COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Title: Higher Education Practice Standard for

Engaged Institutions

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1. Preamble for the HEPS on *Engaged*[1] *Institutions*

Global challenges—such as climate catastrophes, armed conflicts, economic instability, and widening inequalities, compounded by the lasting aftermath of the pandemic that claimed millions of lives—are no longer distant concerns but pressing realities. These crises demand that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) critically reflect on their role and contribution to society from new and fresh perspectives. What role does higher education envision in contributing to making the world a better place?

Institutions should foster and use their relationships to not only understand the complexities of society's challenges better but also to reflect on what would make desirable, viable and sustainable solutions. Institutions should seek to increase participation and representation in how societal challenges are identified and solved. Our investment in learning, teaching and research cannot stand in isolation from the needs expressed by our communities, and engagement should be integral to these core functions in delivering the promise of a better world.

This Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) adopts a broad conception of community. Community can be defined by place, by practice, and by purpose. Community can manifest as solidarity, a fellowship of responsibilities and interests that places equal value on all members of the fellowship (Baker-Boosamra, 2006). Community is not only outward-looking but also inward-looking. The conception of community being advanced here fosters a greater sense of belonging, especially in contexts where our students and staff have endured alienation. This broad conception does not prevent HEIs from seeing the significance of place but frees HEIs to recognise the widest range of community.

When HEIs are engaged, connected and committed to working together with students, stakeholders, communities, government, business and civil society, they create the rich ecosystem needed for improved outcomes across systems. By fostering collaboration among diverse networks and partners, engaged HEIs can facilitate collective reasoning for the transformation of institutions, people, places, policies and processes. Engaged institutions work towards social connections and substantive and meaningful social engagement that leads to enhanced education and development outcomes.

Engagement should transform learning, teaching, and research from being the sole accomplishment of HEIs, to becoming a collaborative and synergistic effort with better chances of positive and sustained impact. Engagement enables the transformation of our thinking, curricula, learning, teaching, research, innovation, and development praxis. Through engagement, academics and students draw from Africa's rich and diverse knowledge heritages, challenging the constraints imposed by dominant knowledge hegemonies. The goals of a transformed HEI should include fostering social responsibility and enhancing the role of higher education in driving social and economic development through meaningful engagement.

This transformative vision of engagement is guided by core principles that shape how

[1] The term 'engaged' is used deliberately throughout this document. 'Engaged' is used to emphasise the act of being actively involved, connected and committed. It implies participation and investment in a particular activity, relationship or goal. Engagement is motivated and deliberate.

institutions interact with society. These principles—embracing mutuality and reciprocity, ensuring ethical practice, pursuing transformation and social justice, recognising pluri-versal knowledge systems, fostering collaboration, and maintaining reflexivity—provide the foundation for meaningful engagement. They ensure that engagement moves beyond transactional relationships to create genuine partnerships that advance both academic excellence and societal development.

Recognising the significance of engagement, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) established a Community of Practice to advance the concept and praxis of Engaged Institutions. The CHE's Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) serves as a strategic lever, aligning the academic project with the broader social purpose of building a sustainable and equitable social order in South Africa while maintaining regional, continental, and global relevance. The HEPS on Engaged Institutions, developed by this Community of Practice using a generative, reflexive approach, intends to leverage the collective agency of students, academics, government, business, and civil society in creating and mobilising the knowledge and innovation required for a better world.

2. Rationale for the HEPS on *Engaged Institutions*

Informed by current literature on community-engaged education, good practice in educational quality frameworks, the QAF, and critical engagement with international benchmarks, including the African Standards and Guidelines (ASGs), the HEPS reflects a consensus around the need to rethink engagement so that it meets the twenty-first century's governance, development, humanitarian, and public health challenges. The impetus for this document comes from the growing recognition of the social determinants of development and the importance of community-level action, leadership, and ownership in all aspects of policy, research, and practice. The philosophical foundation of the HEPS for Engaged Institutions is rooted in the understanding that societal challenges cannot be fully grasped or resolved in isolation. Instead, these issues require collaborative efforts.

This standard aims to support HEIs in developing robustness in their engagement mandate and contributes to building confidence in the quality of higher education provisioning and HEI graduates in South Africa.

Institutions should approach their engagements with a deep respect for the resources invested in higher education and the sacrifices made by society for higher education. Institutions and their constituencies are encouraged to look beyond the purely utilitarian value of higher education and strive to maximize its heuristic value through their engagements.

The generative capacity of higher education institutions in producing ideas, developing human capacity, and driving innovation underscores their indispensability in addressing complex challenges of the 21st century (McCowan, 2022 in Fongwa et al., 2022). However, higher education institutions' ability to find lasting solutions to these complex problems rests

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on their orientation toward engagement.

Engagement is guided by the following principles. *Engagement should be:*

1. **Mutual and reciprocal:** Engagement should generate shared value and opportunity for learning, growth, and problem-solving. Engaged HEIs understand that communities possess knowledge, experience and insight that is valuable for enhanced education and development outcomes. For this reason, HEIs facilitate mutual learning and benefit. Engagement goes beyond transactional interactions and fosters trust, commitment and sustainable partnerships. Collaborators have an opportunity to participate in planning, implementation, and evaluation processes, therefore diminishing top-down hierarchical approaches. Engagement is not extractive.

2. **Ethical:** Uneven power dynamics, clashes of priority, worldview, interests and values can present staff and students with ethical dilemmas. Engagement has the potential to affect the lives and wellbeing of staff, students and communities, as well as the reputation of HEIs. For this reason, ethical decision-making must be promoted as a critical exercise in engaged HEIs. Engagement is conducted ethically and transparently, with respect for and recognition of the dignity, autonomy and well-being of all participants.

3. **Transformative:** Engagement with diverse communities enables the transformation of our thinking, curricula, teaching, learning, research, innovation, and development praxis. Engaged institutions follow transformative rather than affirmative approaches to engagement.

4. **Socially just:** Widespread socio-economic disparities significantly impact national development and the performance of higher education systems. In this context, social justice is grounded in the principle that all individuals possess equal, inherent worth and inalienable rights. These rights encompass equitable access to opportunities, services, and resources; the assurance of freedom and human rights; and meaningful participation in decision-making processes. An engaged institution actively challenges inequity and exploitation, striving to eliminate social inequalities rather than perpetuating or legitimising them. It prioritises the social outcomes of higher education, recognising its role in fostering fairness, inclusion and empowerment within and beyond academic communities.

5. **Pluriversal** (knowledge systems): An engaged institution values and promotes the coexistence of diverse ways of knowing, being and engaging with the world. It advances epistemic diversity by recognising the legitimacy of different knowledge systems and cultural perspectives, including Indigenous, local and non-Western traditions. It deconstructs colonial legacies in higher education by creating space for voices and perspectives that were historically marginalised or excluded.

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6. **Collaborative**: An engaged institution values and encourages relationships in which parties can organise, work, co-create and think together. It actively works to remove obstacles to participation.

7. **Reflexive**: An engaged institution develops and inspires reflexive competence by deeply and critically examining its assumptions, positioning, biases, and how its ways of thinking influence how it interprets situations and engages with others. It demonstrates a critical awareness of how it constructs meaning and knowledge.

Engaged institutions face several significant challenges as they integrate engagement into their core functions. Research reveals these challenges span institutional, cultural, operational and partnership-specific domains (Hora & Millar, 2023). Key issues include institutional commitment, resource constraints and the need for better coordination of engagement efforts. There is also a pressing need for more research on how institutional engagement can be enhanced through interdisciplinary collaboration, particularly with the integration of emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (Adeleke & Abimbola, 2024). Understanding the long-term effects of institution—community partnerships on societal transformation remains another crucial area for investigation (Bowers, 2018).

The standards' alignment with the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) strengthens higher education provisioning quality through systematic implementation. This relationship enhances relevance, accountability and quality cultures whilst building institutional confidence (CHE, 2023). The HEPS promotes sustainable partnerships that move beyond transactional interactions to foster trust and commitment (Jackson, 2015).

The theoretical underpinning of engaged scholarship emphasises collaboration and knowledge integration across academic and societal boundaries. Weerts and Sandmann (2015) highlight how these foundations guide researchers, educators and communities in co-creating knowledge to address real-world problems. This collaborative principle actively works to remove obstacles to participation, enabling parties to organise, work and think together effectively.

Lupini, Bertella and Font (2024) demonstrate how engagement centred around critical theory advocates for participatory methods that challenge inequity and exploitation. An engaged institution actively works to eliminate social inequalities rather than perpetuating them, prioritising education's role in fostering fairness, inclusion and empowerment.

Through this comprehensive framework and its guiding principles, the HEPS for Engaged Institutions provides both principles and comprehensive guidelines for institutions to shape their orientation towards engagement, moving it from the periphery to being wholly integrated into learning, teaching, research and innovation practices. The standards recognise that whilst not every engagement will be optimal in all contexts, they emphasise the importance of cultivating a sensibility and maturity that evolves through consistent

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practice and experience over time.

The HEPS on Institutional Engagement should be cross-referenced with the HEPS on Identity and Agency, Experiential Learning and the HEPS on Transitions into, through and from Higher Education, to ensure that transformation is enacted not only within the institution but also in its partnerships with communities and industries.

3. The HEPS Statement for *Engaged Institutions*

An Engaged Institution intentionally and systematically integrates engagement and academic citizenship into its learning, teaching, research and innovation. This integration is characterised by an in- and outward-looking orientation, a collaborative ethos and a commitment to addressing societal needs through reciprocal partnerships. These partnerships recognise a range of communities and value and incorporate diverse knowledge systems and ways of being.

To support meaningful engagement, the institution fosters enabling environments that include appropriate resources, supportive policies and recognition practices. It maintains flexibility in implementation approaches to accommodate diverse contexts and stakeholder needs. Evidence of the quality and impact of engagement is shown through ongoing review, reflection and evaluation, ensuring that outcomes benefit both the institution and its partners.

An Engaged Institution demonstrates awareness of the outcomes and impact of its learning, teaching and research, and remains critical, thoughtful, and scholarly in how and for what reasons it initiates, builds and maintains relationships.

4. Guidelines for the HEPS on *Engaged Institutions*

Guidelines accompanying a standards statement include how the HEPS might be interpreted and implemented. They elaborate and give an explanation of any terms used in the HEPS statement within the area of practice. They set out good practices 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 NQF level. The Guidelines are framed as questions, encouraging institutions to engage with them in a generative, reflexive, and contextually responsive manner that fosters continuous improvement in practice.

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The Guidelines have been grouped into four dimensions:

1. **Integration and institutionalisation** *(how engagement is embedded systemically)*
2. **Engagement contexts and strategies** *(who, where, why of engagement)*
3. **Knowledge co-creation and exchange** *(how engagement happens)*
4. **Quality enhancement and impact** *(evidence, outcomes, transformation)*

4.1 INTEGRATION & INSTITUTIONALISATION *Emphasises the systematic embedding of engagement within institutional structures, processes, and culture, ensuring that engagement is not peripheral but integral to the institution's identity and operations. This category reflects the QAF's emphasis on institutional responsibility and accountability by focusing on systematic integration that aligns engagement with institutional mission and strategy, transforming it from peripheral activity to core institutional practice.*	
Governance & Strategic Alignment *Focuses on intentionality, purposefulness, and how engagement is embedded in institutional leadership, decision-making structures, and strategic planning. This includes clear lines of responsibility and accountability, ensuring engagement is systematically integrated rather than ad hoc.*	- How does your institutional mission, vision and strategy enable purposeful engagement, and how are these reflected in your institutional structure and operations? To what extent are engagement priorities embedded in institutional decision-making processes and strategic planning cycles? - How do your governance structures and leadership actively champion engagement, and what mechanisms ensure this extends beyond individual champions to create sustainable institutional commitment? How are engagement considerations integrated into major institutional decisions and planning? How are engagement priorities reflected in budget allocations? - How do you ensure alignment between engagement activities and institutional identity while maintaining flexibility for innovation and responsiveness? What processes support the systematic integration of engagement across different institutional levels? How do your research initiatives actively involve community partners and contribute to social and economic development? *[Also refer to the HEPS for Institutional Identity and Agency]*
Enabling Mechanisms *Addresses the formal mechanisms that guide and enable engagement, possibly including policies, procedures and guidelines. These should be robust yet flexible enough to*	- How has your institution developed and implemented formal and informal mechanisms to support engagement, and how do these mechanisms balance the need for consistency with flexibility for context-specific adaptation? What policies guide your engagement purpose and practice? What processes ensure these mechanisms remain relevant and effective? How do you coordinate engagement policies across different institutional levels (faculty, department,

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accommodate institutional differentiation whilst maintaining quality standards.	institution)? - How do you coordinate various institutional support structures to enable engagement while respecting disciplinary and departmental differences? What systems are in place to ensure ethical practice while promoting innovation? How is engagement included in the institutional QMS? - How do your institutional arrangements / structure facilitate meaningful partnerships and sustainable engagement practices? How do these arrangements address potential barriers to engagement while promoting quality and impact? How are formal partnership agreements managed and monitored?
Recognition and Resources *Examines how the institution values, supports and enables engagement through resource allocation, recognition systems and incentives, reflecting institutional commitment beyond mere policy statements.*	- How does your institution recognise, support and incentivise engagement through its resource allocation, recognition systems, and reward structures? How are these systems designed to promote sustained quality engagement rather than once-off activities? How does your institution recognise and reward high-impact engagement? Is engagement incorporated into performance management and promotion criteria? - What mechanisms are in place to ensure adequate and sustainable resourcing for engagement activities across different institutional levels? How do you balance competing resource demands while maintaining engagement as a core institutional priority? How is engagement resourced and funded, and how does your resource allocation (facilities, technology, staff) effectively support your engagement mission? - How does your institution create enabling environments that support staff and student engagement while ensuring quality and impact? What support systems exist to help overcome barriers to engagement?
Student Agency & Development *Examines how the institution enables students as active agents rather than passive recipients in engagement processes, supporting their growth as engaged scholars and citizens while ensuring quality and inclusivity. This encompasses student participation in shaping engagement strategies, development of capabilities*	- How does your institution integrate student voices and perspectives into engagement strategy and implementation? What formal and informal mechanisms exist for students to play a role in shaping engagement priorities and practices? How do you ensure these mechanisms are accessible to diverse student groups? - How does your institution support and empower student-led engagement activities while providing appropriate guidance and resources to ensure excellence? What systems and practices help students develop and implement high-quality initiatives that align with community needs? How do you build student capacity for ethical and effective engagement?

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through engagement, and support for student-led initiatives.	- How do you evaluate and document the impact of engagement on student development? What evidence demonstrates the development of both disciplinary competencies and civic capabilities? How do you ensure engagement experiences contribute meaningfully to graduate attributes and professional development? *[Also refer to the HEPS for Experiential Learning]*

4.2 ENGAGEMENT CONTEXT & STRATEGIES *Addresses how institutions develop and implement contextually responsive engagement strategies that recognises diverse communities and stakeholder needs. This aligns with the QAF's principles of differentiation and fitness for purpose while acknowledging the need for contextual awareness in engagement approaches.*	
Conceptual Framework *Establishes the institution's understanding and approach to engagement, including how it defines and interprets key concepts within its specific context and mission.*	- How does your institution conceptualise and articulate its understanding of engagement within your specific context and mission? How do you ensure this conceptualisation respects diverse knowledge systems while promoting transformative rather than merely transactional relationships? What processes help you navigate power dynamics and historical inequities in engagement relationships? - How are stakeholders and communities defined in your context? How do you communicate and socialise key engagement concepts across the institution? How do you balance multiple community perspectives and needs in engagement initiatives? - How could you strengthen academic excellence through social responsibility in your engagement approach? What mechanisms ensure your engagement framework remains responsive to both institutional identity and community needs? How do you communicate and socialise these concepts across different institutional levels and stakeholder groups? - How does your conceptual framework acknowledge and respond to the complex interplay between local contexts, cultural factors, and institutional capabilities? How do you ensure your engagement approaches remain both scholarly and accessible to diverse communities? What values and principles guide your approach to engagement?
Strategic Priorities *Examines how institutions identify, select and prioritise*	- How does your institution identify, select, and prioritise engagement initiatives in ways that align with both institutional capabilities and community needs? What processes guide the

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engagement initiatives in ways that align with both institutional capabilities and community needs.	development and refinement of engagement priorities over time? How do you evaluate whether your engagement initiatives create meaningful and sustainable impact? - What approaches do you use to scan and respond to emerging societal challenges while maintaining continuity in existing engagement commitments? How do you balance competing demands and expectations from different stakeholder groups? How do you ensure your strategic priorities promote substantive rather than symbolic engagement? - How do your strategic priorities actively work to address systemic inequities as a fundamental aspect of sustainable engagement? What mechanisms help you develop engagement priorities that are rooted in local contexts and relationships, while contributing to broader social transformation?
Approaches in Practice *Considers various approaches and aspects of engagement including reciprocity, collaboration, a knowledge exchange focus, multidisciplinarity and a multi-stakeholder approach.*	- How does your institution facilitate the bidirectional flow of knowledge between the institution and the community, ensuring that academic knowledge is applied in practical contexts and that community insights inform academic inquiry? How do you cultivate and strengthen multi-disciplinary and multi-stakeholder collaboration to enhance the depth and impact of engagement initiatives? - Do you engage with a diverse range of stakeholders (possibly including local communities, industry partners, government bodies, and non-profit organisations, etc.), to address complex societal issues collaboratively? How do you promote inter- and multidisciplinary collaboration and involve diverse academic disciplines? What mechanisms are in place to recognise (and integrate) the contributions of all stakeholders, promote co-creation and emphasis reciprocity? What processes are used to address and align the goals and expectations of stakeholders? - How are students involved in your engagement initiatives? Are engagement activities designed to enhance students' skills, employability, and social awareness? Do you design engagement projects to promote experiential learning for students, deepening their understanding of disciplinary knowledge and its real-world application? *[Also refer to the HEPS for Experiential Learning]*
Internationalisation and Networks *Considers how institutions*	- How does your institution develop and maintain meaningful partnerships across different scales, from local to global? What processes support the development of communities of place, purpose, practice and solidarity? How do you ensure these networks

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develop and maintain partnerships across different scales, from local to global, fostering communities of place, purpose, practice and solidarity.	promote genuine relationships that remain reciprocal and mutually beneficial? - What mechanisms help you integrate international perspectives while remaining grounded in local contexts? How do you ensure network relationships remain reciprocal and mutually beneficial? How does the institution promote staff and student mobility, both inbound and outbound? Can you show critical engagement with regional and international benchmarks? - How do you coordinate and leverage different types of partnerships and networks to maximise impact? What systems help you maintain long-term relationships whilst remaining open to new partnerships and opportunities? Do you include cross-border collaborative programmes and qualifications on undergraduate and postgraduate levels?

4.3 KNOWLEDGE CO-CREATION & EXCHANGE *Focuses on how institutions facilitate meaningful knowledge exchange and co-creation with various communities, reflecting the QAF's emphasis on reciprocal relationships and transformative learning.*	
Integration with Core Functions *Examines how engagement enriches and is enriched by teaching, learning, research and innovation; ensuring mutual benefit and meaningful integration rather than parallel activities.*	- How does your institution ensure meaningful integration of engagement with learning, teaching, research and innovation, rather than treating these as parallel activities? What mechanisms support the authentic incorporation of engagement into curriculum design and delivery? How do you ensure that engagement enriches academic practices while responding to societal needs? How do engagement activities enhance educational outcomes? *[Also refer to the HEPS for Learning, Teaching & Assessment when discussing curriculum integration]* - How do your learning and teaching approaches facilitate active, community-based experiences that develop students' civic and academic capabilities? What processes help you integrate community knowledge and expertise into academic programmes to enrich and deepen educational outcomes? How do you ensure student voices are included in engagement planning and implementation? - How do you ensure bi-directional knowledge flow between the institution and communities that enriches both parties? What systems support the connection between theoretical knowledge and practical application in ways that benefit all participants? How do you evaluate whether this integration achieves both academic and community outcomes?

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Capacity Development *Addresses how institutions build engagement capabilities among staff, students and communities, supporting sustainable and effective engagement practices.*	- How does your institution develop and support engagement capabilities among staff, students and communities in ways that promote sustainable and effective practices? What professional development opportunities help staff and students develop the competencies needed for ethical and culturally sensitive engagement? How do you ensure capacity building benefits all participants? - What approaches do you use to build capacity within partner communities while respecting existing knowledge and capabilities? How do you ensure engagement activities contribute to graduate attributes and professional development? What mechanisms help you identify and address capacity gaps across different stakeholder groups? - How do you develop engagement competencies among staff and students? How do you foster leadership development and ethical practice through engagement activities? What systems help you evaluate and enhance capacity development efforts over time?
Communication and Exchange *Focuses on the mechanisms and approaches for meaningful dialogue and knowledge exchange between the institution and its various communities.*	- How do you ensure reciprocal benefit in knowledge exchange? How does your institution facilitate meaningful dialogue and knowledge exchange between different stakeholder groups? What mechanisms ensure communication is transparent, inclusive and accessible to diverse audiences? How do you promote collaborative learning and knowledge creation across different contexts? - What systems do you have in place to gather, respond to, and incorporate stakeholder feedback into engagement practices? How do you ensure communication flows support rather than hinder engagement relationships? What processes help you document and share engagement experiences in ways that benefit all participants? - How do you facilitate knowledge exchange between different types of communities (place, purpose, practice, solidarity)? How do you navigate communication challenges across different cultural and organizational contexts? What mechanisms help you maintain effective communication in long-term partnerships while remaining open to new dialogue opportunities?

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4.4 QUALITY ENHANCEMENT[2] & IMPACT *Aligns directly with the QAF's emphasis on evidence-based quality enhancement, focusing on how institutions assess, improve and demonstrate the value and impact of their engagement.*	
Monitoring and Evaluation *Examines the systems and processes for tracking, evaluating and improving engagement activities, ensuring they meet quality standards and achieve intended outcomes.*	- How does your institution assess the quality, significance and impact of engagement activities across different timeframes and contexts? What combination of qualitative and quantitative metrics help you evaluate both immediate outcomes and long-term transformative impacts? How do you ensure evaluation processes themselves reflect engagement principles? - How do you meaningfully involve stakeholders in the design, implementation and interpretation of evaluation processes? What mechanisms help you assess the reciprocal nature and sustainability of engagement outcomes? How do you evaluate whether impacts are genuinely transformative rather than merely transactional? - What systems help you monitor and evaluate engagement at different institutional levels while maintaining coherent oversight? How do you ensure evaluation findings inform future practice while remaining responsive to changing contexts and needs?
Data Management *Addresses how institutions collect, analyse and use engagement data to inform decision-making and demonstrate impact, supporting evidence-based practice.*	- How does your institution collect, organise and analyse engagement data in ways that inform decision-making while respecting stakeholder privacy and confidentiality? What systems ensure data quality and integrity across different types of engagement activities? How do you maintain comprehensive records while avoiding unnecessary bureaucratic burden? - What processes help you identify and capture meaningful engagement indicators beyond simple metrics? How do you ensure data collection and analysis practices align with engagement principles? What mechanisms help you share relevant data with stakeholders while maintaining appropriate data governance? - How do you document lessons learned and best practices in ways that benefit both the institution and its partners? What systems help you use engagement data to demonstrate value and impact to different audiences? *[Also refer to the HEPS for the Data Value Chain]*

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[2] This section uses "Quality Enhancement" rather than "Quality Assurance" as it emphasises active and intentional improvement beyond minimum standards. It suggests deliberate intervention to raise quality levels, focusing on adding value and building upon existing strengths.

Risk Management and Ethics *Focuses on how institutions identify, assess and mitigate risks while ensuring ethical practice in engagement activities, protecting both institutional and community interests.*	- How does your institution identify, assess and mitigate potential risks in engagement activities while maintaining space for innovation and experimentation? What ethical frameworks guide your engagement practices across different contexts and relationships? How do you ensure risk management approaches don't unnecessarily constrain meaningful engagement? - What processes help you protect vulnerable populations while promoting their authentic participation? How do you identify and address potential negative unintended consequences of engagement activities? What systems help you handle ethical concerns and conflicts of interest in ways that strengthen rather than damage engagement relationships? - How do you ensure compliance with relevant regulations and standards while maintaining flexibility for context-specific adaptation? What mechanisms help you balance risk management with the need to pursue transformative engagement opportunities? - How does your institution ensure engagement activities can adapt and continue during disruptions (e.g., health crises, natural disasters, social unrest)? What contingency plans are in place? What mechanisms help you identify early warning signs of potential challenges to engagement activities? How do you proactively address these? - How do you build redundancy and flexibility into engagement partnerships to ensure sustainability beyond individual champions or specific funding streams? How do you ensure knowledge transfer and documentation that enables continuity of engagement despite staff turnover or institutional changes?

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These guidelines provide institutions with a comprehensive framework for developing robust and meaningful engagement practices. By working through these questions in their specific contexts, institutions can systematically strengthen their engagement capabilities, develop more effective partnerships and create lasting positive impact. The guidelines recognise that engagement practices will evolve and mature over time, encouraging institutions to reflect on and enhance their approaches regularly, while remaining responsive to changing societal needs and opportunities.

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. Criteria will be developed to align with the specific quality assurance exercise being conducted. This could be an internal quality assurance exercise conducted by an institution, or a specific external quality assurance activity conducted by the CHE. As such the criteria will be activity-, time-, purpose- and context-specific. Certain criteria may remain applicable for an extended 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 the ever-changing environment and context in higher education. Standards may be removed, replaced, updated or consolidated. It would, however, be important to achieve stability by allowing institutions to work with Standards in a particular format for some time, in this case for 7 years. Each of the Standards is also intended to include considerations for potential disasters and changing world environments.

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