COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Title: Higher Education Practice Standard for

Learning, Teaching and Assessment

Long Form: Higher Education Practice Standard *for Transformative Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Programme Management and Provisioning*

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1. Preamble for the HEPS on *Learning, Teaching and Assessment*

HEIs recognise their role in promoting social justice and economic empowerment and the importance of addressing the needs of the society in order to improve the quality of life and environmental sustainability. The HEPS on *Transformative Learning, Teaching and Assessment, Programme Management and Provisioning* positions HEIs to be socially responsive and leverage student success. The HEPS consists of components that are all central in any education system, including the South African higher education system – learning, teaching and assessment. These components not only determine the quality of graduates of an institution but also define the credibility of an institution. The HEPS acknowledges the importance of carefully planned learning and teaching approaches and processes that maximise learning amongst teachers and students alike and puts assessment as an integral part of learning and teaching processes.

The notion of teaching in higher education departs significantly from traditional lecturing. It involves all forms of planned mediation of learning that occurs on and off campus using different types of communication media that are most suitable for students. Thus, consideration is given to the varied nature of students in an institution and/or programme and the wide range of contexts in which learning takes place. Learning, teaching and assessment policies of an institution recognise that a one-size-fits all approach does not auger well for student success. Universities that place students at the centre of their work are characterised by a pedagogy of care and are underpinned by a strong social justice

agenda. Socio-economic dynamics and diversity in South Africa require HEIs not only to broaden access to higher education but also to enrich learning experiences and maximise learning outcomes. Responding to diversity and rising expectations for higher education necessitates a fundamental shift in the provision of learning, teaching and assessment opportunities; and necessitates a more learning-centred approach that embraces flexible learning paths, and recognizes competencies acquired outside formal curricula. Teaching approaches that recognise diversity, that put the student at the centre, and that draw on the affordances of available technologies are prioritised by both staff and students irrespective of the mode of provision. Learning and teaching are perceived as two sides of the same coin and both students and academics take full responsibility for the two activities. The teaching role is often more fully embodied in a team than in an individual.

A key component of learning and teaching is assessment. Institutional policy and practice explicitly acknowledge the dual role assessment plays as a learning strategy on the one hand and as a method of establishing what students master out of their learning experiences on the other hand. The institution has appropriate mechanisms in place for managing **assessment of** and **assessment for** learning. HEIs should ensure that sufficient capacity is developed to manage assessment systems that are valid, reliable and credible.

The missions, modes of education provision, and modes of cooperation of HEIs, such as transformation, Africanization, digital learning, and the adoption of contemporary modes of delivery, become more diverse. Quality assurance plays a crucial role in assisting the enhancement and improvement of learning, teaching and assessment in higher education institutions. It also facilitates adaptation to change while also ensuring that the qualifications attained by students, their experiences in higher education and in society in general remain at the forefront of institutional identities and missions.

A primary objective of the Higher Education Practice Standard for *Learning, Teaching, and Assessment* is to promote a shared understanding amongst both public and private HEIs of what quality learning, teaching and assessment across public and private HEIs entails. This standard plays a significant role in the development of national and institutional quality assurance systems. Engagement with quality assurance processes, internally and externally enables HEIs to demonstrate quality and increase transparency, thereby contributing to the development of mutual trust and improved recognition of their qualifications, programmes, and other offerings.

Five principles of the LTA Practice Standard

The Higher Education Practice Standard on Learning, Teaching, and Assessment, Programme Management and Provisioning offers five key principles. The principles are not prescriptive, instead enable institutions to engage critically, in a generative manner to improve practice in the area. The five principles cut across all the components of the HEP, namely teaching, learning, assessment and Programme Management and Provisioning. These principles are foregrounded to support HEIs critically reflect on the transformative

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approaches to learning, teaching, and assessment that is responsive, contextually relevant, and forward-looking in terms of enhancing improvement in the performance of the national higher education sector. The first principle underlines the importance of drawing on the philosophical/epistemological underpinnings of an institution that shape its transformative practices and responsiveness to the diverse needs of students who operate in a fast changing social and economic environment. This principle acknowledges the need to take into account the diversity of students in the planning and implementation of learning, teaching, and assessment activities of an institution, and the ever-changing higher education environment. The second principle acknowledges that an institution's learning, teaching and assessment activities should have student success as the main goal. If the learning, teaching and assessment practices of an institution do not promote student success, then they are clearly not fit for purpose. The third principle emphasises collaborative effort in leveraging student success in an institution and values inclusivity and co-creation in improving learning, teaching, and assessment on a continuous basis. The fourth principle underscores the role of assessment processes in promoting teaching and learning, and in evaluating the extent to which planned learning outcomes are achieved. Given the central role assessment plays in promoting learning, the theme acknowledges the pre-eminence of the validity, reliability and credibility of assessment in higher education. The fifth principle acknowledges the increasing role technology plays in enhancing the quality of learning, teaching and assessment in higher education. The prevalent use of technology on the market and in society in general makes it compelling for higher education institutions to integrate technology in a meaningful way, including in the generation, acquisition and dissemination of knowledge.

Together, the following five guiding principles of this HEPS form the core of university education and help an institution enact its agreed-on identity and meet its vision, mission and strategic intent.

- **LTA principle #1:** Transformative Learning, Teaching and Assessment is reflected in the philosophical underpinnings, identity, beliefs, values and intentions of the HEI as well as in its learning spaces and institutional identity and culture. It also reflects that the HEI is responsive to the local, national, and international context of students and their communities.
- **LTA principle #2:** Learning, Teaching and Assessment promote student access, success and support student development throughout the academic journey and beyond.
- **LTA principle #3:** The quality of the learning, teaching and assessment experience is a shared responsibility that is based on the principle of learning centredness, which promotes inclusivity, collaboration, and co-creation of knowledge with a diversity of stakeholders, including academics, students, government, industry, and communities.
- **LTA principle #4:** The institution values assessment as a mechanism to measure student progress, enhance learning and teaching towards achieving learning outcomes.

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Assessment is implemented and managed in a way that is credible, valid, reliable and rigorous across all its delivery modes.

- **LTA principle #5**: There is appropriate use of technology to improve the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. The institution invests in updating its technology infrastructure for the benefit of students and staff. The HEI adapts its learning, teaching and assessment approaches in such a way that technology is used effectively and appropriately. Institutions must explore the responsible use of AI tools, in line with their identity, mission, goals and values, and paying due regard to their legal framework and the broader consequences for and impacts on society, culture and the economy. This is in order to advance transformation by closing digital divides, expanding access, and embedding culturally relevant pedagogies.

2. Rationale for HEPS on *Learning, Teaching and Assessment*

The Higher Education Practice Standard on *Learning, Teaching, and Assessment* is developed to set a common framework for quality assurance systems for learning, teaching and assessment across HEIs. It enables the assurance and improvement of quality of higher education and supports mutual trust, thus facilitating recognition and mobility within and across institutions. It provides information and guidelines on what quality learning, teaching and assessment entails in higher education.

The HEPS on *Learning, Teaching, and Assessment* promotes the development and implementation of a flexible, future-oriented quality assurance system that is responsive to the national planning and policy context, a transforming and diverse higher education sector, and complex workplace requirement. It seeks to achieve this objective by promoting reflexive and flexible practices, building communities of practice within and between higher education institutions (HEIs), fostering innovation, cultivating institutional investigative capacity, leading and implementing educational change, and developing academic leadership in relation to flexible curricula and pedagogy and the institutional functions that support these. The HEPS on *Learning, Teaching and Assessment* seeks to make institutions adaptable to different modes of delivery, to different student profiles and to unanticipated challenges that impact negatively on the academic project of institutions (like COVID-19 and #FeesMustFall).

The purpose of the HEPS on *Learning, Teaching, and Assessment* is to enhance the quality of higher education by encouraging institutional innovation and responsiveness to national and international trends in the interest of fostering a sustainable and equitable society.

The HEPS on *Learning, Teaching, and Assessment* seeks to leverage synergies between the CHE and HEIs for collaboration to develop an integrated view of an institution's quality assurance performance, which the CHE will use as the basis for its differentiated engagement with institutions. Such participation could pertain to an institution's capacity development initiatives and lines of inquiry for carrying out its institutional review, qualification accreditation, and national review responsibilities.

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The HEPS on Learning, Teaching and Assessment should be read in conjunction with the HEPS on *Programme Processes, Experiential Learning*, and *Engaged Institutions*.

3. The HEPS Statement on *Learning, Teaching and Assessment*

HEIs should reflect on learning, teaching and assessment, programme management and provisioning practices as aligned to an underpinning philosophy and that are transformative, socially responsive and promoting equitable access for success in a learning environment. HEIs should consider and critically reflect on institutional identity, values and principles and the impact this has on the learning journey, how this may foster a culture of participation, reflexivity, collaboration, co-creation, and the acquisition and sharing of knowledges for sustainable futures. HEIs commit to quality programme management and provisioning, through stakeholder engagement, capacity development and appropriate resources across all modes of provision.

4. Guidelines for the HEPS on *Learning, Teaching and Assessment*

As already indicated, the 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.

The following guiding open-ended questions provide guidelines for planning and design; stakeholder engagement; communication; transformation; leadership; knowledge; resource management; data and information management:

Learning Teaching, Assessment, Programme Management and Provisioning	
Institutional philosophy and systems	How has learning, teaching, assessment, programme management and provisioning embodied the HEI's statement of intent, such as vision and mission statements?
	How are the philosophical underpinnings, beliefs, values and intentions of the HEI made visible and accessible in learning, teaching and assessment approaches, programme management and provisioning?

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	How has philosophical underpinnings, beliefs, values and intentions impacted on programme management and provisioning (mode/s of provision, e.g., contact, blended, hybrid, hyflex and online learning
	Does the institution have a clear policy on its learning, teaching and assessment strategy and how does it ensure that the policy is consistently implemented across all sites of delivery and programmes?
	What types of accommodations have been made to promote parity of provision amongst different modes and on different sites of provision in learning, teaching and assessment?
	In which way is learning, teaching and assessment; programme management and provisioning student-centred to create opportunity for equitable outcomes for all students for all forms of delivery?
	To what extent do learning and teaching (physical and online) spaces reflect institutional culture?
	How has the institution responded to local, national, and international context of students and their communities?
	In which way does learning, teaching and assessment, programme management and provisioning promote student access, success?
	What student development support systems are in place throughout the academic journey and beyond for all forms of delivery?
	How has the institution managed the complexity of dealing with programmes offered in multiple ways (for example, full-time/part-time, contact/online/blended)?
	How has the institution defined authentic learning, teaching and assessment practices in programmes across various modes of delivery? What does this look like?
	How does the institutional vision and mission drive change in the learning teaching and assessment culture, policies and practices through the use of ICTs?
	How does the institution provide support to students with varies technological, data, network and devices needs as well as epistemological and digital skills.
	Who would contribute to strengthening the systems within this standard as it relates to learning, teaching, assessment, programme management and provisioning?

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Internal and External Stakeholder Relations in learning, teaching and assessment	Who are the stakeholders (internal and external), identified by the institution that would be impacted by learning, teaching, assessment, programme management and provisioning
	Which mechanisms are in place to engage with the identified stakeholders in conversations related to learning, teaching and assessment? How are they engaged in conversation and at which stage? How often do such conversations take place?
	What systems and support structures are available that attend to the diversity of student needs to enhance the student experience?
	What initiatives are in place to address the needs of diverse learners in changing technological contexts?
	In which ways and to what extent does the institution contribute toward social, cognitive and linguistic justice to promote transformation through its learning, teaching and assessment activities?
	How does the institution support learning teaching and assessment practices that is socially just, recognizing diversity of staff and students?
	In which ways does the institution contribute toward a sustainable equitable society through learning, teaching, assessment, programme management and provisioning?
	How would a reflexive-generative approach continuously engage relevant stakeholders to facilitate continuous improvement in learning, teaching and assessment?
	Where external stakeholders are involved in the learning, teaching and assessment processes of an institution, are their roles clearly defined and how does the institution ensure these roles are met to avoid disadvantaging students?
Knowledge management	Which systems and or structures are in place for broader stakeholder engagement in knowledge generation and sharing for a social responsive, and transformative learning, teaching and assessment (such as student feedback, peer observation self-reflection)?
	Which levels of leadership are included in the leaders clear about and can they evaluate and find ways to improve the knowledge, skills and expertise required of those involved in programme development, management and provisioning to enable the provision of a high-quality learning environment for all students?
	Which legislation, national policies has impacted on learning teaching, assessment, programme management and provisioning?

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	In which way does advisory bodies, professional bodies, industry and professional council's impact on knowledge creation? How are these external stakeholders included in learning, teaching and assessment practices?
	How have institutions integrated workplace skills in learning teaching and assessment which enables transferability of these skills to improve employment?
	In which ways does the institution promote and support the scholarship of learning and teaching to contribute to new knowledge? How are stakeholders such as student, industry and community included in the practice?
Capital	In which ways does the institution recognise the social and cultural capital of staff, students, community and industry to make a contribution in learning, teaching and assessment?
	How are resources allocated to transformative learning, teaching and assessment, including human resources, infrastructure and capital?
	To what extent do institutional structures, systems and processes for resources development (including staff professional development), allocation and management across all areas of operations such as faculty, schools and departments foster quality programme development, management, delivery and provisioning to promote knowledge, student and teacher development?
	Which systems are in place that support resources development in learning and teaching?
	Are sufficient human and financial resources deployed towards the learning, teaching and assessment activities of an institution?
	How is staff supported to be able to perform their teaching and assessment activities effectively? Is there a system of monitoring and evaluating staff performance in this domain?
	To what extent are opportunities created within the institution to develop social and cultural capital?
	What are the challenges, if any, experienced in the area of other capitals, such as financial and infrastructural to support learning teaching, assessment, programme management and provisioning?
	How has the institution been resourced, i.e. physical infrastructure, ICT infrastructure in terms of various programme provisioning?

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	How can a data-driven approach be used to ensure that adequate human resources are allocated to learning, teaching and assessment?
Governance and leadership and management	What policies, strategic and operational/implementation plans are in place to guide socially responsive, and transformative learning, teaching and assessment programme management and provisioning?
	How has institutional policies, strategic and operational plans guided learning and teaching pedagogies and practices? How is this monitored and evaluated?
	How has institutional policies, strategic and operational plans guided internal and external assessment? How is this monitored and evaluated?
	How has institutional policies, strategic and operational plans guided programme management, and provisioning (modes of provision) to promote knowledge, student and teacher development?
	Who are involved in the governance processes and structures that monitor and evaluate authentic learning, teaching and assessment practices in programmes across various modes of delivery?
	Which stakeholders are engaged in the development of quality guidelines for learning teaching and assessment and what would this entail (e.g. pedagogical and assessment guidelines)?
	How has internal and external quality assurance structures supported learning teaching and assessment at the institution?
	How has internal and external quality assurance structures supported programme management and provisioning?
	Which governance structures have oversight over the alignment between support the alignment between policies and practice is ensured. Focused attention needs to be paid to what practices are implemented to align practice (assessment practice, teaching and learning practice, and pedagogies)
	What governance, management and operational (academic, residential, student affairs, etc.) structures does the institution have across all areas of operations such as faculty, schools and departments for quality programme development, management, delivery and provisioning to promote knowledge, student and teacher development?
	To what extent does the institution utilize broader stakeholder engagement quality programme development, management, delivery and provisioning to promote knowledge, student and teacher development?

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	Who ensures that institutional policies are adhered to on relation to assessment design across the various delivery modes?
	In which ways does leadership actively support the realisation of quality online, blended, hybrid, hyflex education?
	In which ways has the use of ICTs improved the quality of learning, teaching and assessment. To what extent has the institution invested in updating its technology infrastructure for the benefit of students and staff. The "HEI adapts its learning, teaching and assessment approaches in such a way that technology is used effectively
Data and Information Management	Who is included in the data collection on learning teaching and assessment?
	Who is included in the data collection on programme management and provisioning?
	What types and forms data is collected, processed and utilized for decision-making in learning, teaching and assessment, programme management and provisioning?
	How is this data being utilised to ensure continuous improvement of transformative learning, teaching practices?
	How is the data collected used to support and promote student access for success through equitable, epistemic, and infrastructural access to learning and teaching resources that support student development
	How does the institution ensure that data related to learning, teaching and assessment is collected and used ethically in adherence to legislation and policy?
	To what extent does the institution collect, process and utilize data for decision-making to foster quality programme development, management, delivery and provisioning to promote knowledge, student and teacher development?
	What measures are in place to strengthen capacity to work with data in the institution?

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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 *Learning, Teaching and Assessment* will be in place for the first iteration of the QAF, for 7 years.

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7. References

This HEPS is guided by the following legislation and frameworks:

Higher Education Act (Act No 101 of 1997, as amended)

National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No 67 of 2008, as amended)

National Plan for the Post School Education and Training (NPPSET), 2019

Articulation Policy for the Post-School Education and Training System in South Africa, 2017

White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, 2013

National Development Plan, 2012

National Plan for Higher Education, 2001

Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997

The Language Policy Framework for Public Higher Education Institutions

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