various types of information are stored. Various tools enable instructors to easily create their individual online courses. Administration of instructors, users, courses, and content is often centralised and automated within an LMS. (Adapted from various sources.)

Mode of provision refers to the dominant mix of methods by which institutions mediate their curricula. In a single-mode institution, all courses and programmes are mediated either by distance or contact-based methodologies; in a dual-mode institution, courses and programmes may be mediated by either distance- or contact-based methods, and equivalent forms of the same course or programme are offered in both modes; in a mixed-mode institution, all courses and programmes involve a mix of methods associated traditionally with distance- and contact-based provision, with the blend of methods varying from context to context. However, individual programmes will be accredited either as contact or distance provision (DHET, 2014).

Online education refers to a mode of instruction in which students receive course materials and interact with instructors and peers in a digitally mediated context or LMS, typically via the Internet (adapted from Dung et al., 2023). All learning, teaching, and assessment is designed for and happens fully online. Activities are intentionally designed for online and offered

synchronously (at the same time) and/or asynchronously (in own time). Online learning may include limited non-compulsory contact time for particular activities (such as study groups) and/or venue-based final assessment.

Open (and) distance learning (ODL) refers to the use of distance education methods to support the realisation of open learning purposes and principles. Omission of the "and" – as in "Open distance learning" – implies that ALL distance programmes offered are based on open learning principles. (DHET, 2014)

Open learning typically involves making provision to support a wider range of student choices regarding access, curriculum, pacing, sequencing, learning modes and methods, assessment, and articulation. Students studying through ODL approaches typically take longer to complete their studies, as they need to balance study and other commitments. Guiding students towards making informed choices based on workload, and the assumption that completion of a course or programme of study will typically take twice as long to complete, are important features of responsible ODL practice; as is trying to assist students in not taking more than three times the minimum time to complete, for the sake of coherence and the complications arising from curriculum renewal processes (DHET, 2014).

Programme refers to a purposeful and structured set of learning activities designed to enable a student to meet the outcomes necessary for the award of a qualification. Learning Programmes are specialisations of a generic qualification accredited to an institution and recommended to be recorded against the institutional generic qualification on the NQF.

Quality is understood to encompass fitness of purpose, fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation.

Quality assurance (QA) is the process of putting in place and delivering on i) the strategic goals and purposes that an institution has identified for itself and ii) the programmes for delivering sets of learning experiences that support students in attaining the qualifications to which they lead. It also refers to the process of evaluating and providing evidence of the extent to which institutions fulfil their own quality assurance objectives.

Quality culture refers to a set of interrelated and enacted assumptions, values, attitudes, activities, and behaviours, shared by most academic and support employees at an institution that, together, function to deliver the desired quality of learning and teaching, research, and community engagement determined by the vision, mission, and strategic goals of that institution.

Quality improvement refers to the planned programme of activities that institutionalise a quality culture and that develops quality practices better than those that existed previously.

Such quality improvement is usually as a direct response to an internal institutional evaluation and/or an external peer review.

Quality management system (QMS) refers to the institutional arrangements that assure the quality of learning and teaching, assessment, research, and community engagement. Such an integrated, internal system supports, develops, enhances, and monitors the institution's delivery of the core functions of higher education.

Qualification refers to the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by a higher education institution and registered on South Africa's National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Reflexive and generative methodology describes a dynamic, cyclical approach that combines continuous reflection with creative solution-finding. It represents a process where systematic examination of standards and guidelines occurs simultaneously with the generation of innovative approaches to improve them. This dual nature creates a feedback loop where reflection deepens understanding, which in turn enables more effective solution generation, leading to further insights through reflection. The process embodies both the ongoing evolution of quality standards and the enhancement of interpretative and innovative capabilities within those standards over time.

Standards refer to codes of practice for quality assurance used in higher education, which HEIs must consider and adhere to in all aspects of their activities and in all types of higher education provision.

Student experience is regarded as students' comprehensive and holistic engagements with a particular institution; their own efforts and experience of various modes of learning and teaching; curricular design within programmes; assessment practices; access to and use of appropriate learning resources; the management of student enrolment; as well as academic and non-academic student support and development.

Student success is defined, for the individual student, as the attainment of graduate attributes that are personally, professionally, and socially valuable. For the institution, it refers to students' academic persistence in completing their studies; academic results that reflect equity of success in terms of race, gender, and disability; achieving credible results within a minimum time to completion; successful entry into employment or some other form of economic activity; and/or successfully progressing to postgraduate studies.

Synchronous, digital modality refers to a method of teaching and learning where interactions, communication, and activities take place simultaneously, though not necessarily in the same physical location. Participants engage in real-time or near-real-time interactions, requiring them to be present and connected at a scheduled time. Synchronous

communication often involves immediate and direct exchanges between faculty and students, whether they are geographically distributed or located in the same physical space. This modality mirrors traditional face-to-face classroom settings, as participants must engage at specific times to ensure a synchronous and equally accessible learning experience for all involved.

Themed audit refers to an audit of limited scope at national or institutional levels, based on HEQC-approved Terms of Reference and methodology, which focuses on a specific area of interest at a particular time.

Virtual refers to any item, programme, event or learning platform created by computer technology and appearing to exist but not existing in the physical world, thereby referring to a digitally replicated version of something physically real.

1. INTRODUCTION

This *Manual for a Themed Review on Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision 2025* (henceforth the *Manual*) must be read as a complementary document to the *Quality Assurance Framework* (2020) (henceforth the *QAF)*. The *Manual* provides details of an operational nature for planning, capacity development, and the quality review process.

The QAF provides the legislative and educational context for the CHE's EQA functions. It describes the quality-related context within which the themed review is to be conducted as a quality review. The nature of quality reviews is further detailed in the *Implementation Protocols for the External Quality Assurance Functions of the QAF* (2024).

The purpose of the *Manual* is to provide procedural clarity on the themed review on *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision* to be undertaken by the HEQC. Themed audits, on the other hand, focus on an area, process, or situation in the sector that requires immediate investigation and possible intervention through a review across the sector or specific sub-sectors or institutions. Themed audits are conducted according to HEQC-approved Terms of Reference.

2. PURPOSE AND SCOPE OF THIS THEMED REVIEW

In April 2020, shortly after the COVID-19 pandemic started, the first lockdown was announced by the government. Higher education institutions had to institute a range of Emergency Remote Teaching and Learning (ERTL) options to enable students to continue with their

learning. Most institutions opted to move fully online during the Level 5 lockdown, with varying levels and combinations of modes of provision as the lockdown levels eased.

The HEQC responded to the situation by:

1. Extending the accreditation status of all programmes that had been previously accredited in the contact mode to being accredited in the distance mode, which enabled students to graduate from accredited qualifications even under lockdown conditions. This HEQC concession has been extended until the end of 2026.
2. Publishing *Quality Assurance Guidelines for Emergency Remote Teaching, Learning and Assessment during the COVID-19 Pandemic* (2020).

These *Guidelines* envisioned multiple phases in how higher education would respond to the pandemic, starting with an immediate response to the lockdowns and providing digital devices and data to students, with an incremental return to campus for some students as the lockdowns eased. The final stage was characterised as a planning phase of the 'new normal', *with the following characteristics:*

- *Multi-modal teaching, learning, and assessment integral to future sectoral and institutional strategies,* and
- *Digitisation as a central node in systemic and institutional transformation.*

The prediction that multi-modal TLA will become integral to institutional strategies in which the digitisation and investments made during the pandemic can be maximised has been realised. However, the HEQC must base its decisions regarding the modes of learning and teaching provision in institutions, along with the related quality arrangements and future directions, on substantive EQA processes to ensure continued quality in the sector.

Both the *Framework for Institutional Audits* (2021) and the *Quality Assurance Framework* (2021) (QAF) make provision for themed reviews as an external quality assurance instrument to aid the HEQC in making informed decisions about the quality arrangements in institutions.

Since the pandemic concession by the HEQC cannot be extended indefinitely, it was decided that a themed review on *modes of learning and teaching provision* will be used to enable the HEQC to make informed decisions regarding the continued use of various modes of provision by institutions that were originally only accredited for the contact mode (CHE Communiqué 3 of 2024).

The themed review has two purposes: Firstly, it aims to allow institutions which have demonstrated that their quality arrangements within the scope of the review are satisfactory, to continue offering their existing accredited qualifications and programmes in various modes of provision.

Secondly, the themed review aims to help the CHE understand the current state of multi-modal provision in the sector, and to support institutions needing assistance through capacity development initiatives and improvement planning.

It should be noted that the themed review has no direct implications for the funding of public universities, which will continue to do their HEMIS submissions to DHET as they have before, based on the same criteria as have been applied until now. The DHET may, at some point in the future, revise these, as is their mandate, but it will not be on the basis of the outcomes of this themed review.

During the institutional audit process initiated in 2021, significant reporting was done by the institutions that have undergone the institutional audits (that is, the 26 public universities and, thus far, a few private higher education institutions). For example, under Standard 13, Guideline 13.4, institutions were specifically requested to describe and reflect on how their modes of provision changed and were quality-assured during times of disruptions such as during the pandemic. It should be noted that such times of disruption are not only related to the pandemic. The sector is plagued by continuing student and staff protests that result in the closing of campuses, when classes are moved online at a moment's notice. The themed review will, therefore, also draw on the submissions that institutions made during the institutional audits, both to avoid duplication of effort and to gain an evolving picture of the developments since then.

The *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (2014) (Distance Education Policy) describes the potential of distance education (DE) as providing access to those who cannot access traditional campus-based classes, including through lowering of costs due to a lesser investment in physical infrastructure. The Distance Education Policy is, however, clear that access through DE is meaningless if not accompanied by adequate quality assurance arrangements and the potential for student success (Government Gazette of 7 July 2024, Number 37811, p. 6). *Quality matters* are further discussed in the Distance Education Policy, in Sections 2.4 and 4.4. The Distance Education Policy uses a provision grid, which is also used by the CHE in its *Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide* (2014, p. 11), in which the different dimensions influencing modes of provision are articulated. The two main factors are:

- The spatial or geographic distribution of lecturers and students, and
- The extent of ICT support.

These dimensions are, of course, still relevant, but the nature and extent of digital developments in the past decade since 2014 have required another engagement with these

and other dimensions. This engagement is reflected in the Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) for the *Mode of Learning and Teaching Provision*.

The Distance Education Policy defines DE as follows:

> *the term 'distance education' therefore refers to provision in which students spend 30% or less of the stated Notional Learning Hours in undergraduate courses at NQF Levels 5 and 6, and 25% or less in courses at NQF Level 7 and initial post-graduate courses at NQF Level 8, in staff-led, face-to-face, campus-based structured learning activities.* (p. 9) [emphasis added.]

Therefore, for each module and programme, clarity and evidence are needed to determine if it is offered in the 'contact' or 'distance' mode, where:

- 'contact' is defined as 30% or more of the notional hours up to NQF level 7 (and 25% from NQF level 8) being offered synchronously and staff-led by an academic staff member, whether in person or virtually, and
- 'distance' is defined as less than 30% of the notional hours up to NQF level 7 (and 25% from NQF level 8) being offered synchronously by an academic staff member and where learning is supported by designed and structured learning material.

To avoid reverting to outdated practices, the CHE aims to enable all institutions to maximise new developments by focusing on pedagogical decisions and quality arrangements that support students across various modes of provision, rather than on the endpoints of the dimensional continua of 'contact' and 'distance' as defined above. The purpose of this themed review is, therefore, NOT to classify institutions as either distance or contact institutions. The purpose of this themed review is to evaluate the functionality level of the institution in terms of its ability to make quality decisions about the mode of provision for any module, programme, or qualification for which the institution is accredited, where the mode of provision is not understood in binary terms as a choice between distance and contact, but where the mode of provision is understood as a complex dynamic between a variety of dimensions, as explained more fully in the HEPS for *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision*.

Institutions will apply to undergo the themed review. This application is on the basis of the following consideration:

> *If an institution has a programme or programmes that were accredited only for the contact mode before the themed review in 2025 but wishes to offer the programme in distance or fully online mode, also including variations of blended, hybrid, dual or hyflex, the institution has to apply to participate in the themed review.*
>
> *Based on the outcomes of the themed review or if an institution chooses not to undergo the themed review, all programmes that were accredited for the contact mode only before the themed review in 2025, need to return to contact mode only from 1 January 2027 as the HEQC pandemic concession is only until 2026.*

The themed review is at institutional level for existing programmes and will not be done for each programme individually.

3. A HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICE STANDARD (HEPS) FOR *MODES OF LEARNING AND TEACHING PROVISION*

The HEPS for *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision* were approved by the HEQC on 7 February 2025 and are available in the Annexure. The **Standard** was developed by a Community of Practice (CoP) as a Code of Practice for quality assurance in higher education and should, therefore, be taken into account and adhered to by all those concerned, in all types of higher education provision.

The HEPS Statement for the *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision* is:

> The learning and teaching provision in a HEI articulates the inherent identity, agency and espoused pedagogy/pedagogies of the institution, its administration and support and is expressed in policies, structures, plans, processes, resource allocation and measures that are in place to effectively implement, evaluate and continuously improve its institutional position.
>
> The effective provision of the full range of current and future planned programmes to enable student success is achieved through intentional reflexive design by attending to the interrelated dimensions of time-pace-space, preparedness, responsiveness, integrity and institutional support.

The **Guidelines** in the HEPS in the Annexure are intended for developmental and capacity-development purposes and to assist institutions in following a reflexive-generative approach in the continuous improvement of their practice in the longer term and with a future view. The Guidelines are, therefore, not intended for use in this *Manual*, except as prompts to clarify and assist institutions. The Guidelines indicate how the Standard might be interpreted and implemented in the longer term. They guide towards good practice in the relevant area for consideration by the actors involved, and provide the basis for differentiation between institutions, for example differentiation in terms of size, niche area, and NQF level. The Guidelines are open-ended, reflexive questions and support innovation.

The **Criteria**, on the other hand, are derived from the Standards and Guidelines. They are developed for specific purposes, i.e., in this *Manual*, the Criteria are developed specifically for the themed review as an EQA activity to enable peer evaluators to make quality judgements. The scope of these Criteria is limited to a sub-section of the overall HEPS for the purposes of this review, which has a specific purpose in relation to the pandemic

concession of the HEQC. It will be important for institutions in the future NOT to reduce the scope of the overall HEPS to these criteria only. The overall HEPS will form the basis of future quality reviews and accreditation activities.

Even though Criteria may be based on the same HEPS, we will distinguish between *criteria for minimum entry-level criteria for new programmes, qualifications, sites, and institutions,* and *criteria for the external quality reviews of existing programmes, qualifications, sites, and institutions.* The Criteria in this *Manual* are intended for existing programmes, qualifications, and institutions.

The Criteria for the current themed review are derived from the HEPS in Annexure A, and are as follows:

Criterion 1: Intentional design of time-pace-space

The institution's strategy in terms of learning and teaching provision is in line with its identity, mission, vision, pedagogies and strategic planning; and has been and is continuously consulted on with staff and students.

Criterion 2: Policies support the intentional design of time-pace-space

The institution's policies and procedures in various domains of operation (programme design, materials design, learning, teaching, and assessment, student administration and support, ICT, LMS operation, etc.) support the espoused strategy and pedagogies, and have quality assurance and continuous improvement built into them.

Criterion 3: Staff preparedness

The digital literacy of staff is continuously improved through a variety of appropriate continuous professional learning opportunities. Excellence, innovation, and experimentation with new technologies are encouraged and acknowledged in physical and virtual settings.

Criterion 4: Student preparedness

Students' digital literacy is continuously improved. Students are prepared and supported to direct, manage, and monitor their own learning and their learning choices in complex and flexible learning ecosystems.

Criterion 5: Staff competence

The digital pedagogic competence of staff is continuously improved through a variety of appropriate continuous professional learning opportunities. Excellence,

innovation, and experimentation with new technologies are encouraged and acknowledged.

Criterion 6: Responsiveness

The institution has processes in place that are designed to respond to internal and external challenges and opportunities while enhancing the overall student experience, promoting academic success, and addressing individual student needs. Student engagement in digital learning environments is encouraged, monitored, and used effectively.

Criterion 7: Student integrity

The institution has devised and implemented strategies, policies, and evaluation mechanisms to embed the ethical, responsible, and transformative use of resources and technology by students. Integrity in assessments, plagiarism, and the use of various technologies (such as AI) is deliberately and consciously addressed by the institution.

Criterion 8: Institutional integrity

The institution has devised and implemented strategies, policies, and evaluation mechanisms to embed the ethical, responsible, and transformative use of resources and technology within the institution, by the institution itself, and by staff.

Criterion 9: Institutional support

The institution's physical and digital infrastructure and resource allocation is adequate and appropriate to support the espoused strategy and planning, now and into the future. Staff and students have appropriate and adequate access to appropriate resources, devices, and data to support the strategy. Mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of resources based on evolving needs and feedback from staff and students are in place.

Criterion 10: Administrative institutional support
The institution effectively manages its qualifications and programmes and has a clear and correct record of how each programme (including its modules) is offered (i.e. in terms of the mode of learning and teaching provision).

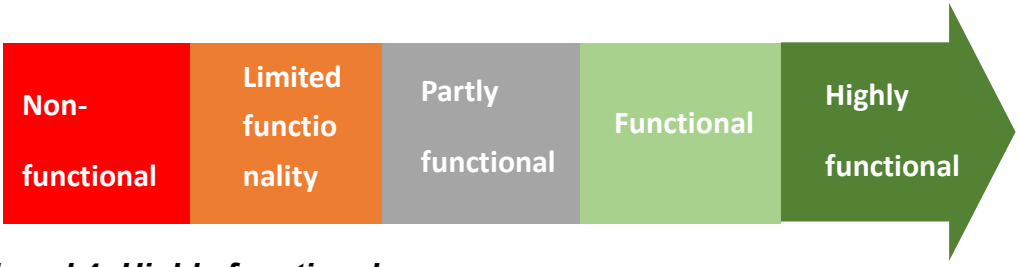
4. OUTCOMES OF THE THEMED REVIEW

In line with the *Implementation Protocols* (2024), each Criterion will be assessed on a scale of functionality as below, and then the CoP will arrive at an overall assessment of the

functionality of the institution for this themed review. The overall evaluation will not be a quantitative but a qualitative overall assessment of the institution on the HEPS and the associated Criteria in the *Manual*.

Institutions will be able to decide how to provide their existing, accredited qualifications, programmes, and modules at the Senate or Academic Board level if they are deemed functional or highly functional in this themed review. This applies if they fulfil most or all of the requirements in the HEPS and Criteria, and have the capacity to assure the quality of their programmes across various learning and teaching modes through a functional Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) system. Essentially, institutions deemed 'functional' or 'highly functional' against the Criteria in the area covered by the HEPS for *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision* will have this autonomy. However, new qualifications must still indicate their mode of provision in their accreditation applications, as they did previously.

The functionality levels that can be the outcomes of the peer evaluation are presented below with their respective interpretations:



Level 4: Highly functional

The institution fulfils almost all the requirements for operating in a variety of modes of learning and teaching and has the capacity for its Senate/ Academic Board to make specific decisions in this regard; and to assure the quality of existing accredited qualifications, programmes, and modules delivered in various modes of provision from 2027 onwards.

An improvement plan may be required on certain aspects of the requirements.

Level 3: Functional

The institution fulfils most of the requirements for operating in a variety of modes of learning and teaching and has the capacity for its Senate/ Academic Board to make specific decisions in this regard and to assure the quality of existing accredited programmes and modules delivered in various modes of provision from 2027 onwards.

An improvement plan may be required on certain aspects of the requirements.

Level 2: Partly functional

The institution fulfils some of the requirements for operating in a variety of modes of learning and teaching.

Focused capacity development must take place, and institutional improvement plans must be submitted to the HEQC, under the oversight of its Senate/ Academic Board. The HEQC decides on a case-by-case basis related to the nature of the shortfalls on whether the institutions may proceed with various modes of provision in existing accredited qualifications, programmes, and modules from 2027 onward.

Level 1: Limited functionality

Serious questions arise about the institution's ability to provide quality programmes in a variety of modes of learning and teaching.

A limited window for capacity development and rapid improvement must take place before the HEQC makes a final decision on the modes of provision for the institution for existing, already accredited qualifications, programmes, and modules. The CHE engages intensely with the institution, and no new programmes may be submitted for accreditation until the improvement plans have been reported on and approved by the HEQC.

Level 0: Non-functional

Serious questions arise about the institution's ability to offer quality programmes at all.

The HEQC will decide on a case-by-case basis on a further engagement with the institution (such as, for example, an institutional review or another kind of review), which may lead to the removal of accreditation of its programmes, which will be reported to DHET as such.

5. THE PROCESS FOR THE THEMED REVIEW ON MODES OF PROVISION

The themed review will follow the process outlined below:

1. Focused **capacity development** to enable institutions to prepare for the themed review.
2. Institutions apply to participate in the themed review.

3. An **agreement letter** for the themed review will be sent to the Vice-Chancellors or Academic Heads of participating institutions.

4. Submission of the institutional **Self-Evaluation Report (SER)** to the CHE by the date in the initiation letter. Institutions need to ensure that their information on the HEQC Online portal is up to date so that the CoP can access the institutional profile there.

   The SER, in its entirety, comprises an institutional profile, a self-reflection, and a portfolio of evidence (PoE) based on the criteria identified by the CHE for the themed review. Each of these is discussed in greater detail below.

   A good SER adheres to the following principles:

   - Comprehensiveness, both in the sense of the completeness of the response to the Criteria and in the sense of institution-wide participation,
   - Meaningful self-reflection, and
   - Frankness, in the sense of an openness to external evaluation, as well as in the sense of providing an honest assessment in areas that need improvement.

   The self-evaluation that the institution undertakes serves the dual purpose of accountability for its quality management while providing direction for the further development and improvement of its quality management.

   All documents included in the SER and evidence are submitted electronically.

5. A **desktop evaluation** by the Community of Practice (CoP) of the institutional SER.

   The CoP may access recent institutional audit documents (SERs, Portfolios of Evidence, and final institutional audit reports), as well as accreditation submissions from the institution, to supplement their understanding. This enables the notion of an integrated approach to external quality assurance, as explicated in the QAF, as well as to triangulate information that is available to the CHE.

   The CoP, through the CHE, may request any **follow-up activities** with the institution, which may include:

   - additional documentation or evidence,
   - access to the institutional systems such as the Learning Management System (instead of the usual site visit), and
   - an in-person or virtual site visit.

6. The CoP submits a **draft report,** which is considered by the relevant HEQC subcommittee. This may be an iterative process.

7. The draft report is sent to **the institution for a response**, with factual corrections and possible representations on the outcomes.
8. The CoP considers the response from the institution and **submits a revised draft report** to the HEQC subcommittee. This may be an iterative process.
9. The HEQC subcommittee submits the draft report to the **HEQC for approval**.
10. Once the HEQC has approved the report, it is final, and is sent to the institution, after which the **follow-up actions** in the report have to be carried out (for example, focused capacity development and/or the submission of an improvement plan).
11. The **executive summary** of the final report is placed on the CHE website.
12. Final reports are communicated to DHET, with recommendations for the amendments to the register for PHEIs, including the list of programmes and their mode of provision.

6. THE TEMPLATE FOR THE SER FOR THE THEMED REVIEW

Institutional profiles:

Institutions need to ensure that their information on the HEQC Online portal is current, correct and up to date.

Introduction

A brief description of the institution, specific to its modes of provision before the pandemic, how it responded during the pandemic, and its response since. Institutions may refer to the institutional audit documents that they have previously submitted.

Criterion 1: Intentional design of time-pace-space

The institution's strategy in terms of learning and teaching provision is in line with its identity, mission, vision, pedagogies, and strategic planning; and has been and is continuously consulted on with staff and students.

Description: How the institution fulfils this criterion, making specific reference to the evidence (e.g. referring to specific clauses)	**Portfolio of Evidence for description (please number evidence pieces per criteria sequentially, and label them by contents)**

	The following are examples of possible evidence: • Strategic Plan (e.g. labelled clearly as: *1.1 CUT Strategic Plan*) • Strategy and planning documents related to modes of provision • Evidence of feedback from staff • Evidence of feedback from students • Etc.

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u>: How the institution fulfils this criterion (reflexive approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection**
	Evidence for evaluating the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the staff and student feedback

Future plans on how the institution aims to fulfil and/or improve on this criterion (generative approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence of future plans**
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the future plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 1	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

CoP's assessment of Criterion 1	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment of Criterion 1	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**

Narrative, observations, and motivation:
Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:

HEQC's assessment of Criterion 1	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Criterion 2: Policies support the intentional design of time-pace-space

The institution's policies and procedures in various domains of operation (programme design, materials design, learning, teaching, and assessment, student administration and support, ICT, LMS operation, etc.) support the espoused strategy and pedagogies, and have quality assurance and continuous improvement built into them.

Description: How the institution fulfils this criterion, making specific reference to the evidence (e.g. referring to specific clauses)	**Portfolio of Evidence for description (please number evidence pieces per criteria sequentially, and label them by contents)**
	The following are examples of possible evidence: •

Institutional self-reflection: How the institution fulfils this criterion (reflexive approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection**

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfil and/or improve on this criterion (generative approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence of future plans**

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 2	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					
CoP's assessment of Criterion 2	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment of Criterion 2	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					
Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:					

HEQC's assessment of Criterion 2	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Criterion 3: Staff preparedness

The digital literacy of staff is continuously improved through a variety of appropriate continuous professional learning opportunities. Excellence, innovation, and experimentation with new technologies are encouraged and acknowledged in physical and virtual settings.

Description: How the institution fulfils this criterion, making specific reference to the evidence (e.g. referring to specific clauses)	**Portfolio of Evidence for description (please number evidence pieces per criteria sequentially, and label them by contents)**
	The following are examples of possible evidence:

Institutional self-reflection: How the institution fulfils this criterion (reflexive approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection**

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfil and/or improve on this criterion (generative approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence of future plans**

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 3	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

CoP's assessment of Criterion 3	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment of Criterion 3	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:

HEQC's assessment of Criterion 3	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Criterion 4: Student preparedness

Students' digital literacy is continuously improved. Students are prepared and supported to direct, manage, and monitor their own learning and their learning choices in complex and flexible learning ecosystems**.**

<u>Description</u>: How the institution fulfils this criterion, making specific reference to the evidence (e.g. referring to specific clauses)	**Portfolio of Evidence for description (please number evidence pieces per criteria sequentially, and label them by contents)**

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u>: How the institution fulfils this criterion (reflexive approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection**
	Evidence for evaluating the effectiveness and inclusiveness of the staff and student feedback

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfil and/or improve on this criterion (generative approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence of future plans**
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the future plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 4	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

CoP's assessment of Criterion 4	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment of Criterion 4	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					
Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:					

HEQC's assessment of Criterion 4	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Criterion 5: **Staff competence**

The digital pedagogic competence of staff is continuously improved through a variety of appropriate continuous professional learning opportunities. Excellence, innovation, and experimentation with new technologies are encouraged and acknowledged.

Description: How the institution fulfils this criterion, making specific reference to the evidence (e.g. referring to specific clauses)	**Portfolio of Evidence for description (please number evidence pieces per criteria sequentially, and label them by contents)**

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u>: How the institution fulfils this criterion (reflexive approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection**

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfil and/or improve on this criterion (generative approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence of future plans**

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 5	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

CoP's assessment of Criterion 5	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment of Criterion 5	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					
Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:					

HEQC's assessment of Criterion 5	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Criterion 6: Responsiveness

The institution has processes in place that are designed to respond to internal and external challenges and opportunities while enhancing the overall student experience, promoting academic success, and addressing individual student needs. Student engagement in digital learning environments is encouraged, monitored, and used effectively.

Description: How the institution fulfils this criterion, making specific reference to the evidence (e.g. referring to specific clauses)	**Portfolio of Evidence for description (please number evidence pieces per criteria sequentially, and label them by contents)**
	The following are examples of possible evidence:

Institutional self-reflection: How the institution fulfils this criterion (reflexive approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection**

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfil and/or improve on this criterion (generative approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence of future plans**

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 6	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

CoP's assessment of Criterion 6	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment of Criterion 6	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					
Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:					

HEQC's assessment of Criterion 6	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Criterion 7: Student integrity

The institution has devised and implemented strategies, policies, and evaluation mechanisms to embed the ethical, responsible, and transformative use of resources and technology by students. Integrity in assessments, plagiarism, and the use of various technologies (such as AI) is deliberately and consciously addressed by the institution.

Description: How the institution fulfils this criterion, making specific reference to the evidence (e.g. referring to specific clauses)	**Portfolio of Evidence for description (please number evidence pieces per criteria sequentially, and label them by contents)**
	The following are examples of possible evidence: • Etc.

Institutional self-reflection: How the institution fulfils this criterion (reflexive approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection**

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfil and/or improve on this criterion (generative approach)	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 7	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

CoP's assessment of Criterion 7	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment of Criterion 7	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					
Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:					

HEQC's assessment of Criterion 7	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Criterion 8: Institutional integrity

The institution has devised and implemented strategies, policies, and evaluation mechanisms to embed the ethical, responsible, and transformative use of resources and technology within the institution, by the institution itself, and by staff.

Description: How the institution fulfils this criterion, making specific reference to the evidence (e.g. referring to specific clauses)	**Portfolio of Evidence for description (please number evidence pieces per criteria sequentially, and label them by contents)**
	The following are examples of possible evidence: • Etc.

Institutional self-reflection: How the institution fulfils this criterion (reflexive approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection**

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfil and/or improve on this criterion (generative approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence of future plans**

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 8	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

CoP's assessment of Criterion 8	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment of Criterion 8	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					
Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:					

HEQC's assessment of Criterion 8	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Criterion 9: Institutional support

The institution's physical and digital infrastructure and resource allocation is adequate and appropriate to support the espoused strategy and planning, now and into the future. Staff and students have appropriate and adequate access to appropriate resources, devices, and data to support the strategy. Mechanisms for ongoing evaluation and adaptation of resources based on evolving needs and feedback from staff and students are in place.

Description: How the institution fulfils this criterion, making specific reference to the evidence (e.g. referring to specific clauses)	**Portfolio of Evidence for description (please number evidence pieces per criteria sequentially, and label them by contents)**
	The following are examples of possible evidence: • Etc.

Institutional self-reflection: How the institution fulfils this criterion (reflexive approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection**

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfil and/or improve on this criterion (generative approach)	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 9	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

CoP's assessment of Criterion 9	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment of Criterion 9	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					
Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:					

HEQC's assessment of Criterion 9	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Criterion 10: Administrative institutional support

The institution effectively manages its qualifications and programmes and has a clear and correct record of how each programme (including its modules) is offered (i.e. in terms of the mode of learning and teaching provision).

Description: How the institution fulfils this criterion, making specific reference to the evidence (e.g. referring to specific clauses)	**Portfolio of Evidence for description (please number evidence pieces per criteria sequentially, and label them by contents)**
	The following are examples of possible evidence: • Etc.

Institutional self-reflection: How the institution fulfils this criterion (reflexive approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection**

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfil and/or improve on this criterion (generative approach)	**Portfolio of Evidence of future plans**

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 10	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

CoP's assessment of Criterion 10	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment of Criterion 10	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					
Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:					

HEQC's assessment of Criterion 10	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Overall assessment for the HEPS on Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision:

Institution's self-assessment for the HEPS overall	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

CoP's overall institutional assessment for the HEPS	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

HEQC Subcommittee's overall institutional assessment for the HEPS	0	1	2	3	4
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					

Subcommittee's recommendation to the HEQC:

HEQC's overall institutional assessment for the HEPS	**0**	**1**	**2**	**3**	**4**
Narrative, observations, and motivation:					
HEQC's final decision:					

Executive summary of the outcome of the themed review

An executive summary of the outcome of the themed review will be provided for each institution and will be placed on the public website of the CHE as part of its public accountability mandate.

The executive summary will consist of a narrative of the process of the themed review in the institution, with the overall outcome for the institution in terms of which it may (or may not) offer existing programmes in a variety of modes of learning and teaching provision, as approved and quality-assured by its Senate or Academic Board, and as reflected in the record submitted for Criterion 10, along with a brief narrative summary outlining the follow-up activities for the institution in relation to the themed review.

Annexure: The HEPS on *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision*

Title: Higher Education Practice Standard for
Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision

1. Preamble for the HEPS on *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision*

The Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) for Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision is located within the current higher education (HE) landscape, which is characterised by the persistence of thinking about HE provision in terms of 'contact' and 'distance' as modes of provision. There has been some acknowledgement of the blurred space between these endpoints by reframing the binary formulation of distance/contact through the inclusion of the category 'hybrid' as a third mode of provision, which combines relevant ratios of contact and distance, depending on curriculum design. Existing regulatory structures – such as the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (2014) – however, still require clear demarcation between contact and distance learning for purposes of funding, resourcing, student-to-staff ratios, and workload allocation.

While acknowledging the current regulatory space, this HEPS seeks to move beyond the *operational and regulatory* binary formulation of provision by inviting institutions to consider reflexively and pedagogically the arrangements for the particular provision an institution imagines for learning in higher education. This HEPS draws attention to how and why an institution arrives at a specific arrangement for its provision, whether it is appropriate for the institution, effectively implemented and quality-assured. The binary notion of distance and contact as modes of provision is challenged by the current and contextual realities of continuously changing learning and teaching ecosystems and the fast-changing ICT landscape.

Decisions around learning and teaching provision are better informed by the purpose and desired outcomes of learning and teaching, the impact of learning and teaching, and the experiences of students and staff. An institution's structure, choices of technology use, and the extent to which online or digital tools and services are used should be appropriate for the nature of the outcomes of learning, and the relevant students.

This HEPS considers the conceptualisation of learning and teaching offered by the institution as an expression of its identity and agency. Consequently, this HEPS intersects with other HEPS (e.g. the HEPS for Institutional Identity; Programme Processes; Teaching, Learning

and Assessment; and Physical and Digital Learning Environments), with many cross-cutting implications[1]. Furthermore, this HEPS acknowledges that while the discourse around modes of provision persistently reinforces the contact/distance framing of provision, there is an urgent need to address the structural bias that often frames provision exclusively in terms of contact learning. This structural bias requires that all *other* approaches to higher education provision (i.e. approaches that incorporate or are solely digital, blended, hybrid, distance, etc.) explain, describe, and conceptualise to a degree not expected of exclusively contact approaches. This HEPS attempts to change this bias so that even contact education becomes more deliberate in terms of the design and quality assurance of whichever mode of provision is chosen.

By bringing pedagogical purpose into sharper focus, the HEPS for Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision foregrounds the importance of design and, with it, the multiple cross-cutting implications for all aspects of the academic project. By centring design, institutions are invited to consider a range of possibilities to maximise impact in the learning engagement, including careful attention to the student context (accessibility, inclusivity, and flexibility), staff competence, and infrastructure (Chan, Ghali & Prinsloo, 2023). Consequently, this HEPS is a catalyst for a thorough reframing and reconsideration of student success; flexibility for both staff and students; and the notion of full-time, part-time, and distance students.

The multiplicity of cross-cutting design elements and their implications, as well as the pace and intensity of the change in the ICT space, requires a conceptualisation of the HEPS that will consider the many different combinations of choices that institutions may make in the future in various flexible ways. This variety of combinations, choices and potentialities leads to blurred boundaries, contested categorisations, and definitional conundrums regarding provision modalities. While the Standard, Guidelines, and Criteria will not be bound by strict categorisations, they will reference the Distance Education Policy (2014) framework for broader contextual understanding.[2]

Beyond challenging the contact/distance binary and avoiding categorisations and their definitional difficulties, this HEPS enables institutions to ask questions about creating and arranging supportive learning habitats (as also in the HEPS for Physical and Digital Learning Environments) that speak to a clarity of purpose in higher education. The chosen arrangements can be considered effective and purposeful when they support the explicit outcomes of learning. This will enable the inclusion of relevant and appropriate aspects of learning in the contact, distance, spatial, virtual, etc., all as part of the constructed learning habitat, which serves the design and learning outcomes.

[1] Not all these HEPS are currently available in the public sphere. Once all the HEPS are developed and consultation is complete, they will be realigned to avoid duplications, gaps, and/or inconsistencies.

[2] A glossary of terms is included in the HEPS. This glossary provides a starting point for navigating the range of terms implicated in discussions about modes of provision. The definitions or descriptions offered, while not exhaustive or uncontested, will assist in framing institutional practice. Institutions are encouraged to make explicit their own understanding of the terms used in the configuration of their chosen mode(s) of provision.

This HEPS is intended to be useful for various units of analysis, i.e. for the institution, for programmes or qualifications, and for modules.

The following recommendations of the HEQC Task Team *Report on Blended and Online Learning: Report to the CHE* (2023) find expression in the approach used in this HEPS:

- The present definitions for distance mode are to be retained in the short term, as the subsidy calculations for public universities are likely to be used for the next three to five years.
- The current binary view of distance/contact modes should be reconsidered … and [that] modes of provision should be defined as "the manner in which education and training is delivered".
- Institutions should be required to review their performance and reflect on how they will operationalise each mode/s of provision in relation to their learning and teaching strategies.
- Standards should be developed for modes of provision.

A variety of challenges currently mark the higher education landscape, including generative artificial intelligence (AI) – its implications for learning, teaching, research, and assessment – and the integrity in and of assessment. It is reasonable to expect that a higher education practice standard that brings learning and teaching into focus will explicitly address these challenges. It is, however, not the purpose or intention of any of the HEPS in the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) to prescribe to institutions how to address such challenges. Rather, this HEPS expects institutions to be deliberate in design and self-reflexive in monitoring and evaluation, thereby allowing institutions to navigate and position themselves in relation to this continuously changing environment.

The boundaries between the various HEPS are porous, with possible overlaps, which may allow differentiated perspectives. Similarly, the various continua and dimensions that frame the modes of provision of learning and teaching overlap, intersect, and impact one another. For example, decisions about time-pace-space taken by an institution will have implications for institutional support structures and systems, and decisions about technology mediation will shape considerations about student preparedness.

2. Rationale for the HEPS on *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision*

Higher education institutions are presented with "the challenge of sustaining a learning system that implements the culture of constant and immersive learning in relation to disruptive technologies" and constant change (Abad-Segura, González-Zamar, Infante-Moro & Ruipérez García, 2020:5). There are various factors that impact quality learning and

teaching in higher education institutions. It is the responsibility of institutions to focus their attention on the arrangements of their learning and teaching provision that contribute towards an ecosystem of practices, approaches, technologies, and systems that constitute a learning environment.

The purpose of this HEPS is to enable the evaluation of the appropriateness, relevance, effectiveness, and sustainability of learning and teaching strategies for a specific higher education institution (HEI), a group of students, module, programme, or qualification. The responsibility for conceptualising the learning and teaching provision and the rationale of this provision remains with the HEI and needs to be informed by theory, valuable practice and experiences, evidence of success, and impact. Decisions regarding the provision of learning and teaching need to support national and social transformation and continuous improvement.

The HEPS for *Learning and Teaching Provision* considers and critically reflects on pedagogical approaches to designing learning pathways[3] and promoting increased flexibility within the bounds of institutional capacity. The overall purpose of this HEPS is to facilitate the institutional evaluation of its provisioning, establishing the degree to which student interactions with both theoretical, applied, and practical knowledge can be considered transformative and to be enabling student success. This HEPS should facilitate a shift in thinking from binary and distinct overall modes of provision to more flexible ways of pedagogically informed provision, allowing space for innovation and continuous changes in the digital environment.

The HEPS for *Learning and Teaching Provision* accounts for how HEIs balance access and costs, reduce performance gaps, and improve learning outcomes, without sacrificing quality or academic rigour. The migration to online learning and the development of learning management systems (LMSs) have not necessarily reduced costs or shifted workload. However, these developments have changed how we think about learning and teaching provision in HE, introducing the need for new expertise to develop and offer the curriculum. Most HEIs now include some form of technology-mediated interaction with both staff and developed learning materials to enable learning. The COVID-19 pandemic facilitated faster adoption by overcoming resistance to digitally mediated learning and supported experimentation with how students engage in learning.

Developing a new equilibrium has meant that HEIs need to revisit their positioning and motivation for the modality of provision of learning and teaching. While older binaries and categorisations were helpful differentiators in provisioning, these are less useful distinguishers now. As a result, reflexive-generative reflection is needed to utilise what has been learnt in recent years, and to support the critical evaluation of what to return to, what to retain, and what to develop into newer forms of provisioning. Pedagogically informed

[3] This includes a range of programmes, from micro-credentials to short learning programmes to part and whole qualifications.

decision-making and deliberate design needs to be centred in all modes of provision. The questions that guide this reflection may be useful in exploring how quality is defined in this context, how choices are made, and how quality in the form of student outcomes and impact is pursued.

3. The HEPS Statement for *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision*

The HEPS Statement is an overall statement that describes the requirements for modes of provision to ensure acceptable levels of higher education provision, experiences, and operations for students, staff, and the public.

The learning and teaching provision in a HEI articulates the inherent identity, agency, and espoused pedagogy/pedagogies[4] of the institution, its administration, and support, and is expressed in policies, structures, plans, processes, resource allocation, and measures that are in place to effectively implement, evaluate, and continuously improve its institutional position. The effective provision of the full range of current and future planned programmes to enable student success is achieved through intentional reflexive design by attending to the interrelated dimensions of time-pace-space, preparedness, responsiveness, integrity, and institutional support.

4. Guidelines for the HEPS on *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision*

Guidelines indicate how HEPS might be interpreted and implemented. They guide good practice in the relevant area for consideration by the actors involved and provide the basis for differentiation between institutions, e.g. differentiation in terms of size, niche area, and National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level. The Guidelines are, therefore, open-ended and allow for innovation.

The Guidelines are posed as questions that enable institutions to engage with them in generative, reflexive, and contextually responsive ways to constantly improve practice in the area. They are also used evaluatively in internal and external quality assurance processes, such as accreditation and quality reviews, to form the basis for the Criteria that will be

[4] Pedagogy refers to a broad range of approaches to teaching and learning, which includes andragogy (the study of adult learning) and heutagogy (self-directed learning). Institutions may be required to explain their approach to teaching and learning in the context of one or more of these approaches. For example, an institution might describe its teaching and learning approach as heutagogically aligned, meaning that it emphasises self-directed learning.

developed for future external quality assurance (EQA) functions, as described in the QAF (CHE, 2021).

Arrangements for learning and teaching provision are often complex and consider decisions along the dimensions listed below (Figure 1). These dimensions function heuristically, inviting institutions to think through the conceptualisation of the modalities of learning and teaching provision.

Dimensions are provided with a general description. The guiding questions set for each dimension can be applied to multiple units of analysis. For example, if the unit of analysis is a programme, the institution considers the configuration of the mode of learning and teaching and its implications for the programme. The guiding questions serve the purpose of enabling a deeper and reflexive unpacking of each dimension. Institutions should note that the guiding questions do not represent an exhaustive list, nor is it expected that each question be addressed. Instead, the various stakeholders in an institution are encouraged to use these reflexive questions as a springboard into deeper reflection on institutional quality practice.

The guiding questions and interconnectedness between various dimensions should be carefully attended to in order to enable reflexive engagements with the quality aspects of the dimensions. For instance, in large classes, the responsiveness may be low due to constraints on resources and staff workload. However, the quality aspects should then be mitigated by deliberate and other structured design elements (e.g. through tutor support programmes, peer learning, automated responses to quizzes in the materials, bots, and a host of other possibilities).

By taking a certain institutional position and crafting a particular learning and teaching environment, the institution carries the responsibility to evaluate both the conceptualisation and its implementation, with a view to identifying strengths and weaknesses. Self-evaluation of this kind may result in the identification of other dimensions or decision matrices. Institutions are invited to present these with supported reflexivity and a well-argued, evidence-based articulation.

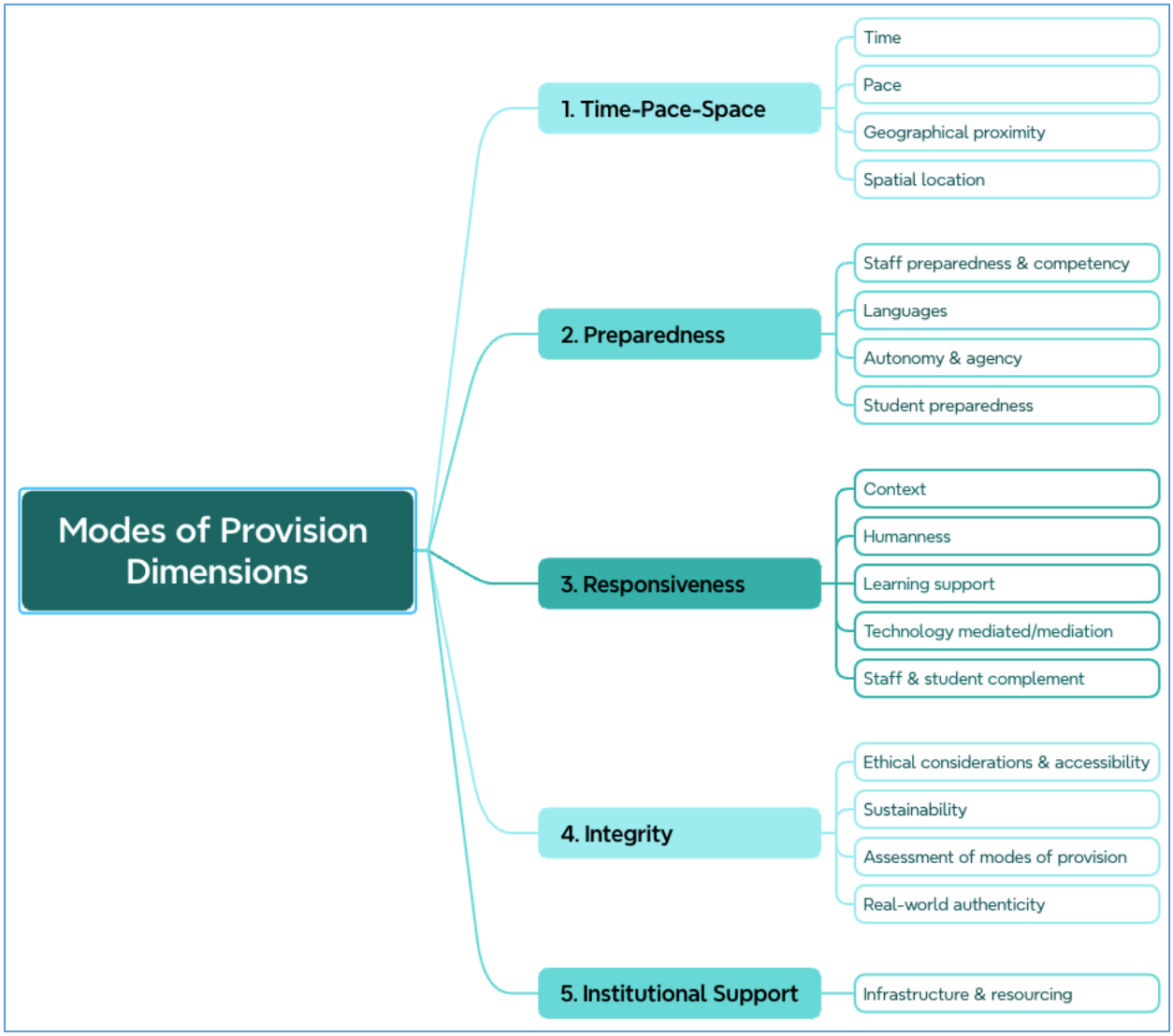


Figure 1: Summary of dimensions of learning and teaching modalities of provision

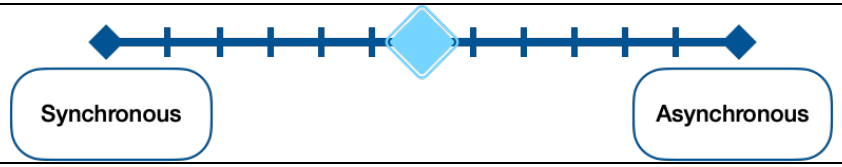
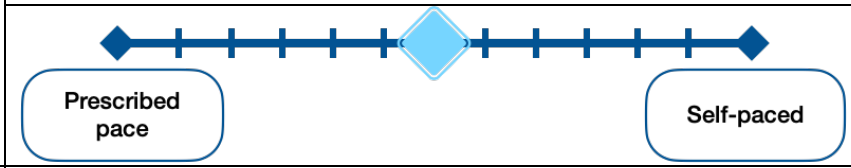
4.1. Time-pace-space[5]

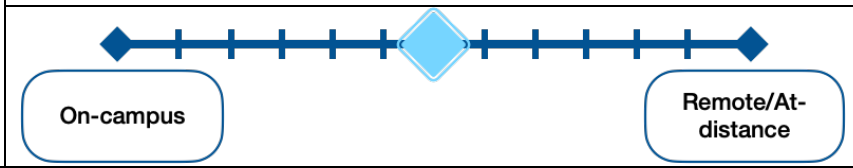
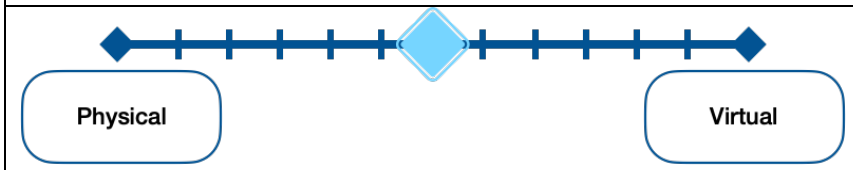
This dimension of learning and teaching provision invites institutions to consider how time, the pace of learning, and the space allocated for this purpose are configured for the particular modality. The various aspects noted in the table are intended to trigger consideration of the implications of the decisions taken by an institution. Engagement with this dimension should take note of the clear distinction between contact and distance provision made in the *Policy for the Provision of Distance Education in South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Post-School System* (DHET, 2014). The parameters offered in the policy for 'contact' indicate that provision in this mode should be "staff-led, face-to-face, campus-based structured learning" (2014: 9). Recognising the changing landscape and its implications for definitions of 'contact' and 'distance', the HEPS for Modes of Provision reemphasises the importance of learning and teaching provision being lecturer-led but acknowledges that the space within which this plays out can be in a physical classroom or virtual, using a range of methods.

Aspects for consideration	Guiding questions
Time: The concept of time considers when learning and teaching happens and has implications for the other dimensions addressed below.	1. How have the implications of the time-pace-space continua been considered for logistical planning, resourcing, implementation, and integration for the chosen mode of provision? 2. What arrangements have been put in place for learning and teaching to be conveyed in asynchronous and synchronous modalities, ensuring parity of quality where more than one mode of provision is operational? 3. How flexible is the academic schedule to accommodate diverse learning preferences and individual student needs? 4. In what ways are the limits of flexibility of learning and teaching provision in different contexts recognised, measured, and monitored? For example, how is contact time monitored and quality-assured? Or how is the quality of hybrid[6] method (blend of both asynchronous and synchronous methods) managed to ensure parity? 5. How does the academic calendar support awareness of and alignment to seasonal considerations or academic rhythms and the implication of these for learning optimisation? For example, the timing of work-integrated learning given professional considerations; time zone differences when scheduling synchronous sessions; or daylight hours based on seasonal changes.

[5] This dimension includes a series of sliding scales or continua. These scales are meant only as visual representations of a range of possibilities on a continuum, and when used in conjunction do not result in clearly defined categories of provision.

[6] Where the term *hybrid* is used, alternative terms are inferred, including, for example, hyflex, hi-flex, multi-modal, etc.

	
Pace: A characteristic of formal learning is that the pace at which students navigate learning is largely predetermined by the demands of the programme or institution (i.e. faculty, course designers, etc.). Students typically need to demonstrate progression through the learning material, usually signalled by the achievement of competence against predetermined learning outcomes.	1. How does the institution conceptualise the range of possibilities for the provision of learning and teaching, and its implications for the pacing of learning, ensuring parity of quality? 2. How does the design of learning and teaching provision address pace and workload allocation for students and staff? 3. What enabling pedagogical approaches and practices are implemented to promote student self-paced learning (e.g. against milestones)? 4. How is student progression against learning outcomes measured and monitored in relation to credits or notional hours? 5. How are student experiences and expectations managed in terms of the pace of learning within a particular modality? 6. What signals have been designed to give students an indication of pace and certain milestones required by a particular time? 7. How does the institution evaluate whether the pace is appropriate for the majority of students?
	
Space: Geographical proximity: refers to the physical distance between students, faculty, educational institutions, and learning resources. In education, this can affect the mode and quality of learning and teaching. For instance, geographical proximity can influence whether students engage with staff	1. In what ways does the geographical location(s) of the HEI and its students impact on mode(s) of provisioning, and how are these accounted for in the learning programme? 2. How does this geography affect access and success for students? For example, even an institution that offers all programmes fully online should have a geographical location and physical address for students to access, should the need arise. 3. How does geographical location inform and shape thinking about learning and teaching provision, and what implications does it have for the mode(s) of provision? 4. What measures have been implemented for the institution to provide support for differently abled staff and students to access and navigate physical or virtual learning spaces?

<table>
<tr><td rowspan="2">in person or virtually, and their access to different resources and opportunities. Additionally, the location of the educational institution and the background of the students can shape their educational experiences. The impact of geographical distance on learning and teaching provision should be considered when planning and designing programmes.</td><td>5. In what ways are a variety of learning contexts considered in the thinking about learning and teaching provisioning?
6. What measures have been implemented to ensure quality, integrity, and parity of assessments – despite the differences in geographical spread?
7. How is student feedback used to inform changes to the time-pace-space configuration and improve the overall learning experience?</td></tr>
<tr><td> 
</td></tr>
<tr><td rowspan="2">Space: Spatial location: considers who or what occupies the space and how the space is constructed, whether it relies on physical or virtual arrangements, or both.
Physical locations will be accredited sites of delivery.
Virtual environments, as an extension of the accredited site of delivery, should be intentionally designed for the mode(s) of provision.
Distance or variations thereof, between faculty, support staff, and students may result in changes to the provision of learning and teaching.</td><td>1. What informs how the space of the HEI is constructed for learning and teaching, given the types of programmes and students? Why/how is this appropriate?
2. How accessible is learning and teaching provisioning to students?
3. How are location and proximity addressed in the mode(s) of provision of learning and teaching? For example, synchronous or asynchronous delivery, contact sessions, in-person or virtual?
4. In what ways does the construction of virtual and/or physical spaces support the intended learning and teaching and assessment practices, philosophy and intentions, or outcomes, including the administration, student support, and governance of the institution?</td></tr>
<tr><td> 
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4.2. Preparedness

This dimension invites institutions to consider how students and staff are prepared and equipped to engage in the chosen mode(s) of learning and teaching provision. This dimension, therefore, includes staff preparedness and competency, language of provision, student preparedness, autonomy, and agency in the learning process. These aspects are intended to encourage institutions to reflect on the implications of the decisions taken by an institution.

Aspects for consideration	Guiding questions[7]
Staff preparedness: refers to the resourcing and developing of staff to offer and support learning and teaching provision effectively in the institution. *Staff competency:* refers to the degree to which staff are competent to perform their specific roles, fit-for-purpose for the learning and teaching provision.	1. How does the particular learning and teaching provisioning inform staffing requirements and training? 2. What enabling approaches does the institution engage with to facilitate a shift away from a binary model that recognises only contact and distance modes of provision? 3. How does the institution sustain and provide for the professional development of academic support[8] staff to engage in dynamic, changing environments? 4. What measures has the institution implemented to ensure that staff are skilled and proficient in focusing on the effective implementation and use of emerging technologies for learning, teaching, and assessment, including aspects of: pedagogy, design and development of interactive environments and LMSs, selection of digital tools and services and their pedagogical value, group activities, critical engagement, reflective exercises, and formative and summative assessment tasks? 5. In what way does the institution provide spaces to enable staff to explore and rethink different forms of assessment practices, such as the design and development of digital stories and portfolios (including e-portfolios) for formative and summative purposes? 6. How are staff empowered to access and interpret data to inform learning and teaching (also considering the HEPS on The Data Value Chain)? 7. How is excellence, experimentation, and innovation in learning and teaching supported and acknowledged?

[7] The guiding questions are numbered solely for ease of reference and not significance or importance.
[8] Where the term academic support staff is used, it encompasses a variety of roles, including teaching assistants, tutors, instructional designers, academic development staff, etc.

	8. In what ways are the academic staff trained and supported to design and implement learning and teaching provision that promotes student progression through the learning material over a period, and enables the revisit and mastery of specific concepts? 9. What measures have been implemented or required to review and reflect on the impact and effectiveness of strategies implemented to support staff preparedness and competency?
Language of Provision: Language of learning and teaching (LOLT) refers to the language medium in which learning and teaching, including assessment, takes place. Given that language is the means by which students access learning and teaching, this can enable or be a barrier to learning in a multilingual context. *Multilingualism:* refers to the capacity to use multiple languages, or the proficiency in several languages. In an educational context, it involves acknowledging the responsibility of educators towards all students, regardless of their home language, emphasising the promotion of local languages, enhancing social equality, and addressing challenges faced by individuals disadvantaged by the exclusive use of English as the medium of instruction.	1. Given the choice of mode of provision, how is language considered in terms of access, equity, practicability, and redress to achieve learning outcomes? (Also considering the HEPS on Institutional Identity and Agency; and the DHET policy on language in higher education.) 2. How does the institution identify the interventions needed and support the development of literacies in the language of learning and teaching (i.e. the language[s] of provision)? 3. How are staff enabled to support all students regardless of their home language (i.e. the language(s) of support)? 4. How does the institution address the challenges faced by some students related to the use of English as the medium of instruction? 5. In what ways does the institution enable pedagogical approaches to promote access to multilingual opportunities for digital literacies and online learning preparedness? 6. In what ways are multilingual pedagogies considered when developing course content to ensure the use of indigenous language inventories, translanguaging practices, and/or other appropriate language-based practices for knowledge creation? 7. To what extent are institutions incorporating the use of various technologies, tools, and services to support multilingualism in the provision of teaching and learning and assessment?
Autonomy: refers to the ability of students to take initiative and be self-directed in diagnosing their	1. In what ways does the institution assess students' preparedness to ensure the effective implementation of the chosen mode of provision to facilitate student learning autonomy and increase students' achievement of learning outcomes?

learning needs, setting goals, choosing resources, implementing learning strategies, and evaluating outcomes. *Agency:* involves intentional and purposeful actions in learning, indicating a socially mediated system connected to autonomy. It reflects students' willingness to initiate acts for learning, emphasising their active role in the educational journey.	2. In what ways are pedagogical approaches and practices designed and implemented to promote student and staff autonomy and agency? 3. How are professional staff and educators trained and supported to promote autonomous learning and the related student demonstration of initiative, resourcefulness, and persistence among other graduate attributes? 4. How are students enabled to exercise autonomy and agency to succeed in the particular learning environment? 5. How is flexibility in student attendance, participation, learning choices and autonomy (e.g. in terms of time-pace-space) supported and monitored to ensure the achievement of learning outcomes? 6. How is life-long learning supported and encouraged through the chosen mode of provision?
Student preparedness: refers to the extent to which institutions are catering for and supporting students with the requisite skills for navigating higher education learning.	1. How does the institutional provision cater for and support the development of student competencies and literacies for navigating learning? 2. How does the HEI incorporate or acknowledge the competencies and experiences of students? 3. What is the institution doing to ensure students' smooth transition and induction to the demands of higher education, including orientation and training for the use of an LMS and other required systems? 4. How are students supported in making choices and monitoring their learning in a complex and flexible learning environment? 5. Where relevant, how does learning and teaching provision enable preparedness for their future careers (for example, future success, employability, lifelong learning, etc.)? 6. In what ways is the institution developing information security awareness among staff and students to prevent cybersecurity incidents?

4.3. Responsiveness

This dimension of learning and teaching provision invites institutions to consider their responsiveness to internal and external challenges and opportunities in higher education. The dimension is interested in the following key areas: context, humanness, learning support, technology mediation, and the complement of staff and students for learning provision. These aspects, as depicted in the table below, are intended to encourage institutions to reflect on their actions and decisions in relation to this dimension.

Aspects for consideration	Guiding questions
Context: refers to the various environmental, cultural, socioeconomic, demographic, technological, and educational conditions and factors that influence and shape learning and teaching processes and the impact these have on the mode(s) of provision.	1. In what ways does the institution consider the multiple contextual factors to determine the learning content, modality of teaching, and the related student needs? 2. How do the institution's design strategies in various areas address and mitigate any lack of responsiveness that may arise from contextual constraints? 3. How does the institution adapt to advancements in technology, tools, and services as contextual factors shaping learning and teaching provision in ways that benefit both students and staff? 4. How does the institution demonstrate awareness of the cultural, socioeconomic, and demographic (including language) context of students in designing and delivering modules/programmes? 5. How are faculty and support staff prepared for culturally responsive learning and teaching that leverages the cultural knowledge of a diverse student profile to create relevant learning engagement?
Humanness: in the context of learning and teaching, modes of provision involve a thoughtful balance between human elements and technological advancements, emphasising human interaction and connection, ethical use of technology, and the augmentation of the human learning experience through responsible and innovative practices.	1. How does the institution conceptualise the relationship between human and technology-mediated learning? 2. To what extent does the institution integrate emerging technologies, tools, and services, such as generative AI (e.g. chatbots and AI tutors), while ensuring human interaction and connection, into their learning and teaching practices? 3. What strategies has the institution implemented to embed the ethical and responsible use of technology among students? 4. What strategies are in place to ensure institutional ethical use of technology? 5. How does the institution conceptualise the use of and complex relationship between human and artificial intelligence within the context of higher education transformation? 6. In what ways does the institution navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by the integration of technology into education, ensuring that the human aspect is not overshadowed but rather augmented by technological advancements?

Learning Support[9]: Student support refers to a range of services, resources, and interventions provided by educational institutions to assist students in their academic, personal, and social development.	1. How does the particular arrangement of learning and teaching address issues of accessibility? 2. How does the institution conceptualise and provide a range of tools and services available for learning and teaching provisioning? 3. In what ways does the institution ensure academic and academic support staff receive training and continuous professional learning opportunities to enhance learning, teaching, assessment, and student support? 4. How does the institution ensure the effectiveness of the learning support mechanisms and services for the chosen modality?
Technology-mediated learning: a broad term that encompasses various ways of integrating current and emerging technology into educational processes.	1. What is the role of current and emerging technologies in the conceptualisation of learning and teaching modes of provision? 2. What is the role of adaptive and assistive technologies[10] in the conceptualisation of learning and teaching modes of provision? 3. What are the pedagogical drivers informing the decision-making around learning with technologies? 4. In what ways does the institution leverage technology-mediated learning to enhance the effectiveness of learning technologies within their academic programmes? 5. How does the use of various learning technologies inform and shape the conceptualisation of the learning environment the institution is creating in support of learning and teaching? 6. How does the institution integrate generic computer-based tools for production and presentation into its curriculum to foster a more interactive, engaging, and agentic learning environment for students? What specific examples or innovative approaches can be adopted to achieve this integration successfully? 7. How does the institution use learning technologies to customise technology-mediated learning to suit the diverse learning styles and preferences of students?

[9] These support mechanisms are designed to enhance the overall student experience, promote academic success, and address individual needs. Student support encompasses a variety of areas, including academic advising, tutoring, counselling, career guidance, accessibility services for students with disabilities, financial aid assistance, and wellness programmes. The goal of student support is to create a holistic and inclusive learning environment that empowers students to overcome challenges, make informed decisions, and achieve their educational and personal goals. Effective student support contributes to a positive and enriching educational experience, fostering the development of well-rounded individuals prepared for success in their academic and future endeavours.

[10] Adaptive and assistive technologies refer to a range of technologies intended to amplify inclusivity and provide enhancements or different ways of interacting in the context of learning and teaching.

Staff and student complement: is a dynamic and multifaceted concept that involves strategic planning, resource allocation, and continuous *evaluation* to ensure an optimal balance of students and staff that supports educational quality, institutional efficiency, and the well-being of both students and staff.	1. How does the HEI determine the appropriate student-to-staff ratio and composition? 2. How does the institution ensure that determinations of student-to-staff ratios and composition consider equity and inclusion, particularly in supporting marginalised groups and promoting diversity among staff and students? 3. What are some challenges or constraints to improving student-to-staff ratios, access, or success, and how are these explored or overcome? 4. How are financial and material resources leveraged to maintain an optimal student-to-staff ratio for student well-being and success, and staff well-being? 5. How does the institution strategise to ensure suitable student-to-staff ratios, encompassing academic, administrative, and support staff to fulfil all essential services vital for student success? 6. What mechanisms, including feedback from student voices, academics, and industry partners, are in place to continuously assess the effectiveness of the current student-to staff ratio? How are these used to make adjustments appropriate to the mode(s) of provision if necessary? 7. How does the HEI determine the appropriate student-to-staff ratio and composition for various fields of study?

4.4. Integrity

Integrity as a dimension of learning and teaching provision invites institutions to reflect on their commitment to transparency, fairness, and accountability in learning and teaching, assessment, and student support to ensure that educational outcomes are credible and meaningful (i.e. alignment with institutional mission, vision, and values, and adaptive to changing circumstances without compromising educational quality). These aspects, as depicted in the table below, are intended to encourage institutions to reflect on their design decisions and actions.

Aspects for consideration	Guiding questions
Ethical considerations: pertain to the principles and values that guide decision-making processes, ensuring fairness and transparency, equitable access, and an inclusive environment that supports diverse learning needs. Ethical considerations also involve compliance with legal and regulatory standards and promoting academic integrity. *Accessibility:* refers to the extent to which educational programmes, resources, and environments are designed and delivered to accommodate the needs of all students, including those with disabilities or other barriers to learning and engagement.	1. How does the institution conceptualise and embed ethical, transformational, and inclusive principles in decision-making on mode of provision in programmes and modules? 2. How does the institution gain clarity about the student profile as informed by programme offerings? How does the student profile inform the selected mode(s) of provision? 3. How is the student communication and learning support aligned to the chosen mode of provision? (e.g. are prospective students clear on what to expect of the institution in order to make informed decisions about their choice?) 4. How are student, institutional and programme-level expectations – related to the chosen mode of provision – managed? (e.g. requirements for devices and data needs). 5. How does the institution identify and address barriers and opportunities – in relation to the chosen mode of provision – that can enhance engagement and success for differently abled students? (HEPS LTA). 6. How does the institution ensure compliance with the relevant regulatory requirements in relation to the chosen mode of provision? (e.g. POPIA, PAIA, OHS, etc.) (Consider also the HEPS for Identity and Agency, and the HEPS for Student Administration.) 7. To what extent does the institution create inclusive learning experiences that are physically, digitally, and pedagogically accessible, ensuring that all students have equal opportunities to participate in and benefit from higher education?
Sustainability and adaptability: are about how an institution can ensure operational stability and continuity over time in that it remains resilient, responsive, and capable of maintaining high standards of	1. How are principles of sustainability and adaptability planned for and incorporated into the provision of learning and teaching, given the mode(s), to preserve the integrity of the provision? (e.g. contingency and continuity planning vis-à-vis load-shedding, student protests, pandemic, interruption to communication, disaster management, changes in employability, responding to student success factors, etc.)

education regardless of external or internal challenges.	
Assessment and modes of provision reflects on the constructive and intentional alignment between modes of provision and assessment practices to uphold the credibility and reliability of educational outcomes that directly impact how assessments are designed, delivered, and monitored. (e.g. different delivery formats, such as in-person, *distance*, and hybrid models, require tailored assessment methods and tools to ensure fairness, accuracy, and security.)	1. How does the institution design, develop, implement, account for, monitor, and manage assessment (i.e. all processes, procedures, tools) in (all) chosen modes of provision? For example, the conceptualisation of assessment as a function of the design of programmes, which is informed by the chosen mode of provision. This also implicates the range of tools, i.e. proctoring tools, plagiarism tools, etc., for the delivery of the programme and the nature of the assessment within the discipline and as a measure of the fidelity (real-world) of programmes. (Consider also the HEPS on Learning, Teaching and Assessment.) How does the institution ensure credibility, reliability, fairness, and parity? What evidence is used to evaluate the achievement of such assessment principles, especially across modes of learning and teaching provision? 2. How does the educational context and student diversity influence the intentional design of assessments within the chosen modes of provision?

Real-world authenticity or fidelity: refers to the degree to which an institution considers the learning and teaching provision and the environment it seeks to create in relation to the real-world context. The institutional learning environment should be considered in terms of its ability to approximate the real-world from a physical, functional, psychological, and social perspective, and is discipline-specific. When the learning environment exhibits high fidelity (i.e. real-world of work), it enables a more complex and realistic learning engagement.	1. How closely do the institution's teaching practices align with the institution's mission, vision, and educational goals? 2. To what extent are instructional approaches that promote authentic learning – where learning activities correspond to real-world contexts – available and accessible to students? 3. In what ways are educators supported to design learning environments reflective of learning activities that contribute to the authenticity of the learning experience? 4. In what ways does the institution ensure consistency in the delivery of high-quality education across different departments and programmes, considering the modes of provision? 5. To what extent are assessment and feedback mechanisms in place to ensure fidelity to learning outcomes? 6. How does the institution gather feedback from employers, alums, or industry experts to evaluate the real-world relevance and effectiveness of its educational programmes, and how is this feedback used to inform instructional practices? (Consider also the HEPS on Experiential Learning.) 7. How does the institution evaluate and align graduate attributes to the real-world context? 8. How does the institution promote a culture of continuous improvement in teaching and learning, with a focus on enhancing the authenticity and practical relevance of educational experiences, and what mechanisms are in place to evaluate the success of these efforts over time?

4.5. Institutional support

Institutional support is the mechanism through which higher education institutions provide comprehensive assistance, guidance, and resources to ensure the success of students, faculty, and staff, cognisant of the various mode(s) of provision. This includes a range of services, such as academic advising, library and technological services, counselling services, technological assistance, and administrative support, all aimed at enhancing the educational experience for students and staff.

Aspects for consideration	Guiding questions
*Infrastructure and resourcing: t*he configuration of the mode of provision has implications for infrastructure and resourcing. Institutions should be able to demonstrate how the constructed mode of provision can be accommodated and supported as a viable and learning-enabling environment. Institutions need to be able to describe and reflect on whether their current arrangements are sufficient, enriching, or innovative for the purpose.	1. How does institutional capacity align with the chosen combinations of provision, particularly when considering existing practices for verifying institutional resources and physical infrastructure for teaching and learning? 2. How does infrastructure and resourcing, including classroom and online technologies, enable the particular learning and teaching provisioning? 3. How are various stakeholders involved in continual planning, monitoring, and evaluation of the infrastructural and resourcing requirements to improve robustness and resilience, and to ensure the continuity of learning and teaching, given the demands of the mode(s) of provision? 4. How is support for technology resources, such as online resources and the LMS, offered to students and faculty, and what evidence is collected to show effectiveness and sufficiency? 5. How are virtual access levels to learning environments – across various roles, including student, staff, tutor, guest, admin, super-admin – managed and monitored? 6. In what ways does the institution consider the educational context for differently abled staff and students to determine the availability of infrastructure, resources for learning and teaching, and overall institutional adaptations at all levels? 7. How are the various IT, LMS, and other integrated systems managed and integrated to support the current and future mode of provision? 8. To what extent are arrangements sufficient, enriching, or innovative for the purpose, qualification(s), and types of students? What informs decision-making around the types of provision the institution chooses when designing and teaching a programme? 9. How are innovation and experimentation in the provision of learning and teaching supported in terms of infrastructure and resourcing?

5. Criteria

Criteria are the instruments to determine whether the standard is being met or not. They are benchmarks for evaluation and for making quality judgements about higher education activities, based on the standards and guidelines agreed upon by the HE sector. The Criteria depend closely on the purpose of the quality judgement that it is meant to be used for.

Criteria are not included in the standard description. This is because the criteria will be developed to be relevant to the specific quality assurance exercise that is being conducted. This could be an internal quality assurance exercise conducted by an institution, or a specific external quality assurance activity to be conducted by the CHE. Criteria are therefore activity-, time-, and context-specific. Some criteria, for example the criteria for accreditation, will be in place for a longer period.

Whenever an EQA activity is to be undertaken, the CHE will re-convene the Community of Practice to develop the relevant criteria for the exercise.

6. Review of the HEPS

It is understood that the HEPS will be regularly reviewed and revised in an iterative way to account for change. The HEPS on *Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision* will be in place for the first iteration of the QAF, for five years or when necessary, given the fast pace of technological change.

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8. Glossary

Agency in Higher Education	involves intentional and purposeful actions in learning, indicating a socially mediated system connected to autonomy. It reflects students' willingness to initiate acts for learning, emphasising their active role in the educational journey.
Asynchronous	as a digital modality involves education, instruction, and learning experiences that occur at different times, and often in different locations. Participants in asynchronous settings engage in activities without the constraint of real-time interaction, allowing for flexibility in when individuals contribute to discussions or complete coursework. In this modality, interactions and communication occur with a time lag, enabling participants to be geographically dispersed, or situated in the same physical space. Asynchronous learning allows for a more flexible schedule, as faculty and students interact over an extended period, such as days or weeks, providing latitude in scheduling coursework and interactions. However, asynchronous modalities do not cater for real-time, immediate engagement and feedback.
Blended learning	refers to the provision of structured learning opportunities using a combination of contact, distance, and/or ICT-supported opportunities to suit different purposes, audiences, and contexts (DHET, 2014). Blended learning involves purposefully integrated, technology-mediated activities to support face-to-face learning, teaching, and assessment. This can involve different approaches, such as the flipped classroom, simulations, or a virtual learning environment. Thus, the term blended learning implies that the mode of learning is enhanced with supplemented learning, and supplementation may be enabled by technology, contact, or tools.
Contact mode	refers to courses involving face-to-face or personal interaction with institutional teachers or institutional supervisors, through lectures, tutorials, seminars, practicals, supervision, or other forms of required work, which occurs at the institution's premises or at a site of delivery of the institution (CHE, 2022). All LTA (learning, teaching, and assessment) is facilitated and designed for face-to-face interaction on campus and generally follows a conventional timetable. This is also known as in-person, face-to-face, or on-site teaching, as the educator and students are in the same physical space at the same time. Contact mode includes all learning environments and activities such as lectures, seminars, fieldwork, laboratories, and tutorials.
Curriculum	is a structure that distributes access to knowledge and to knowing by specifying what is taught, who is taught, who teaches, how it is taught, and how learning is assessed. The curriculum is therefore politically, socially, and culturally constructed. The term curriculum encompasses: • Knowledge, such as the list of subject areas, topics, and resources included in a course of study. • Ways of knowing, skills, values, and practices. • Teaching methodologies, including modes of provision. • Assessment practices. All curricula are informed by the nature of the discipline or field, the philosophical beliefs of the designer(s), who the students are, the

	institution and its identity, and the broader context in which the curriculum is enacted. A curriculum encompasses the planned process, the actual implementation of the teaching, and the students' experiences of the learning process. It also includes awareness of the 'hidden curriculum', that is, the unwritten, unofficial, and often unintended lessons, values, and perspectives that a curriculum promotes and enacts.
Differentiation	in the context of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) refers to institutional functional differences and their differences in respect of identities, missions, and internal quality assurance (IQA) functionality. Differentiation is also implicated in terms of the configuration of the mode(s) of provision and plays out in relation to the dimensions (i.e. time-pace-space, preparedness, responsiveness, integrity, and institutional support).
Distance education	as a mode of provision is defined by DHET as the interaction with institutional teachers or supervisors which is undertaken through distance education techniques such as correspondence, telematics, learning support centres, or the Internet. The Distance Education Policy acknowledges continua of pedagogy and modes and does not consider online as essential to distance education (DHET, 2014). Distance education is based primarily on a set of teaching and learning strategies (or educational methods) that can be used to overcome spatial and/or transactional distance between educators and students. It avoids the need for students to discover the curriculum by attending classes frequently and for long periods. Rather, it aims to create a quality learning environment using an appropriate combination of different media, tutorial support, peer group discussion, and practical sessions. Institutions opting for distance education as a mode of delivery need to establish systems and processes for decentralised distribution of learning resources, communications, student and learning support, as well as formative and summative assessment. The term 'distance education' as a mode of provision therefore refers to provision in which students spend 30% or less of the stated notional learning hours in undergraduate courses at NQF Levels 5 and 6, and 25% or less in courses at NQF Level 7 and initial postgraduate courses at NQF Level 8, in staff-led, face-to-face, campus-based structured learning activities (DHET, 2014).
Educational context	refers to the environment where learning takes place and refers to the various factors that influence the learning experience, including cultural, social, economic, and physical aspects. It involves adapting teaching methods, content, and the learning environment to meet the specific needs of learners and recognising the dynamic interplay of these factors. A context-aware approach ensures that education is inclusive, relevant, and responsive to the diverse needs of students, considering not only the content but also the timing, location, and modalities of instruction.
Hybrid learning	as a combination of both synchronous and asynchronous modalities integrates elements of real-time interaction and flexibility. This approach allows for a blended educational experience where students and faculty can engage both synchronously, at scheduled times, and

	asynchronously, with the freedom to participate at different times. Hybrid learning provides a balance, leveraging the advantages of both modalities to accommodate various learning styles and preferences. The synchronous component involves simultaneous interactions, akin to traditional classroom settings, while the asynchronous aspect allows for individualised learning schedules and increased flexibility in accessing educational materials. In hybrid mode learning, teaching and assessment involves a purposefully designed combination of face-to-face and online or virtual. Different forms may include block release (blocks of contact time interspersed with periods of fully online learning, teaching and assessment); dual delivery (teaching happens face-to-face and online at the same time); hyflex (students can choose to participate synchronously in-person or online, or asynchronously in their own time).
Learning management system (LMS)	is a platform or software that assists with the delivery of content online for learning purposes and is therefore used to organise and distribute e-learning materials, assignments, and assessments; track and calculate grades; and facilitate communication among students and teachers. An LMS integrates interactive learning environments and administration and facilitates customised online instructional materials. An LMS can be a web-based software application using a database on which various types of information are stored. Various tools enable instructors to easily create their individual online courses. Administration of instructors, users, courses, and content is often centralised and automated within an LMS. (Adapted from various sources.)
Mode of provision	refers to the dominant mix of methods by which institutions mediate their curricula. In a single-mode institution, all courses and programmes are mediated either by distance- or contact-based methodologies; in a dual mode institution courses and programmes may be mediated by either distance- or contact-based methods, and often equivalent forms of the same course or programme may be offered in either mode; in a mixed-mode institution, all courses and programmes involve a mix of methods associated traditionally with distance- and contact-based provision, with the blend of methods varying from context to context. However, individual programmes will be accredited either as contact or distance provision (DHET, 2014).
Online education	refers to a mode of instruction in which students receive course materials and interact with instructors and peers in a digitally mediated context or LMS, typically via the Internet (adapted from Dung et al., 2023). All learning, teaching and assessment are designed for and happen fully online. Activities are intentionally designed for online and offered synchronously (at the same time) and/or asynchronously (in own time). Online learning may include limited non-compulsory contact time for particular activities (such as study groups) and/or venue-based final assessment.
Open (and) distance learning (ODL)	refers to the use of distance education methods to support the realisation of open learning purposes and principles. Omission of the 'and' – as in 'open distance learning' – implies that ALL distance

	programmes offered are based on open learning principles (DHET, 2014).
Open learning	typically involves making provision to support a wider range of student choices regarding access, curriculum, pacing, sequencing, learning modes and methods, assessments, and articulation. Students studying through ODL approaches typically take longer to complete their studies, as they need to balance study and other commitments. Guiding students towards making informed choices based on workload, and the assumption that completion of a course or programme of study will typically take twice as long to complete, is an important feature of responsible ODL practice; as is trying to assist students not to take longer than three times the minimum time to complete, for the sake of coherence and the complications arising from curriculum-renewal processes (DHET, 2014).
Programme	refers to a purposeful and structured set of learning activities designed to enable a student to meet the outcomes necessary for the award of a qualification. Learning Programmes are specialisations of a generic qualification accredited to an institution and recommended to be recorded against the institutional generic qualification on the NQF.
Qualification	refers to the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by a higher education institution and that is registered on the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF).
Reflexive-generative	describes a dynamic, cyclical approach that combines continuous reflection with creative solution-finding. It represents a process where systematic examination of standards and guidelines occurs simultaneously with the generation of innovative approaches to improve them. This dual nature creates a feedback loop where reflection deepens understanding, which in turn enables more effective solution-generation, leading to further insights through reflection. The process embodies both the ongoing evolution of quality standards and the enhancement of interpretative and innovative capabilities within those standards over time.
Synchronous	digital modality refers to a method of teaching and learning where interactions, communication, and activities take place simultaneously, though not necessarily in the same physical location. Participants engage in real-time or near-real-time interactions, requiring them to be present and connected at a scheduled time. Synchronous communication often involves immediate and direct exchanges between faculty and students, whether they are geographically distributed or located in the same physical space. This modality mirrors traditional face-to-face classroom settings, as participants must engage at specific times to ensure a synchronous and equally accessible learning experience for all involved.
Virtual	created by computer technology and appearing to exist but not existing in the physical world, thereby referring to a digitally replicated version of something physically real.