



Title: Higher Education Practice Standard for
Continuous Professional Learning

Long Form: Continuous Professional Learning for Higher Education Practitioners

1. Preamble for the HEPS on *Continuous Professional Learning*

Higher education (HE) in South Africa and across the globe is complex and constantly changing. This shifting context necessitates staff who are able to rethink, reimagine and implement new ways of working, knowing, doing and being to ensure that they remain relevant and responsive to the changing demands of the academic project. Similarly, staff should be enabled, encouraged and capacitated to make intentional and agential decisions to shape their roles and direct their own learning and growth in the Higher Education context.

While there are a number of sectoral staff development frameworks, guiding documents and initiatives, these may focus on specific areas of development in isolation. This HEPS guides continuous professional learning (CPL) initiatives for all staff, actors and stakeholders in higher education, who as a collective contribute to the academic project. The HEPS provides a guideline to enable the articulation of how staff working in different spaces are enabled to seamlessly contribute to students' access, learning and teaching experiences and success in quality higher education, as well as to contribute to the broader mission of higher education in research and innovation and community engagement.

A primary objective of this practice standard is to promote a shared understanding amongst higher education institutions regarding what continuous professional learning for higher education practitioners involves and why it is important for all staff working in and with higher

education to continuously learn, unlearn and relearn in order to optimize their contributions as individuals and as collectives to achieve the goals of higher education.

Given higher education's historical and unequal socio-cultural arrangements of the recent apartheid past as well as the symbolic power embedded within language constructs, this standard has purposefully and intentionally shifted from using the concept of *staff development* to using *Continuous professional learning (CPL)*. While staff and professional development is acknowledged, CPL is used to denote the enhancement, support and shaping of institutional professionals through continuing authentic professional learning opportunities (Webster-Wright, 2009). The notion of CPL within the HEPS is a shift from a deficit discourse of authoritative moulding and predetermined goals towards a more participatory and collaborative approach with and amongst all HE practitioners. The aim is a CPL approach that is strategic about HE professionals as engaged, agentic individuals, capable of self-directed learning (Webster-Wright, 2009). The intention is to shift the institution's quality focus towards the ontological perspectives of professional learning by engaging their practitioners and stakeholders as whole people, in their knowing, doing and being (Dall'Alba & Barnacle, 2007). The notion of CPL has significance and implications for institutions to strategically engage and enact this HEPS' principles, to support and enhance critical reflection of professional work experiences, to acknowledge the complexity and diversity of these experiences and to develop insights from them to motivate professionals as they continuously learn individually and collectively.

Principles informing the Continuous Professional Learning for Higher Education Practitioners Standard

This HEPS sets out principles as a framework for key considerations of continuous professional learning for higher education practitioners. These principles are embedded in the spirit of the QAF and enable the planning, implementation and sustainability of professional learning programmes and interventions in institutions.

- i. Continuous learning is an **ongoing journey** that is iterative, allows for self-reflection and provides opportunities for the emergence of **agency** within the context of institution and self. It focuses on continuous *becoming* as opposed to a product. Higher education practitioners should critically reflect on themselves and their learning journey within their institutional and career context. Continuous professional learning is a **relational** endeavor towards being and becoming, towards the self and the institution. It takes place over time extending beyond isolated training events and finite periods of staff development. For the ideal professional who takes pride in their breadth and depth of knowledge, high level of skill and the thorough execution of their work; ongoing learning about new developments in their field and practice must be available to enhance lifelong and life-wide professional learning.

ii. **Collaboration** in continuous professional learning for higher education practitioners takes multiple forms within and external to the institution, including professional learning communities, peer observation, committee work, internal and external networks and sharing across existing silos. Constant sharing of evolving and diverse practice perspectives, insights and experiences can be achieved by establishing an institutional learning collective (Kummen & Hodgins, 2019). This collective is underpinned by ongoing knowing, being and doing through collaborative sharing of effective and efficient higher education practices amongst all stakeholders. Every individual learning journey should be acknowledged while fostering a culture of continuous reflective and reflexive practice, skills enhancement, innovation, knowledge exchange, dialogue and generation of new knowledge towards a supportive and inclusive ecosystem for all institutional stakeholders. Collegial, collaborative approaches towards and within institutional CPL practices requires an inclusive and non-judgmental culture to establish innovative and transformative learning collectives. Given variations, differences and disparities in appointments for institutional practices, a collaborative space must be open to independent and pluriversal ways and thoughts to become part of the Ubuntu notion of seeing the other as self. A collaborative space of this nature invokes the meeting of diverse higher education practitioners' thoughts.

iii. Institutions are encouraged to foster **enabling cultures** and establish appropriate **organisational structures and systems** that encourage professional learning, with a view to enhance HE practitioner's efficiency to perform their roles optimally to the benefit of themselves, the institution and the students. Enabling structures and institutional culture can independently or interdependently invoke individual and collective agency towards critical thinking, experimenting, renewal and innovation within and for African higher education contexts. The success of an institutional CPL strategy is dependent on transformative cultural values that are embedded and promoted within all domains of the institution. Institutional stakeholders' successes are also dependent on enabling structures that result in positive change and institutional enhancement. CPL for all stakeholders should include the identification, affordances and mitigation of enabling and constraining structures and culture within the various institutional contexts.

iv. CPL is not a one-size-fits-all endeavour; it should be **tailored and flexible** to meet changing needs of staff at different stages of their careers in different contexts. Professional learning is socio-cultural and integrates epistemological and ontological perspectives on learning (Webster-Wright, 2009). Contextual, practice and institutional **differentiation** is expressed in varied formal and informal ways within and between institutions of higher learning. These differentiated ways shape institutional ways of knowing, doing and being while having an enabling and / or constraining influence on its vision, purposes, resources, stakeholders, academic mandates, transformation imperatives as well as internal and external relationships. CPL for all institutional stakeholders should include differentiated

activities to engage and enable personal, professional and collective agency to navigate, mitigate and negotiate possible power differentials, tensions and contradictions that could emerge from the differentiated institutional and stakeholder related aspects. CPL encourages self-directedness in that they provide learning experiences and offer choices which are contextualised within the institution and self.

v. Continuous Professional Learning is **relevant and responsive** to changes in higher education and is aligned with institutional, national and personal goals. The strategic aims, purposes and goals of continuous professional learning for all should be personally, professionally, institutionally, contextually, and socially relevant to be considered responsive internally (to an institution) and externally (to the sector). As a mechanism for meaningful exploration toward advancing the academic project, CPL should focus on the influence of historical, socio-cultural and higher education trends, challenges and opportunities. Purposeful, responsive and relevant intentions should enable a resilient, agile and adept institutional workforce with the agentic capacity to lead, manage, support, sustain and engage in transformative change within all institutional contexts. CPL is transformative in that it also seeks to address the conditions that may still be enabling conditions of injustice and inequity in Higher Education. CPL is neither punitive nor meritocratic.

2. Rationale for the HEPS on *Continuous Professional Learning*

This standard recognises the role of every employed staff member and stakeholder in the unique capacity and position they may fulfill towards operationalising the institution's vision, mission, and academic project. Learning institutions are complex environments with a multitude of diverse functions and responsibilities required to uphold the mandates and transformation imperatives of higher education. Continuous professional learning speaks to a collaborative, coherent and holistic approach to the ongoing 'becoming' journeys of all staff. This HEPS is critical in enhancing self-directed primary and institutional agency towards promoting institutional quality, well-being and the academic project.

Institutions navigating the current complex and continuously changing higher education sector while preparing for emerging unknown futures require an agile, adept, well-informed, critically engaged and agentic academic and non-academic workforce, students, and strategic partners as institutional decision-making actors. An institutional CPL approach to this effect can enhance collective criticality towards a more coherent and cohesive institutional quality assurance and enhancement strategy.

Given the unique historical, socio-cultural and contextual legacy of South African higher education institutions, continuous professional learning for all should embody an authentic

yet contextually and personally relevant situatedness that enables every staff member, student and stakeholder to locate their positionality and position within an institution's identity, vision, mission and strategy. This HEPS calls for a shift towards a more coordinated, well-considered continuous professional learning strategy for all staff members, students as well as relevant institutional stakeholders.

An institution's continuous professional learning plan should enact the role of responsiveness and resilience while being cognisant of the complex, intersectional yet emerging personal and professional presence all stakeholders have. A collectively coherent presence can be further enhanced through continuous exploration of what it means to come to know, do, be and become while practicing within a volatile, unpredictable, precarious higher education terrain.

Given that the higher education working environment continues to be hierarchical, managerial and increasingly marketized, working conditions are often perceived to be steadily deteriorating, with increased workload, stress and burnout. CPL underpinned by a collaborative, collegial, relational and agentic interpersonal and professional ethos with a purpose to transform and be transformed by institutional context and communities holds the potential to create not only more conducive working conditions but to enhance collective well-being and social responsibility.

CPL for all staff should include spaces to explore multivocal perspectives that intersect daily with a broad range of contextual factors and emerge as vital forces of influence that provide the narrative for institutional quality. A CPL strategy based on the ethics of immanence and potentialities (Taguchi, 2010) holds institutional transformation potential in challenging all staff potentialities and capacities to act and be inventive in collaborative experimentation and production of concepts and knowledge.

Continuous professional learning must foreground transformation, enabling staff to critically engage with decoloniality, inclusivity and equity in their professional development pathways.

An inclusive, holistic and integrative institutional CPL plan for all can foster:

- Knowledge sharing of diverse experiences and perspectives that can lead to new ideas, innovative practices and collaborative initiatives
- Ongoing learning, reflection and skills enhancement that encourages a culture of continuous enhancement of the institutional community
- Collaborative problem solving and decision-making processes as a more inclusive approach that can lead to effective and beneficial institutional solutions and strategies
- Open communication and active engagement amongst all aiming for a sense of community and shared institutional purpose

- Holistic development of the institutional community by acknowledging and valuing diverse contributions from all members with the potential to create a dynamic and continuously improving higher education community.

An inclusive continuous professional learning approach acknowledges the diverse and unique journeys and contributions of each individual as part of the institution's collective becoming process. This recognition fosters a culture of inclusivity, respect and value for varied lived realities, diverse expressions of ontology and epistemology, and for the professional practice of each institutional stakeholder.

This suggests that institutional CPL should prioritize collaboration and partnerships with other institutions and organizations to support ongoing professional learning and pedagogical development. CPL should be used as a comprehensive approach to create a skilled, motivated and adaptable people-centred institution underpinned by an innovative and entrepreneurial culture that promotes the nurturing and cultivation of diverse talent while enabling human flourishing.

This HEPS should be read in conjunction with the HEPS on *Institutional Identity and Agency, Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Research and Innovation, Engaged Institutions, and Student Administration*, as together they ensure that continuous professional learning supports transformation, academic quality and institutional effectiveness.

3. The HEPS Statement for *Continuous Professional Learning*

The HEPS Statement is an overall statement or set of statements that explicitly describe the codes of practice and agreed-on norms that describe threshold levels or minimum expectations for practice in that area. More than one set of statements is possible when there are sub-sets of practice in the area. The statement(s) describe requirements in the area of practice to ensure acceptable levels of higher education provision, experiences and operations for the students, staff and the public.

Continuous Professional Learning for Higher Education Practitioners reflects higher education institutions' responses to their ability to critically assess what knowledges, dispositions, competencies and skills are needed to achieve their institutional goals.

4. Guidelines for the HEPS on *Continuous Professional Learning*

The following guidelines support institutions and practitioners in their reflection on the standard:

a) Planning and design

Planning and design involve intentional and systematic processes in relation to the implementation of CPL. An institution should be able to demonstrate and critically reflect on their policies, processes and procedures that direct and support the planning and design of CPL. Such a system should embed the principles stated above, of encouraging practitioners to take ownership of their careers (at different stages thereof), actions and outcomes to gain a stronger sense of personal agency, and allow for active participation in CPL.

- In what way does the institution's approach to CPL reflect a commitment to fostering agency and active participation among practitioners?
- How do structures including organisational, governance and management structures support and manage CPL in the institution?
- In what ways does the institution ensure that CPL offerings are aligned with its identity and mission, fostering a culture of continuous learning?
- To what extent do institutional policies and procedures for CPL planning reflect a commitment to inclusivity and equity, and how can this be improved?
- How does the institution involve diverse stakeholders in the design of CPL offerings, ensuring varied perspectives, collaboration and expertise?
- In what way do the CPL offerings reflect a commitment to flexibility and accessibility for all participants?
- What mechanisms are in place to evaluate the effectiveness of an institution's CPL offerings in achieving their intended purposes, considering feedback and evolving needs and how effective are these?

b) Stakeholder and community engagement

Stakeholders are defined by Freeman (1984, p.46) as "any group or individual who is affected by or can affect the achievement of an organization's objectives" and he speaks of "The Principle of Who or What Really Counts". Inclusive stakeholder engagement embraces the key values of democracy, equity and emancipation required for institutional and transformative shifts in higher education. Institutions should lean on their stakeholder's multiple voices, knowledge, skills, experiences, resources and networks to enrich CPL in collegial, collaborative and authentic ways. This further enables societal redress and social cohesion.

- How does the institution actively involve key stakeholders in shaping and co-creating its CPL initiatives, ensuring diverse voices are heard and valued?
- In what ways does the institution foster equitable participation and engagement in its CPL programs, considering the needs and perspectives of all stakeholders?
- How does the institution integrate community engagement into its CPL activities, promoting collaboration, mutual learning and service learning with external partners?

c) Communication

Given the fluidity of the higher education system nationally and globally and the need to continuously review and adapt, timeous communication within HEIs and across the sector is central to ensure relevant, responsive and transparent ongoing professional learning.

- How does the institution ensure transparent and timeous communication about CPL policies, strategies and initiatives to all relevant stakeholders?
- What channels and structures are in place to facilitate input from staff regarding CPL planning, implementation evaluation and sustainability?
- How does the institution ensure that all stakeholders are informed about CPL needs and initiatives, fostering a sense of agency and engagement?

d) Transformation

CPL responds to the critical need of facilitating HEIs' preoccupation with symbolic transformational practices to questions of deep transformation (Green, 2022). CPL addresses issues of deep transformation relating to students' and staff's experiences of Higher Education, epistemological equity and social justice (Luescher et al., 2023). HEIs responses to inequity should not be ameliorative but transformative, addressing the roots of inequity. CPL initiatives should affirm a sense of belonging for all students, staff, and stakeholders in the institution. Continuous professional learning must foreground transformation, enabling staff to critically engage with decoloniality, inclusivity and equity in their professional development pathways.

- How does CPL support deep transformation within the institution, promoting equity, social justice and inclusivity in higher education practices?
- In what ways do CPL initiatives support the fostering of a sense of belonging and empowerment among students, staff, and stakeholders?
- How does the institution assess whether its CPL initiatives effectively support transformative goals, to address systemic inequities and the transformational goals of the QAF (transformation in, of and through higher education)?

e) Knowledge and ways of knowing

The development of knowledges and new ways of knowing is one of the core functions in higher education and CPL can make a central contribution to this. All staff in HEIs need to acknowledge that HEIs are complex and that there are a myriad of knowledges and ways of knowing within institutions. Staff need opportunities to engage with and contribute to the development of knowledge and ideas from diverse fields with openness and curiosity. Opportunities for dialogue amongst colleagues is central to embracing different ways of knowing and knowledges in the planning of CLP.

- What knowledge fields inform the development and provisions of CPL and how are these decided on?
- What kinds of professional learning and knowledges may be privileged in your institution and why?
- Which groups are responsible for the development of CPL programmes?
- How do you ensure that facilitators of CPL address diverse needs in terms of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes?
- How does CPL support widening both formal and epistemological access?

f) Leadership

Institutional leadership with reflexive, thoughtful and inclusive approaches to power differentials is foundational for effective and holistic CPL strategies for all stakeholders to equitably reach their full potential. Leadership that practices autocratic and unconscious "do unto others" power over their CPL strategy, epistemology, methodology and purpose can alienate, marginalize and disempower stakeholders. It can also lead to resentment and disruptive moments. A collaborative, distributive leadership approach can lead to empowerment, active participation, and a socially just and equitable CPL strategy.

- In what ways does institutional leadership enable an empowering, equitable co-created and collaborative CPL strategy?
- In what ways does leadership become aware of and address the inherent power dynamics within departments, identities and experiences, and how can this prevent active participation and alienate some over others?
- How does leadership balance strategic direction with distributive influence to enable more collaboration and co-creation of a CPL strategy for all by all?

g) Resource management

Resource management involves allocating financial, human and other resources effectively. This includes budgeting for CPL opportunities which can include training

programs, workshops, conferences and courses. Adequate and equitable funding and allocation of time for CPL contribute to the enhancement of employees' experience of learning, skills, knowledge and capabilities. Responsible resource management is crucial for optimizing productivity, achieving organisational goals and fostering a positive work environment.

- What role does leadership play in aligning organisational resources with CPL goals and objectives?
- Which structures, policies and procedures ensure resource allocation for CPL?
- In what ways do the human resource policies and practices support CPL?
- What strategies are employed to ensure that CPL resources are distributed equitably across different departments or teams within the institution?
- To what extent does a diverse range of learning resources contribute to the professional growth of staff and stakeholders?
- How do performance appraisal systems integrate with CPL?
- How does the management of financial resources for CPL initiatives facilitate the transformation of HE?
- How is CPL supported, monitored, evaluated and improved?
- How are resources employed to optimise opportunities for learning and create environments that are conducive to learning?

h) People and human capacity

Continuous Professional Learning does not advance instrumentalist approaches to higher education where students are viewed and valued as products or customers and staff as labour. In such a framing both students and staff are simultaneously human capital commodities for the knowledge economy (McKenna, Hlengwa, Quinn & Vorster, 2022). Continuous Professional Learning is transformative and values staff beyond their instrumental contributions. In CPL learning is not predicated on individual cognitive effort but on whether the environment supports and is conducive to learning. Staff require ongoing professional learning to optimize inclusive and transformative use of learning environments.

- How do CPL initiatives promote a holistic approach to staff development that enables access and parity, valuing individuals beyond their instrumental contributions?
- In what ways does CPL support professional growth of participants fostering an environment where all can thrive?

i) Infrastructure and facilities

The involvement of the relevant applicable departments ensures that infrastructure and facilities are available, suitable and accessible to facilitate CPL. Ongoing reflections and institutional support, such as policies, procedures, planning and guidelines on infrastructure and facilities help improvements in CPL and universal access. Examples of infrastructure and facilities include libraries, theatres, laboratories, an LMS and online cloud-based infrastructure. A reflexive approach acknowledges the dynamic nature of CPL requirements and supports the adaptation of physical and digital environments accordingly, ensuring that they remain conducive to the evolving needs of participants.

- How does the institution ensure that infrastructure, facilities, policies, SOP's and guidelines support an inclusive and accessible environment for CPL including at a distance, if relevant.
- In what ways does the institution use feedback and reflections on infrastructure to continuously improve CPL offerings and accessibility?
- In which ways is the accessibility and usability of infrastructure, such as learning management systems, influencing staff engagement in CPL?
- How does a robust IT infrastructure support the implementation of virtual or remote training options for geographically dispersed staff members?
- How does the institution monitor and evaluate the efficiency, effectiveness and impact of infrastructure and facilities towards CPL?
- How does the institution integrate technology infrastructure with CPL initiatives to improve the tracking and evaluation of individual and team progress?
- To what extent is the approach to infrastructure and facilities reflexive and generative to facilitate continuous improvement in CPL?

j) Governance and management

Governance and management provide a structural framework for the implementation of CPL and overlaps with planning and design. CPL should be holistically aligned with the institutional strategy, overseen by a leadership team, and governed by a system of policies and plans which should be developed and in place to guide CPL implementation.

- How does CPL align with institutional strategies and priorities, ensuring coherence and effectiveness in implementation?
- In what ways do governance structures support inclusive decision-making and accountability in CPL planning and management?
- How is it ensured that CPL is concurrent with legal and ethical considerations?

k) Data and information management

Gathering, analysing, and utilising data is integral to CPL, offering valuable insights that not only inform decision-making but also enrich the effectiveness of CPL programs and contribute significantly to the overall success of professional learning endeavours. Quantitative and qualitative data play crucial roles, encompassing a diverse array of metrics. These may include but are not limited to, the enumeration and categorisation of CPL offerings, attendance metrics for CPL activities, network and collaboration statistics, session engagement metrics, promotional data, as well as evaluations derived from, for example, student course and programme assessments, needs assessments, CPL offering evaluations, performance reviews, job satisfaction surveys and peer reviews.

It is essential to recognise that data and information should also encompass the subjective experiences of participants in their learning journey. Evaluating CPL should also delve into how staff perceive and engage with their learning experiences. In this reflective process, the philosophical underpinnings guiding the evaluation of CPL must be given due consideration, as they shape the interpretation and utilisation of the gathered data, fostering a holistic understanding of the learning process.

- How does the institution use data to inform CPL strategies and decision-making, ensuring relevance and responsiveness to evolving needs?
- How does the institution use data to understand the experiences of participants?
- What mechanisms and arrangements are in place to ensure the protection and integrity of data from a legal and ethical perspective?

l) Technology, including artificial intelligence (AI)

Technology is critical in intertwining with various learning modalities and the utilisation of information and communication technologies (ICTs). Its significance lies in fostering accessibility and flexibility, facilitating interaction and accommodating diverse learning styles. Higher education institutions are also encouraged to embark on a reflective journey, crafting strategies that seamlessly integrate artificial intelligence (AI) into CPL initiatives. AI's integration should not merely be viewed as an external resource for the academic endeavour but rather as a catalyst for personalised and transformative CPL experiences.

- How does the institution integrate technology, including AI, in CPL initiatives, ensuring alignment with pedagogical goals and ethical considerations?
- In what ways does the institution support staff in developing the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively utilize technology for CPL?
- How does technology enhance accessibility and engagement in CPL activities, promoting inclusivity and collaboration among participants?

- What ethical considerations does the institution have in place and inform staff to be aware of when working with technologies?
- How are digital competencies used in CPL to incorporate a variety of effective digital pedagogical practices?

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 Higher Education (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 External Quality Assurance (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 *Continuous Professional Learning* will be in place for 7 years.

7. References

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