COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Title: Higher Education Practice Standard for

Student Administration

1. Preamble for the HEPS on *Student Administration*

The Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) on student administration is firmly rooted in an expanding body of research exploring the role, function, quality and importance of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) within the higher education landscape and society. It recognises and acknowledges the substantial contribution of HEIs to social cohesion and the public good. The Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) significantly emphasises differentiation as a fundamental principle in establishing an External Quality Assurance (EQA) framework that embraces diversity within higher education provision in South Africa. In alignment with the QAF's call for a reflexive-generative approach, this HEPS on student administration adheres to a reflexive-generative approach. The HEPs on student administration is also firmly rooted within the South African legislative framework. See Addendum A.

Several academic disciplines inform student administration, services and programmes. The desired outcomes of any good practice in student administration systems and processes are the same as those for higher education in general and include:

- A high-quality learning experience
- Improved higher education access
- Better retention and progress toward graduation
- Enhanced career/employment prospects
- Enhanced life-long learning interests.

Kivistö and Pekkola (2017) highlight that quality and quality assurance of student administration has received less attention than the extensive literature on quality and quality

assurance of educational and research processes. However, all forms of student administration within a higher education system can be understood as a service. In essence, a service is a transaction between two parties: a service provider, which in this regard is the HEI and a service user, which refers to the applicant, student, alumnus or other stakeholders receiving a service from the HEI. Students are among the most important groups using the services of HEI administration.

Thus, the HEPS on student administration plays an important role in planning, benchmarking and improving processes and operations at the institution to support sustainable student success. Through its various activities, services and programmes, higher education must place students at the centre of its focus. Students must be considered equal and fundamental partners and stakeholders in their education. Student administration must be delivered seamlessly, meaningfully and aligned with the institution's academic mission. Professionals in student administration must create spaces for students to engage their institution and the learning process. The HEPS on student administration is intended to build supportive and inclusive communities of service locally and globally.

The following underlying principles provide the grounding for the HEPS to support quality student administration in HEIs:

- **Administrative quality as excellence**

Administrative quality as excellence can be defined in terms of the quality of resources and other administrative service inputs (Harvey, 2006), such as the processes of planning, organising, directing and controlling the implementation of administrative functions directly concerned with students. In addition, administrative quality as excellence considers the well-being of administrative staff, the services provided, and the resources provided to support these services.

- **Administrative quality as consistency**

This dimension relates to reliability, availability and accuracy in all aspects of administrative work. Staff willingness to help by providing prompt service is an important aspect of consistency. This dimension of quality as consistency includes all administrative work involving clear routines and processes, whether as part of study administration, maintenance and operations or ICT services. A lack of consistent, efficient quality negatively impacts student journeys and success.

- **Administrative quality as fitness of purpose**

According to Vlãsceanu et al. (2007), quality as fitness of purpose focuses on an institution's or programme's defined objectives and mission. Fitness of purpose evaluates whether the quality-related intentions of a higher education institution are adequate. Kerns (2019) adds that fitness of purpose stresses the importance of alignment of the institution's activities with the needs and desires of its students and stakeholders. In South Africa, The National Working Group on the Restructuring of the Higher Education System (2002) assessed 'fitness of purpose' against a set of performance indicators and benchmarks in relation to graduation rates,

research outputs, staff qualifications and financial stability to determine a healthy and well-functioning institutional system.

- **Administrative quality as fitness for purpose**

In the context of administration, fitness for purpose has two meanings. First, it refers to matching the delivery of any kind of administrative service to the expectations of students. The key issue is that the student experience should be perceived as satisfactory by the HEI. The fitness for purpose approach relates equally to all four requirements faced by HEIs: operating within the limits of rules, regulations and norms set by the public authorities; operating efficiently and productively; understanding the boundary conditions imposed by academic work and HEIs as scholarly communities and remaining adaptive to the needs of external society. Administrative quality is defined by the opportunity for scalability and the opportunity to pivot in response to changes, risk and complexity.

- **Administrative quality as value**

Quality in administration can be understood as the ability to achieve the maximum benefits of administrative services using limited monetary and human resources. In other words, administration quality is maintained or increased when resources are not wasted – that is, they are not allocated to activities or processes that do not add value to the service provided. While determining the optimal level of efficiency is, of course, difficult, identifying slack resources is often more straightforward. Data can inform strategic institutional decisions. Quality in administration can be understood as the ability to streamline and create efficiencies in the student lifecycle.

- **Administrative quality as transformation**

Administrative quality as transformative is about placing the student at the centre of all administrative processes, ensuring a student-centred approach. The student voice and experience are critical to ensure that students feel included, heard and have a sense of belonging. Care, respect and ethical relationships should form important enablers for operationalising administrative quality as transformational. Administrative quality as transformative involves addressing barriers to access and ensuring inclusivity; fostering diversity among staff to ensure representation from diverse backgrounds in administrative roles; ensuring that student administration processes are sensitive to different linguistic and cultural contexts, which is essential for effective service delivery; and recognizing and valuing the prior learning experiences of students from diverse backgrounds, including those who may not have followed traditional educational pathways. Administrative systems must advance transformation by simplifying access, reducing bureaucratic exclusion and providing equitable support across diverse student demographics.

- **Administrative quality as integration**

Finally, quality can be understood as administration's ability to achieve positive changes and added value for core activities. In the case of HEIs, administration does more than support academic activities; it proactively creates favourable conditions and circumstances for the

institution's financial success and academic excellence while at the same time meeting the needs of service users. This approach requires administration from the lowest to the highest positions to be adaptive and forward-looking concerning changes in circumstances and to understand the 'bigger picture' in which HEI operates beyond their own work tasks (Shanahan and Gerber, 2004).

Below is an illustration of the underlying principles mentioned above (adapted from Harvey and Green, 1993).

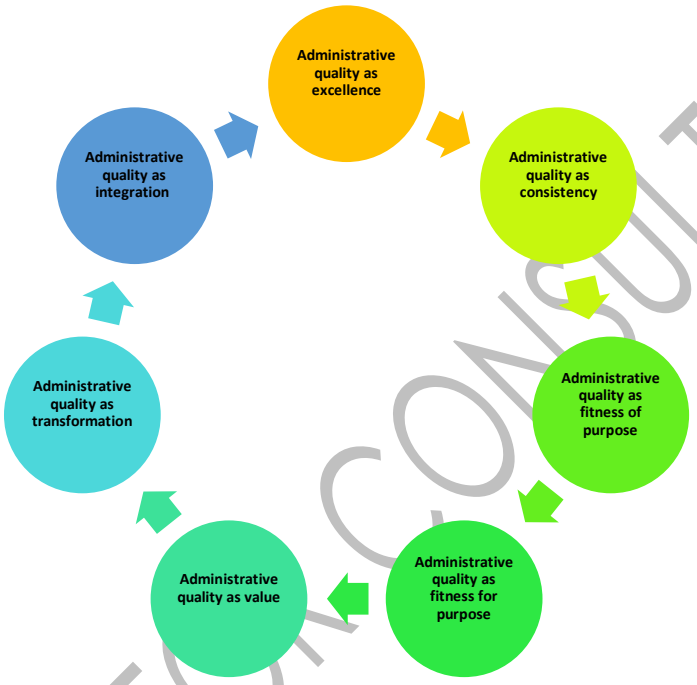

Figure 1: Underlying principles of the student administration HEPS

2. Rationale for the HEPS on *Student Administration*

The HEPS on student administration is critical to ensure that HEIs provide quality programmes and services. The QAF offers a comprehensive approach to quality assurance, probing engagements on student administration and enabling HEIs to operate effectively and efficiently.

The primary focus on quality assurance has been addressing the quality of HEIs' core missions, learning and teaching, research, community service and, in recent times, third mission activities, including student support and services. Consequently, student administration has been primarily considered a support function, not a standalone core

function of HEIs. The quality assurance of student administration has not received much attention in student retention and success until now, with administrative activities often limited to areas closely linked to the institution's academic activities. The functions of administration in academic life have often been considered secondary in that the teaching and research for which HEIs exist can be carried on only by academic staff. From this point of view, administration justifies itself in facilitating and strengthening the work of the academic team. Administration is never an end but only a means to an end. Nevertheless, it can be an indispensable means. It is important to recognise what administration has to contribute, and what, in fact, must be assigned to administration if the overall purposes of academic institutions are to be realized.

Administrators ensure a safe and productive learning environment for the students and academics at their institution. Administrators support institutions' smooth running and play significant roles in their success. According to Mawudeku and Ankumah (2021), an orderly HEI environment that is efficient and well-managed provides the preconditions for enhanced student learning.

The quality assurance of student administration cannot function alone and needs to work within an institutional ecosystem dependent upon the collaboration of student administration staff and non-administrative stakeholders. Student administration must ensure that such a collaboration with all staff is affected. Student administration, for this HEPS, is based on the student lifecycle, from a student deciding to register at an institution until they complete the qualification and graduation. Therefore, the areas of focus in a student life cycle include the organisational structure of a HEI, student administration functions, policies governing the student administration function and administrative procedures applicable from application, admission, registration, attendance of lectures or other learning activities, information reporting, assessment and examinations up to and including the award of the qualification.

Higher education institutions' student administration activities significantly impact students' lives and, therefore, their academic performance. Several studies have argued that student administration departments, which include multiple significant roles, can enhance student academic performance. LeBlanc and Nguyen (1997) identified the following seven indicators of HEI service quality: institutional reputation, administrative personnel, academic staff, curriculum, institutional responsiveness, physical evidence and access to facilities. In this regard, student administration at an institution has a pivotal impact on staff and student morale, policies and the learning atmosphere, which could determine whether a student will stay and succeed or drop out - from application, admission, registration, attendance of lectures or other learning activities, information reporting, assessment and examinations up to and including the award of the qualification. Integration with other functions, such as support services, finances, human resource management and information systems, and finally, effective student management information systems is also important (AAA 2017: Adaptit). Student information management systems also overlap with the HEPS on the Data Value Chain.

The HEPS on student administration should provide the foundation for how a student will transition, engage socially and academically, and academically perform at an HEI. A student's experience should be transformative, with caring being the basis of a mindful institution-student relationship. As part of its professional practice, student administration should centre care on diversely relational forms such as human concern, moral responsibility, individual attentiveness and personal responsiveness, thus building a relationship rooted in mutual respect.

This HEPS should be read in conjunction with the HEPS on Institutional Identity and Agency, Programme Processes, Learning Environments, Student Transitions, the Data Value Chain, and Continuous Professional Learning, as these collectively ensure that student administration systems are integrated, transformative and supportive of equitable access and success across the student lifecycle.

3. The HEPS Statement for *Student Administration*

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.

The institution should critically and reflexively examine its effective, efficient and ethical student administrative structures, processes and systems, supporting the management and development of a holistic student life cycle. This self-reflection should be done within the context of the evolving national and international higher education landscape and its local, regional, and global imperatives and commitments.

Student Administration processes may include, but are not limited to, the administrative management of the following:

- Application processes, including submitting applications, transcripts and standardised test scores.
- Admission decisions and acceptance offers.
- Distribution of student handbooks /policies /process documents.
- Course registration and enrolment into classes.
- Timetabling of classes.
- Maintaining student records, including personal information, academic history and grades.
- Managing course registration, add/drop periods, and waiting lists.

- Examination scheduling, registration, distribution, logistics and processing.
- Providing information on financial aid options, scholarships, grants, and loans.
- Billing and collecting tuition payments.
- Verifying completion of degree requirements, certification and awarding degrees.
- Graduation and Alumni processes.

4. Guidelines for the HEPS on *Student Administration*

Guidelines describe how HEPS might be interpreted and implemented. They set out 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 NQF level. The Guidelines are open-ended to allow for innovation and provide the basis for differentiation.

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 to form the basis for the Criteria that will be developed for future external quality assurance (EQA) functions as described in the QAF such as accreditation and quality reviews.

Theme 1: Student Administration Governance, Organisational Structure and Policy Framework

The institutional governance and policy framework encompasses a comprehensive set of regulations, policies, and rules specifically tailored to govern the student administration function, as explicitly outlined and defined in the preamble of this document.

The institutional governance and policy framework serves as a structured and overarching guideline that defines the parameters, standards and procedural intricacies governing the various facets of student administration as outlined within the preamble of this document and illustrated in the student administration ecosystem (in Fig. 2). In this ecosystem, the foundation is the institutional governance and policy framework.

The governance and policy framework outlines the authoritative directives and principles that guide decision-making, operations, and compliance within student-related administrative processes. This framework acts as a foundational structure, delineating the boundaries and expectations within which the student administration function operates. It sets forth the fundamental principles that underpin administrative practices and establishes a cohesive and transparent system for managing student-related affairs. The policies, regulations and rules embedded in this framework should be meticulously crafted to ensure that the student administration function aligns with the overarching goals, values and regulatory considerations.

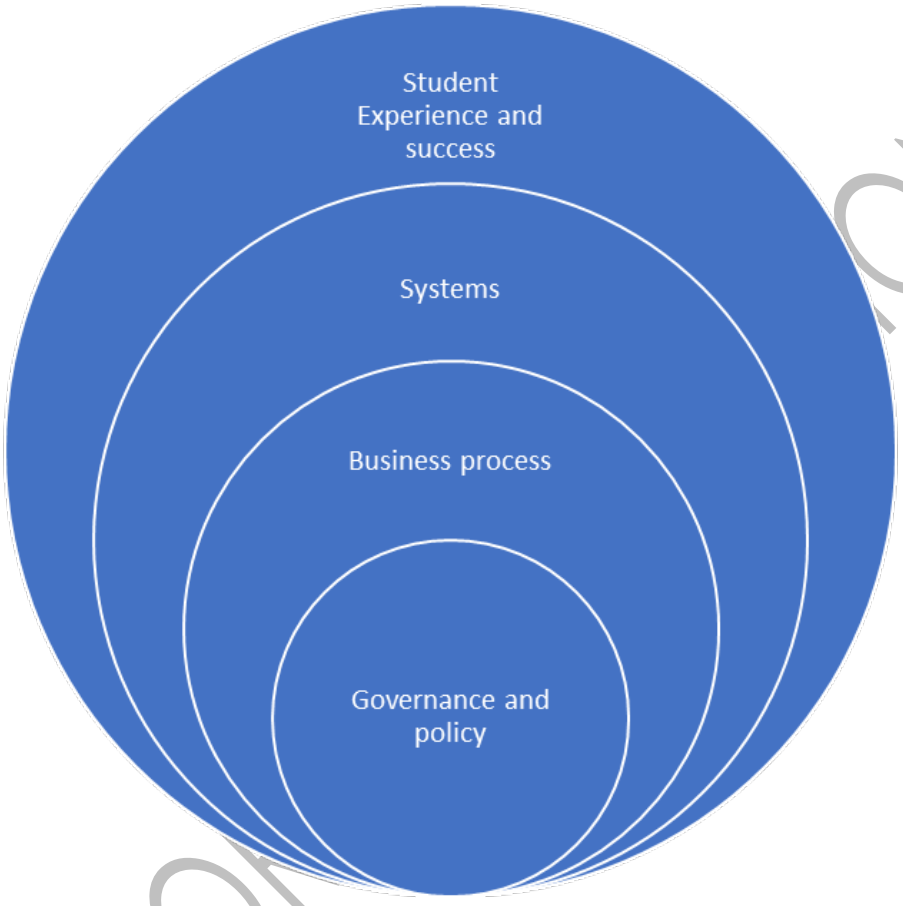

Figure 2: Student Administration Ecosystem

Furthermore, the governance and policy framework are a dynamic tool, subject to periodic review and updates to accommodate changes in institutional needs, educational trends and regulatory requirements. It consists of a set of living documents that evolves in tandem with the dynamic landscape of higher education, adapting to emerging challenges and opportunities within student administration.

In essence, the governance and policy framework represent a robust and adaptive set of guidelines designed to foster effective and compliant student-related administrative practices, ultimately contributing to the overall success and integrity of the educational institution. This Standard is aligned with the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA), which indicates that higher education in Africa in the 21st century aims to increase access and ensure quality provision. The purpose, amongst others, is the development of mutual trust, thus facilitating recognition and mobility of students and human resources within and across national borders through self-evaluation

and external peer review.

Student recruitment, admission, certification and support service policies should be published. Policies and procedures should be consistently applied to ensure fair and equitable recruitment and admission, the progression of students, certification of qualifications, and responsive support services.

The institutional policy framework should have guidelines which:

1. promote the institution and its programmes, recruitment, admission, selection and registration.
2. ensure that students admitted meet minimum programme-specific entry requirements.
3. promote student retention and progression.
4. ensure the storage of detailed records per administrative area, including transcripts.
5. consider the shift towards student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching provision.

Students need guidance throughout their journey of the student life cycle. Adequate provision should be made to advise and assist them. Engagement with students is based on the promotion of students' learning by:

1. advising them on academic issues.
2. advising them on financial matters.
3. providing health and personal counselling services.
4. providing career guidance.

Student engagement should be visible in the following areas:

1. From a governance and policy formulation point of view, the principle is that institutions should value inclusive practices. Student engagement is one of these practices. This engagement should be genuine, not tokenistic, and integral to institutional culture. This inclusive practice is seen as a student-centred approach and promotes a sense of ownership in the academic project (Matern, 2007). Student representatives in governance structures and student support services ensure that available resources and facilities are fit for purpose and accessible to students.
2. As the primary stakeholders in the teaching and learning process, students are well placed to participate in reviewing existing academic programmes and assessing the effectiveness of associated student support programmes and the quality of the intended course outcomes.
3. Student participation in RPL and in assessment practices enhances insight of both students and staff, guards against inappropriate assessment methodologies and promotes fairness.

4. Student feedback, through appropriate channels, on their experiences of curriculum and teaching methodologies serves to improve institutional learning and teaching service delivery, e.g., student evaluation of courses in learning and teaching provision. Such feedback is provided for lecturer and course development purposes.
5. Students' perspectives and insights on issues pertaining to articulation within and across departments, faculties and institutions add value in providing accurate information for decision-making processes and promoting quality education.

In such an inclusive system, when student representatives participate in quality assurance processes, their voice or input is promoted through appropriate student selection, training and monitoring processes.

Reflexive questions:

1. How does your institution educate students and drive awareness about the student administration policies throughout the student life cycle? How is this linked to your vision and mission?
2. How is your student administrative policy framework aligned to your institutional governance and policy framework?
3. What relevant laws and regulations underpin your student administrative governance and policy framework?
4. How do you ensure your student administration governance and policy framework aligns and is continuously compliant with relevant laws and regulations?
5. What are the key student administration objectives identified in you governance and policy framework?
6. How is your student administration governance and policy framework designed to achieve related objectives?
7. What ethical principles underpin the governance and policy framework?
8. How are integrity and ethical conduct promoted and maintained in student administration?
9. How does the student administration governance and policy framework identify, manage and mitigate risks?
10. How is the performance of the governance and policy framework measured?
    a. What are your mechanisms for regular evaluation and improvement?
    b. What are your mechanisms to revise policies based on new information or evolving needs?
    c. How do you ensure your student administration governance and policy framework is inclusive and considers diverse perspectives?
11. Who are the stakeholders involved in your student administration?
12. How are the student administrative interests and concerns of different stakeholders addressed?

a. How are stakeholders engaged in reviewing, communicating and implementing student administrative structures, processes and decisions?
b. Who are the key stakeholders involved in the student administration governance and policy decision-making process?
c. What mechanisms are in place to ensure transparency in your institution's student administration?
d. How do you ensure that your decision-making processes and policies are fair, equitable and transparent?

13. How do you ensure that institutional processes are sufficient to verify fraudulent stakeholder documentation, information and processes?
14. How are resources allocated to support the implementation of policies?
15. How are your student administrative resources (staff, systems, etc.) allocated to ensure they are sufficient for their purpose?
16. How are staff working in student administration developed and supported to maintain a service orientation for excellence?
17. How is your student administration budget and financial plan aligned with the governance framework and strategy?

Theme 2: Student Administration Business Rules and Processes

According to Zoet and Versendaal, (2013: 3) business rules are "statements that define or constrain some aspect of the business intending to assert business structure or to control the behaviour of the business". In addition, Aguilar-Savén (2004: 129) defines a business process as "structured, measured sets of activities designed to produce a specified output for a particular customer or market." The essence of a business process is that "processes are relationships between inputs and outputs, where inputs are transformed into outputs using a series of activities, which add value to the inputs." The definitions indicate that business rules are (1) statements to define or constrain an aspect of a business, (2) to create structure, (3) enable control, (4) activities intending to produce a specific output from defined inputs, and (5) to add value.

When integrating this understanding of business rules into higher education student administration, it is necessary to determine the bounds of student administration. Doing this will help institutions to implement the guidelines within clearly demarcated boundaries. In this practice standard, student administration is restricted to the administrative processes associated with the student life cycle[1]. This cycle includes: (1) pre-enrolment, (2) enrolment, (3) orientation, (4) academic progression, (5) experiential learning, (6) student support, (7) financial aid and student finance, (8) student life and engagement, (9) graduation and

[1] Refer to Appendix B titled "Glossary for the HEPS on Student Administration" for a definition of the student life cycle.

certification and (10) alumni engagement.

Considering the definitions for business rules and the scope of the student life cycle, business rules and processes in student administration are defined as a set of unambiguous policies, guidelines and procedures that define and govern the various administrative activities, operations and decisions related to managing students throughout the student life cycle. These rules and processes are designed to ensure efficiency, consistency, compliance with regulations, a positive experience for students, and equality and equity of provision to support an institution in operationalising its mission, vision, and goals.

Student administration should be guided by the following principles. Business rules and processes should:

1. Contribute to creating a positive and inclusive institutional culture, enabling a safe and supportive environment.
2. Enable the effective and efficient functioning of student administration.
3. Create an equal, equitable, consistent and fair experience for students.
4. Foster an environment that supports student's academic and personal development.
5. Enable compliance with regulatory standards and institutional policies.
6. Mitigate risks to students and the institution.
7. Enhance accountability and demonstrate transparency in their operations.
8. Be adaptable to the evolving education landscape, including new technologies and educational trends.
9. Enable the integration of systems and processes.
10. Encourage the interconnectedness between student administration, faculties, HR, finance and management.

The following guidelines (in the form of questions) consider the proposed definition of business rules and processes within the student administration domain and that student administration is deployed within and throughout the student lifecycle. The guidelines also consider the principles that should guide student administration.

1. How does your institution systematically determine and refine business rules and processes within student administration to ensure alignment with institutional and national policies?
    a. What processes does your institution use to determine the business rules and process applicable per student administration area, e.g., the business rules and process for the enrolment process?
    b. How does your institution ensure student administration policies and procedures align with institutional and national policies?
    c. How does your institution plan and design student administration procedures that lead to operational consistency, efficiency and adaptability?

    d. What is the process for amending student administration policies, guidelines and procedures? How does this process maintain operational consistency, efficiency and adaptability throughout the change process?
    e. How does the institution collect data and use relevant information to manage various institutional processes effectively?
2. How does your institution ensure that student administration policies and procedures support growth and inclusivity, integrating diverse perspectives, maintaining documentation, and implementing governance structures for effective delegation and accountability?
    a. How are your institution's student administration business processes scalable to meet growth in programmes and student numbers?
    b. What strategies and mechanisms does your institution employ that ensure that the student administration policies, guidelines and procedures contribute to creating a positive and inclusive institutional culture?
    c. How are various stakeholder perspectives integrated into student administration policies, guidelines, processes and procedures to ensure that they cater to a diverse student body?
    d. How does your institution ensure administration policies, procedures and systems are well documented and consistently maintained?
    e. How are governance and management structures designed to facilitate the delegation of powers in student administration while maintaining accountability?
3. What evidence can you provide of effective collaboration between student administration, faculties, HR, finance, and management in decision-making processes that enable the effective and efficient functioning of student administration?
4. How does your institution ensure transparent and effective communication of student administration policies, guidelines and procedures to foster clarity and understanding among students and staff, while also implementing practices to address stakeholder complaints across the student lifecycle, promoting accountability and responsiveness?
    a. How does your institution communicate and distribute student administration policies, guidelines and procedures to ensure clarity and understanding among students and staff?
    b. Are the communication practices in your institution in place and transparent to enhance accountability in student administration?
    c. How are stakeholder complaints across the student lifecycle managed?
5. How does your institution prioritise social justice in student administration to ensure equitable access to opportunities across the student lifecycle, while actively promoting transformative practices that meet the diverse needs of students and foster inclusivity within administrative processes?

    a. How does student administration address issues of social justice, ensuring that students have equal and equitable access to opportunities throughout the student lifecycle?
    b. How does your institution actively promote transformation in student administration processes to meet the needs of a diverse student body?
6. How does your institution foster an environment within student administration that supports academic success and personal development of students, while implementing effective processes for handling stakeholder complaints and facilitating corrective action to address concerns promptly and transparently?
    a. How does leadership within student administration across the student lifecycle foster an environment that supports students' academic and personal development?
    b. What processes are in place for handling stakeholder complaints that enable corrective action by your institution?
7. How does your institution mitigate risks to both students and the institution, and what measures are in place to proactively identify and address potential risks within administrative processes throughout the student lifecycle?
    a. What evidence can be presented to showcase how your institution mitigates students' and institutional risk?
    b. What measures exist to identify and mitigate risks in your administrative processes across the student lifecycle?
8. How does your institution allocate and optimize resources to support efficient student administration processes, while implementing strategies to promote equality and equity in student support services?
    a. How are resources allocated across different processes to support effective student administration?
    b. What strategies are in place to optimise resource utilisation?
    c. What resource allocation strategies are used to enable equality and equity in student support services?
9. How does your institution measure and monitor the effectiveness of student administration processes, ensuring data integrity and compliance with regulatory standards, while safeguarding student data and using information management to support the student lifecycle?
    a. What indicators does your institution use to measure the effectiveness of student administration across the student lifecycle? How does your institution monitor and evaluate these metrics?
    b. How does your institution ensure the integrity and security of student data in the administration processes across all phases of the student lifecycle?
    c. How do data and information management contribute to compliance with regulatory standards and policies?

10. How does your institution integrate artificial intelligence into student administration to improve efficiency and adaptability, while implementing measures to ensure ethical and unbiased decision-making processes?
    a. How is artificial intelligence integrated into student administration to enhance efficiency and adaptability?
    b. What measures are in place to ensure the ethical and unbiased use of artificial intelligence in decision-making processes?

Theme 3: Student Administration Systems and Tools

Student administrative systems refer to systems and processes for the capture and record-keeping of all administrative requirements over the student life cycle. Where possible, this comprehensive suite of software applications and resources should be integrated and designed to streamline, manage and automate applicable administrative tasks and processes within HEIs. These systems are specifically designed to meet the unique requirements of a particular institution, providing solutions for the diverse range of activities associated with administration over the student life cycle. These platforms leverage processes and systems to automate workflows, eliminate manual processes, lower the risk of error, and facilitate real-time collaboration among staff, administrators and students. These systems typically include (although not limited to) a Student Information Systems (SIS), online student platforms, Learning Management Systems (LMS), communication platforms and analytics and reporting tools.

While acknowledging the diversity in the South African context, budgetary constraints and access to relevant systems, HEIs are encouraged, where possible, to develop processes that allow the integration of disparate administrative functions such as admissions management, data management, student information systems (SIS), learning management systems (LMS), financial aid processing, scheduling tools, and more. Integrated administrative processes and systems provide a holistic view of institutional data while ensuring accuracy, reducing redundancy and improving communication between stakeholders. Although there are endless administrative systems and tools available to HEIs, HEIs are encouraged to understand their required administrative tasks and critically select processes, systems and tools to support the efficiency and effectiveness of these tasks.

Implementing integrated systems offers benefits for streamlining higher education administration. These include enhanced efficiencies, improved data accuracy, seamless collaboration, streamlined workflows and enhanced student experience. Integrated systems and processes improve engagement with the student community by providing effective communication channels and a user-centric approach to administration.

To effectively streamline student administration, the integrated processes and systems within HEI are advised to encompass the following key features:

- **Centralised Data Management**

An integrated system should provide a centralised database that consolidates data from various departments into one secure location. This centralised database allows authorized users to access accurate, relevant data in real-time, making informed decisions based on up-to-date information.

- **Customisable Dashboards and Reporting Tools**

Integrated systems should offer customisable dashboards that allow administrators to visualise key metrics. Dashboards can be configured to meet the unique needs of different stakeholders within the institution.

Reporting tools enable users to generate comprehensive reports on enrolment trends, academic performance, data analytics, budgets and other aspects of administration.

- **Seamless Integration with Existing Systems**

Integrated systems should be capable of integrating with existing software applications and databases commonly used in higher education, such as student information systems (SIS), learning management systems, financial management software, and more. This integration ensures data consistency and avoids duplication of effort.

- **Mobile Accessibility**

In today's mobile-centric world, it is crucial for integrated systems to offer mobile accessibility. Students, faculty members, and administrators should be able to access the platform from their smartphones or tablets, wherever they happen to be, enabling them to stay connected and perform essential tasks on the go.

- **Scalability and Flexibility**

Integrated systems need to be scalable and flexible enough to accommodate the changing needs of an institution. They should be able to adapt to evolving technologies, regulatory requirements, growth in student population, and other factors without compromising performance or functionality.

Overall, student administrative systems and tools play a pivotal role in enhancing the efficiency, accuracy and accessibility of administrative processes and related information within HEIs, contributing to the overall success of students and the effective management of resources.

Higher Education Institutions are encouraged to critically self-reflect on the following questions:

1. How streamlined and integrated are your institution's administrative systems?
    a. Does your institution have a bespoke or off-the-shelf student administrative system? How fit for purpose is the system?
    b. How often is the administrative technology infrastructure updated or upgraded?
    c. How many systems do your administration teams have to access to track the data of the student lifecycle, and how integrated are the systems?
    d. What technical support is in place to support your administrative systems?
    e. How effective and efficient are the administrative systems used to track the administrative requirements over the student life cycle?
    f. What key functionalities does the administrative system offer for student enrolment and academic record management?
    g. Are there seamless data flows (integration) between the administrative, academic, finance and support services systems of the institution?
    h. In which cases does manual intervention become necessary, and why?
2. How accessible are your institution's administrative systems?
    a. What accessibility features are in place to ensure inclusivity for all users?
    b. To what extent are your administrative systems accessible "off-campus" (for example to avoid work interruptions) and what is the security around this?
3. What mechanisms are in place to ensure continued training and development for all staff using the various administrative systems?
4. How do you ensure continued feedback from staff on the effectiveness of systems and identified areas of improvement?
5. What measures are in place to ensure the accuracy, safety and security of student data and records?
    a. How does the institution ensure compliance with relevant data protection laws and educational regulations?
    b. What measures are in place to ensure data recovery and system continuity in case of a system failure or other disruptions (to include recovery time as well)?
    c. Is there a documented and tested disaster recovery plan in place?
    d. What measures are in place to ensure the security and privacy of student data within the system?
    e. How is sensitive information such as grades and personal details protected from unauthorised access?
6. What reporting tools are available within the system for monitoring student progress, enrolment trends and other relevant metrics?
    a. How easily can custom reports be generated to meet specific institutional

reporting requirements and inform decision-making?

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 *Institutional Identity and Agency* will be in place for 7 years.

7. References

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Addendum A: National Policies and Frameworks

The following national policies and frameworks inform student administration practice in South Africa:

a. Criteria for Programme Accreditation (2004, 2012), Council on Higher Education, to be replaced by the new QAF HEPS.
b. Directives for Certification National Certificate (Vocational) Levels 2 - 4, 2014.
c. Directives for Certification National Senior Certificate, 2018.
d. Immigration Act No.13 of 2002.
e. Immigration Regulations, 2014.
f. Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programmes for Holders of the Senior Certificate (Amended) and the Revocation of the Designated List of Subjects, 2018.
g. Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programmes requiring a National Certificate (Vocational) at Level 4 of the National Qualifications Framework, 2018.
h. Minimum Admission Requirements for Higher Certificate, Diploma and Bachelor's Degree Programmes requiring a National Senior Certificate (NSC), 2008.
i. National Policy and Criteria for the Implementation of RPL, 2019.
j. National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008.
k. Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework Policy, 2014.
l. Policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in higher education, 2016.
m. Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer on the National Qualifications Framework 2014.
n. Policy on Minimum Requirements for Programmes Leading to Qualifications in Higher Education for Early Childhood Development Educators, 2017.
o. Protection of Personal Information Act, 2013 (POPIA)
p. Publication of the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-framework and Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework of the National Qualifications Framework, 2013.
q. Quality Assurance Framework, 2021. Council on Higher Education.
r. Recognition of the National Certificate (Vocational) Level 4 by public HEIs for access into programmes offered by higher education institutions. DHET, USAf and UMALUSI, Joint communique 1 of 2016
s. Regulations for the Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions, 2016.
t. Requirements and Conditions for Matriculation Endorsement and Issuing of Certificates of Exemption for Admission to Bachelor's Degree Studies13, 2008.
u. Revised Policy on the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ), 2015.

v. Revocation of the Designated List of Subjects for the National Senior Certificate, 2018.
w. The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework, 2012. Council on Higher Education.
x. The SA Constitution.
y. White Paper on Post-School Education and Training, 2013.

Appendix B: Glossary

Admissions: The assessing and processing of enrolment applications in terms of eligibility criteria.

Re-enrolment: A person who re-registers or re-enrols at a HEI for a specific learning programme or qualification.

Student Support Services or Student Affairs (academic support, student counselling, career services): The department or division of services and support for student success at an HEI.

Good practice: The formulation of key process steps and/or events (strategies and tactics) and sub-steps in an organized, structured and chronological order as they occur in practice. The description of the events is clear and simple to understand by all levels of staff working in the particular function. Defined and formulated 'good practice' must adhere to the following requirements: It must set benchmarks that institutions strive to accomplish. It is about implemented practices that work rather than theoretical models and prescribed text. It is about the leading practice that best works for a particular individual process rather than an overall performance at one institution. It is dynamic and must be reviewed from time to time to incorporate the latest implemented 'best practices'. Note: The 'good practice' defined in this HEPS serves as a guideline to institutions, but there will always be some institutions that deviate from these guidelines for justifiable reasons.

Student Administration: The HEI entity and function responsible for managing a broad range of functions, often supported by complex management information systems through the student life cycle.

Stakeholders: The broad term refers to prospective and registered students of the institution and external parties such as government organizations, student sponsor organizations or employers, parents, service providers, support staff, faculty and alumni etc.

Student Systems (Enrolment, student record management, course registrations): The entity and function of student administration in higher education use different systems to manage the various aspects of the institution.

Student life cycle:

The student life cycle is a student's journey at a higher education institution, from initial interest to alum engagement. This journey may include the following stages: pre-enrolment, admissions, enrolment and orientation, academic progression, experiential learning, student support, financial aid and student finance, student life and engagement, graduation and certification and alum engagement. The following institutional functions may participate in the student life cycle: admissions, recruitment, academic advising, registrar, finance and financial aid, student affairs, faculty, experiential learning, counselling and health services, institutional research, career services, and alum relations. The following processes may form part of the student life cycle:

i. Pre-enrolment: recruitment, marketing, information sessions, campus tours, application inquiry and guidance, application submissions, pre-admission counselling, and pre-enrolment communication.
ii. Admissions: application review, admission decision, communication with admitted students, deferral or waitlisting, credit accumulation and transfer, recognition of prior learning, and pre-enrolment assessments.
iii. Enrolment and orientation: enrolment confirmation, module registration, financial aid and tuition payment, housing assignments, orientation planning and implementation, student ID and access cards, technology and systems access, health and immunization documentation, and introduction to campus physical and human resources.
iv. Academic progression: coursework and class attendance, academic advising, experiential learning, module registration and scheduling, formative and summative assessments, academic progress monitoring, academic interventions, grade reporting, research and research projects, supervision, academic awards and recognition, academic integrity and plagiarism management, and exchange programmes.
v. Experiential learning: management of simulated learning, work-directed theoretical learning, problem-based learning, project-based learning and workplace-based learning.
vi. Student support: academic advising, counselling services, career services, tutoring and learning support, career development services, financial aid support, disability support services, health and wellness programmes, diversity and inclusion initiatives, student engagement programmes and activities, legal and advocacy services, and housing and residential life services.
vii. Financial aid and student finance: financial aid applications, income assessment, government financial aid programmes, institutional scholarships and bursaries, external scholarships and bursaries, loan programmes, financial counselling and advice, fee payment plans, debt management and repayment, appeals processes, and reporting and compliance.
viii. Student life and engagement: orientation programmes, clubs and society management, events and activities management, student representative council management, residential life programmes, sports and recreation programmes, cultural and arts initiatives, leadership development programmes, community service and volunteerism, student publications and student media initiatives, e.g., a campus radio station.
ix. Graduation and certification: Programme audit for completion, application for graduation, final summative assessments, clearance for graduation, verification of academic records, approval by governance structures, graduation ceremony, and issuance of certificates and transcripts.

x. Alumni engagement: alumni registration, communication channels, alumni events, alumni chapters and associations, professional development opportunities, alumni rewards and recognition, and online platforms and communities.