COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Title: Higher Education Practice Standard for

Transitions into Higher Education (HE)

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1. Preamble for the HEPS on *Transitions into Higher Education*

A main priority of standards of higher education institutions (HEIs) in South Africa should be transformation, which should inform the institutions' visions, missions, and goals. Higher education (HE) is a critical sector to develop high level skills and knowledge to contribute to sustainable economic growth and development in our country. It is also a key vehicle for redressing inequalities, poverty alleviation and unemployment. Many aspirant students continue to experience barriers to entering higher education. (https://pmg.org.za/committee-meeting/12495/).

This Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) provides a framework for engaging with transformative transitioning into higher education that will promote access for success as outlined below. Transitions are a key site for transformation, ensuring that structural barriers to access, progression, and employability are dismantled, and that students from historically excluded groups receive targeted support.

The HEPS for *Transitions into Higher Education* is grounded in a growing body of research on global developments with regard to patterns of learning pathways and flexibility of modes of higher education and training provision. It also takes account of key dimensions of the South African context.

High levels of inequality, poverty and low intergenerational mobility continue to characterise our society. Poverty is consistently highest among black South Africans. It is generally accepted that higher education yields private and public benefits. Private benefits accrue

to individuals in the form of employment or income, or internal qualities and public benefits accrue via contributions of individual graduates to government, industry and society more broadly. Expanding access and diversifying education and training provision, as well as improving its quality and responsiveness to societal needs, are key policy objectives of the Post-School Education and Training (PSET) system. Attainment of these objectives is challenging as South Africa continues to face an ever-increasing number of people who are not in employment, education or training (NEET), and funding constraints impact on the number of students enrolled in the public universities. In 2019, only 2.5 million students of all age groups were enrolled at PSET institutions, yet 3.3 million youth aged 15–24 years were not in employment or education and training (NEET). According to the Universities South Africa Chief Executive Dr Phethiwe Matutu, the estimated number of spaces available for first-time entrants across public universities in 2023 was 196 324. The 2022 National Senior Certificate cohort had 278 815 bachelor passes and 197 357 diploma passes. This amounts to a possible shortage of 279 846 first time entry places in the public universities. https://www.citizen.co.za/news/south-africa/education/space-at-tertiary-institutions-january-2023/ In 2019 the total number of students in private higher education institutions was 191 504 (https://www.dhet.gov.za/Planning%20Monitoring%20and%20Evaluation%20Coordination/Post-School%20Education%20and%20Training%20Monitor%20-%20Macro-Indicator%20Trends%20-%20March%202021.pdf). It is apparent that the current higher education system is not able to absorb all potentially eligible applicants into higher education.

Whilst black African students comprise over 80 percent of total student enrolment at public universities, and the participation rates of black African students have increased over the past decade, racial inequality continues to plague the PSET system. In 2019 The Gross Enrolment Ratio (GER) for black African students at public universities was 20 percent, while that of white students was about 49 percent. (Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), 2021). Only 6 percent of adults have a degree. Although South Africa's GER improved slightly to 23.9% in 2019 from 22.4% in 2017, its performance in 2019 remained lower than that of countries like Russia (86.4%), Brazil (55.1%), China (53.8%), Algeria (52.6%), Malaysia (43.1%), Mexico (42.8%) and India (28.6%). South Africa fares very poorly in comparison to other middle-income countries, thereby compromising its international economic competitiveness (DHET, 2022).

There are many skilled people in the country who wish they had a higher educational qualification, but were held back by a lack of finances, a fear of how long it may take, or an inadequate matric pass at school. National and institutional policies on the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) are intended to address this. However, most institutions are not geared to determining what prospective applicants' knowledge and skills are worth and whether they could contribute towards a recognised qualification through credit exemption.

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This Standard foregrounds the strategic importance of critical reflection on the profile and size and shape of enrolments in the system and the effectiveness of current strategies to advance access into higher education for the historically disadvantaged sections of our society. It invites institutions to consider strategies (such as the emerging notion of microcredentials) for expanding opportunities for a bigger pool of students who wish to upgrade their knowledge and skills through transitioning into higher education.

2. Rationale for the HEPS on *Transitions into Higher Education*

Over the years HEIs' admissions policies and systems have been geared towards 'traditional' applicant pools, resulting in the exclusion of prospective applicants coming from different educational, social and economic backgrounds. Those who have been deprived of access to higher education have largely been victims of educational and other disparities, misaligned institutional policies with national transformation policies, and policy gaps regarding the admissions of applicants wishing to transition into higher education through non-traditional routes, and other barriers. Thus, transformation needs to be the overarching Dimension in guiding planning for the future to advance social justice.

The HEPS on *Transitions into Higher Education* seeks to advance social justice through:

a) Providing a framework for institutions to re-conceptualise transitions into higher education.

b) Challenging institutions to think about ways in which they can enable a broader range of potential transitioners beyond young school leavers to transition into higher education via different routes and at different points in their lives.

c) Encouraging reflections by institutions on the extent to which they are creating an enabling environment through the provision of enabling policies, administrative systems and procedures and resources to support students through their applications and their transitions into higher education.

d) Stimulating thinking about how institutions, staff and student agency can be informed of changes in the policy environment related to transitions and can be empowered to identify and address barriers to transitions.

e) Stimulating critical reflection on the factors that contribute to epistemic exclusion and success of vulnerable students as they transition into higher education.

f) Inviting institutions to think about how to provide a mix of developmental and regular curriculum offerings, designed and offered by collaborative teams of staff working in close partnership to enable transitions into higher education.

2.1 Legislative and policy requirements

The National Plan for Post-School Education and Training (NPPSET) 2019 – 2030 represents an ambitious roadmap to create and build a PSET system from a disparate range of poorly coordinated and articulated institutions. The aim is to build a highly coherent, integrated,

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well-coordinated and articulated PSET system that enables expanded access to post-school education and training opportunities and enhanced responsiveness to societal needs. The regulatory environment, including national legislation, regulations and policies, and institutional policies and procedures, should enable the attainment of these transformation goals for HE.

The policy environment is in a state of flux due to inconsistencies between various policy instruments of key national bodies, namely the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), the Council on Higher Education (CHE), the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) and the changing national and global environment. The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) is itself the subject of review and is soon to be gazette.

The national legislation and policies of the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, and the policies of the South African Qualifications Authority, the Council on Higher Education and the Quality Council on Trades and Occupations that are particularly pertinent to the HEPS on transitions into HE are those that relate to minimum admissions requirements for access into HE, the recognition of different forms of learning, allocation of credits, articulation, mobility of students (locally and internationally); and those that refer to the creation of an enabling environment for students e.g. financial support for students in public universities, the Language Policy, or access programmes e.g. Extended Curriculum Programmes. Information on the relationships between the three Qualification Sub-Frameworks, namely, the Higher Education Qualifications Sub Framework (HEQSF), the General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF) is also important.

There are different implications, in some instances, for public and private institutions. For example, public universities are required to submit enrolment plans and plans related to the implementation of RPL and the Language Policy to the Department of Higher Education and Training, but private higher education institutions are not. However, all higher education institutions should be guided by the normative values enshrined in the Constitution, and the purposes of HE outlined in the Education White Paper 3. The Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) states that the Constitution aims to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, social justice and fundamental human rights. The Education White Paper 3: The Transformation of Higher Education (1997), articulates purposes for HE in South Africa which enjoin HEIs to advance equity in the society through expanding opportunities for access to people from disadvantaged communities (Department of Education, 1997, p. 4).

Whilst the notion of a single, integrated qualifications framework, comprising three sub-frameworks, is intended to enable mobility within and across sub-frameworks, in practice transitioning in and out of learning programmes linked to different qualification types on the three sub-frameworks has been very limited. Deeply rooted divisions among constituent institutions of the Post-School System, and perceptions of HE institutions about the 'target group' for HE, hamper mostly vulnerable South Africans in their efforts to further their learning

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progression. Policy inconsistences and/gaps at national level with their contradictory objectives as well as misaligned institutional policies or policy gaps at institutional level undermine efforts to advance flexibility in relation to learning progression. Institutional policies, procedures and services should reflect how institutions seek to give effect to the constitutional values and advance national policies related to advancing equity, redress and social justice.

It is hoped that the recommended changes in the HEQSF will create a systemic policy environment to enable learning transitions by indicating ways in which the qualifications registered on the 3 sub-frameworks can be linked and recognising the multiple ways in which people seek to enhance their knowledge and skills base. The ability or opportunity to learn gradually while growing the prospect for credits when the time comes, is identified as potentially very important for young people who are Not in Employment or Education and Training (NEETs). An enabling approach will allow for credits to be allocated for informal and non-formal learning, including learning gained through occupational qualifications, TVET qualifications, massive open online courses (MOOCs) and continuing professional development courses.

The revised HEQSF and the National Policy Framework on Internationalisation of 2020 can be used to enable greater flexibility and learning transitions within the region, continent, and the globe. The Policy Framework identifies four principal types of cross-border collaborative qualifications, namely: 1) co-badged qualifications, 2) joint qualifications, 3) consecutive qualifications, and 4) double or dual qualifications. Institutional and national policies and legislation will need to be introduced to give effect to the Policy Framework.

National departments and individual institutions will need to consider their roles in relation to enabling recognition of learning from different countries in the continent and expanding inter-institutional arrangements, such as credit accumulation and transfer (CAT), Memoranda of Understanding (MoU) and/or Memoranda of Agreement (MoA) that enable specific articulation between qualification types across the 3 sub-frameworks and between qualifications and programmes offered by post-school education providers. The DHET will need to introduce regulations relating to the expansion of minimum admissions requirements for entry into, and progression within, HE.

2.2 Scope

This standard provides tools for institutions to interrogate their admissions policies with due cognisance to their missions, and the role of higher education in advancing the goal of building an equitable and sustainable society in South Africa.

2.2.1 Conceptualisation of 'transitions'

The concept of learning pathways has been central to the conceptualisation of many of the policies on education and training in democratic South Africa (Ramsarup, 2017). This concept has been critiqued on the grounds of an over-emphasis on the pathways of individual students who access higher education straight after school and an orientation and

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for ignoring or downplaying the impact of social structure on access. This approach has been viewed as deterministic and linear implying that transitions are uni-directional" (Lotz-Sisitka, Mohanoe, Ramsarup & Olvitt, 2017: 79). Alternative approaches, such as those of Field and Raffe cited in Ramsarup, 2017 by way of contrast, have tended to emphasise that transitions between learning pathways and the world of work are changing continuously at individual and societal levels. Understanding the changes at various levels puts the spotlight on institutional assumptions underpinning how transitions are currently understood and whether they are being managed in ways that take account of the profiles, qualities and needs of the students who apply and eventually register at higher education institutions.

In looking at their management of transitions the guidelines challenge institutions to reflect on whether they have adequately engaged with the changing nature of learning and work transitions and how this may affect different social groups and the constructs of their current and prospective students. Viewing learning pathways from the perspective of multiple transitions challenges institutions to interrogate the extent to which their institutional systems, policies, procedures etc are geared to enabling students and applicants to navigate pathways between different forms of learning and qualification, transition into learning programmes at different points in their lives and transition between education and training institutions and work.

Cooper and Ralphs (2016) have advocated that boundaries between different forms of learning are potentially navigable but that specialised pedagogies [and supportive staff, systems and policies] are needed to enable border crossing (Cooper et al, 2016). Conceptualising access into higher education as 'transitions' into higher education encapsulates the growing complexities in the relationship between learning and work and the multiple points at which, and in which, people may wish to transition into higher education due to political, social and economic factors. It invites institutions to think about learning pathways in the context of the broader society as opportunity structures" (Ramsarup, 2017: 92).

Examples of different types of transitions follow. Students may transition directly from schools or Technical Colleges after meeting the admission requirements through the completion of a National Senior Certificate (NSC), or a National Certificate (Vocational) (NC(V)) at level 4. Older students who have completed a National Adult Senior Certificate (NASCA) may seek to transition into HE for the first time; may seek to transition into HE from non-formal and informal learning through the recognition of prior learning (RPL), completion of non-formal learning programmes (short courses) or recognition of formal learning linked to other sub-frameworks such as the Nated 191 qualifications. Older students who have completed part or all of an undergraduate degree or diploma may wish to return to higher education and transition into different qualification types at undergraduate level. Students may also transition immediately after the completion of an undergraduate degree, or some time thereafter, into postgraduate education. Students may be admitted to qualifications on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (HEQSF) who may have been granted credits towards the qualification by institutions. Students may have completed workplace

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training programmes or learnerships or may wish to transition between work and learning or may wish to move between both concurrently. Prospective students may wish to register for a module at a time or a full qualification. The educational requirements set for professions may change and people may require a degree or postgraduate qualification or may simply wish to have a better opportunity at furthering their career and educational prospects.

The concept of 'transitions into higher education' also covers people transitioning between education and training systems of different countries in the region, the continent more broadly and the rest of the globe.

2.2.2 'Transitioners'

The role of the transitioning individual agent is an important consideration in learning pathway construction. Educational experiences, willingness to learn, lifestyle choices, education/training history, historical advantage and/or disadvantage, and reflexivity at career level as depicted in career stories across the studies, are significant elements of learning pathways. This HEPS foregrounds the agency and social and cultural resources of prospective and registered students (i) to move away from the notion of a decontextualised student, (ii) encourage a focus on recognising the specialised dispositions, qualities and needs of knowers, and (iii) to underscore the need to strengthen the links between structures, policies, systems, qualification design, knowledge, pedagogy and the subjectivities of students (Maton, 2014).

Possible characteristics of prospective and registered students which may affect students'/applicants' agency in navigating transitions and the knowledges they bear include:

a) Language competencies
b) Differently abled
c) Race
d) Gender
e) Socio-economic class
f) Nationality
g) Prior exposure and experience with technology
h) Financial means
i) Educational background
j) Geographical origin and mobility
k) First/subsequent generation student status
l) Previous HE exposure, including exclusion,
m) Employment status
n) The degree to which work and studies are being balanced
o) Access to information/guidance about higher education
p) Mode of study
q) Familial/social/work responsibilities
r) Mental wellbeing.

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2.3 Institutional, staff and student agency

The HEPS provides guidelines to assist institutions with evaluating transition(s) into their institution based on an analysis of the interconnections between the labour market and the social, political and historic factors which have shaped their thinking on transitions – particularly the interconnections between institutional arrangements reflected in systems, policies, procedures and support, and how these can "impact and shape transition processes and outcomes" (Raffe cited in Ramsarup, 2017).

The standard considers what patterns of materiality that support the continued enactment of approaches to the management of transitions into HE in ways that exclude or include such as institutional culture, financial support, admissions policies, accessibility of information about applications, application procedures, composition of admissions committees, staff attitudes and capacity. These all constitute boundary making sites. The Standard guides the unbundling of assumptions underpinning current systems and practices.

The identification of absences is critical for conceptualising transformative praxis (Lotz-Sisitka, *et al*, 2017). For example, absence of access and RPL mechanisms and appropriate levels of support for entering and sustaining learning pathways for students only able to study at night can be identified as a social-material *boundary making* factor. The Standard and Guidelines enable institutions to look beneath the policies and the practices to critically reflect on how pathways have been shaped or not shaped and to imagine other possibilities.

A key challenge in relation to facilitating transitions from different types of education and training institutions, forms of learning and qualification types revolves around the nature of recognition that may be appropriate for distinctive knowledges. Cooper, Ralphs and Harris (2017) argue that it is possible to use particular methodologies to 'translate' learnings from one type of learning, for example, informal learning into the standards or naming conventions of another type of learning, for example, formal qualifications into which applicants hope to transition, or for which they seek to obtain credits. They propose that students can be empowered with tools to 'navigate' the forms of knowledge they may need to develop in order to succeed in the desired qualification and engage in 'dialogue' about the value of the knowledges they have gained through other means. Prospective students can be empowered to document and reflect on their paid and unpaid work experience, volunteer work and training programmes; their life experiences such as life skills, hobbies, leisure activities or parenting; and their prior formal education, non-formal and informal study, online courses and workshops. Determinations can then be made about whether the knowledge and skills gained are comparable to any of the courses taught within the chosen qualification. (https://cornerstone.ac.za/rpl/). This pedagogical approach is one through which cultural and political boundaries/borders can be navigated and transcended to enable articulation between different types of knowledges. Hence, they describe it as a 'border' pedagogy to enable crossing of 'borders' between particular types of qualifications, for example, between TVET and HEQSF qualifications. Similar methodologies can also be explored with a view to reaching agreements or memoranda of understanding

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between institutional types in relation to cognate qualification. Border crossing methodologies can be used to reflect on the historical and ideological underpinnings of dominant knowledge, acknowledge its boundaries, identities, or cultures with which it is associated, the privilege from which it speaks and the motivation of constructing such boundaries. In so doing it can surface discussion about how knowledge can exclude and/or benefit some people and not others (Giroux, 2004).

Admission policies at institutions of higher learning play a pivotal role in ensuring credible and seamless selection processes. Given the inequalities in backgrounds and resources experienced by learners in South Africa, it is inevitable that students at HE level will need to take different routes and times to arrive at the same end. Furthermore, given the different relations between and weightings accorded to theory and practice across the pathways, it is inevitable that graduates will encounter challenges when attempting to move from one pathway or qualification type to another. It is therefore desirable for the standard to provide tools for guiding institutions to think about how to provide a mix of developmental and regular curriculum offerings, designed and offered by collaborative teams of staff working in close partnership. For example, alternative interventions in the form of bridging courses, Higher Certificates and extended programmes can be used to support students who meet admission criteria but may need additional forms of support. Customised courses can also be offered on how to empower staff to work with prospective students who come from diverse educational backgrounds on building a comprehensive and individualized skills profile of formal qualifications and experiential learning. Such skills profiles include a comparative mapping of formal qualifications and experiential learning onto a framework of critical outcomes and occupational competencies associated with different fields of practice and fields of study. The skills profiles seek to reflect a careful mapping and analysis of the knowledge and skills that the candidate has to offer, or a previous different qualification type, with associated evidence in relation to the entry-level capabilities associated with their chosen field of study and career. (https://cornerstone.ac.za/portfolio-development-course-for-access/).

HEIs are not directly involved in the school system; however, collaboration can play a key role in career guidance to facilitate smooth transition into HE. Career guidance helps students to make the correct subject choices relevant to the careers they intend to pursue. HE institutions and schools should explore collaboration measures to offer integrated career guidance to students at the beginning of high school senior phase.

The announcement of free education in 2018 has made a huge impact in helping the poor undergraduate students to access HE through National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS). However, the reality is that public institutions lack the capacity to absorb all matriculants eligible to higher education due to infrastructure limitations. Transitioning into postgraduate studies is a challenge as not all students secure funding (https://www.usaf.ac.za/underfunding-is-a-threat-to-postgraduate-studies/).

Institutions need to consider ways of generating income to enable them to provide financial support for students who are not eligible for state funding.

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Information technology tools are becoming increasingly important to support access to education in ensuring that transitioners are able to use online platforms to gather information relevant to applications and admissions processes. The online platforms should be easily accessible, and information published on institutions' websites should be easily interpreted by prospective students. The online technologies such as Chatbots, Customer Relationship Management systems (CRM) are efficient and accessible to prospective students 24/7 to acquire instant information on admissions processes and ability to track application outcomes. In addition, technology such as Zoom and MS Teams also enable virtual meetings between admissions staff and students.

Institutions need to think about ways in which they can empower staff to develop and implement strategies to enable a broad range of potential transitioners to transition into higher education.

This HEPS should be read alongside the HEPS on *Transitions Through Higher Education, Transitions from Higher Education, Learning Environments, Programme Processes, Modes of Learning and Teaching Provision, Student Administration, Learning, Teaching and Assessment, and Engaged Institutions*, as these collectively ensure that student transitions are supported through inclusive practices, transformative pedagogy, and coherent institutional systems.

3. Statement for the HEPS on *Transitions into Higher Education*

The higher education institution should reflect on its admissions and recruitment policies and strategies in the light of the need to advance social equity and broaden opportunities for more people to transition into higher education.

The higher education institution should use its vision, mission and identity as the basis for reflection on its conceptualisation of prospective transitioners into their institutions, their characteristics and their pathways into and through higher education, with due consideration of relevant regional, national and institutional goals. To remove barriers to learning, the institution should endeavor to gain a comprehensive understanding of the diverse lived realities and knowledges of transitioners, both by analysing data and by engaging in dialogue with relevant stakeholders. Institutional policies, procedures and programmes relating to the application, selection, admission, and onboarding of students into higher education should be drafted, designed and implemented in a manner that deliberately accommodates a diverse range of applicants.

Institutions should indicate how the staff will be empowered to fully implement policies and procedures in the manner intended and how prospective students from different and diverse educational backgrounds can be assisted with applications to transition into higher education.

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4. Guidelines for the HEPS on *Transitions into Higher Education*

Dimension 1: Transitions

Leadership	a) How does the institution's leadership ensure transformative transitioning to the institution to redress inequalities and barriers affecting prospective students?
Institutional identity and strategy	a) How has the institution defined the concept of transitions and what factors informed this conceptualisation? b) How did the institution go about determining the institution specific elements of your policy/policies related to possible multiple transition points into HE? c) How does the institution deal with, or plan to deal with, linguistic and epistemic justice in its approach to enrolment planning?
Stakeholder engagement	a) How does the institution ascertain and take account of changing needs of stakeholders, and changes in the nature of work, in conceptualising and planning for key transition points in the institution? And how do you determine which stakeholders to engage with? b) Has there been any consideration of developing Memoranda of Understanding with other types of institutions to enable a more systemic approach to transitions in particular areas? c) Has the institution experienced any challenges from stakeholders, for example, professional bodies in relation to the institution's approach to managing transitions into higher education? If you have how have you dealt with these/plan to deal with anticipated challenges?

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Institutional systems	a) How have the institutional policies been aligned with the national goal of enabling greater flexibility regarding recognition of different forms of learning and learning transitions between different parts of the education and training system and forms of work and the qualifications offered? b) How is the effective management and tracking of the application and admission processes ensured, so that applicants with different educational backgrounds receive timely and appropriate guidance and advice about applications and ways of transitioning into HE in a way that would facilitate a successful transition? c) How does the institution leverage ICT resources to ensure a smooth and efficient application and admissions process for different kinds of potential transitioners into your institution? d) How does the institution ensure that its staffing levels are adequate to handle the workload introduced by enabling multiple transition points and offering a variety of support for transitioning activities, tailored to the characteristics of the new student cohorts? e) How have financial implications, which include student funding been dealt with?
Sustainable and equitable society	a) The Preamble of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) states that the Constitution aims to heal the divisions of the past and establish a society based on democratic values, multilingualism, social justice, and fundamental human rights. How do/have these values affect(ed) the institution's policies and plans regarding transitions and the size and shape of your educational offerings? b) What measures has the institution put in place to be responsive to changes in the nature of societal education and training needs?
Institutional data	a) What kinds of data sources does the institution use to assist with enrolment planning for the range of offerings in the institution?

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Dimension 2: Transitioners

Demographics	a) How do considerations of equity, diversity and social justice inform the institutional approach to marketing, recruitment and admissions? b) How is the institution preparing for different kinds of potential transitioners with different needs, capacities and knowledges? c) How has the institution recognized and acknowledged the diverse student body in its approach to pedagogy, curriculum design, and modes and flexibility of provision?
Representation	a) How does the institution assess whether your institutional culture and policy speak to and represent diversity in respect of the student profiles? b) How do your policies engage with diverse student backgrounds in the institution? c) How does your institution recognise and embrace diversity among staff and students?
Social justice	a) Are there institutional policies focusing on transformation issues such as gender, language and wellness of students and staff and how are staff and students made aware of these?
Institutional leadership	a) How does leadership ensure appropriate admissions policies to address the needs and demands of regional, continental and other international prospective students?
Institutional systems	a) How is the design of the application and admission procedure customised to align with the unique characteristics and needs of the institution's prospective students? b) How does the institution ensure that different operational departments are aware of their roles and responsibilities to promote smooth operations related to transitioners of HE? c) Are there any plans to evaluate existing policies to ensure alignment of characteristics of student body and staff?

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Institutional data	a) How does the institution use data to steer the improvement of the student experience? b) How does the institution use data to measure impact across the stages of transitioning? c) What data variables are relevant to transitions to HE? d) How does the institution ensure data quality and integrity? e) How does the institution effectively utilise data to streamline transitions? f) How does institution maximize the use of data to identify all transitioners?

Dimension 3: Institutional, staff and student agency

Leadership	**Institutional Planning:** a) How has the leadership at the institution ensured that institutional staff/stakeholders are equipped for changing ways in which applicants may seek to transition into HE? b) How does the institution approach the dissemination and discussions of changes in national legislative and policy environment and assess the capacity of institutional staff to design and implement policies and ways of working in the area of transitions that achieve national objectives?

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Institutional systems	**Policies and procedures:** a) How has the institution ensured that policies and procedures related to transitioning are aligned with national plans and policies as well as global trends in transitions into higher education? b) What has the institution done to ensure process flow/procedure/SOP are developed and communicated to ensure smooth transitioning? c) How are staff recruitment policies and practices addressing the need for an inclusive and diverse workforce that embraces differences in race, ethnicity, language and other unique characteristics of its transitioners? d) How is the design of the application and admission procedure customised to align with the unique characteristics and needs of the institution's prospective students? e) What strategies does the institution have in place or plan to implement to overcome language being a barrier to access to knowledge and information? **Structures:** a) How has the institution implemented an organisational structure and a support infrastructure to aid all stakeholders in the process of managing transitions? **Monitoring and evaluation:** a) How has the institution implemented monitoring and evaluation activities to assess and maintain quality standards in relation to student transitions into your institution? b) How is the effective management and tracking of the application and admission processes ensured, so that applicants receive timely assistance and admission with access to appropriate guidance and advice? **Resourcing:** a) How does the institution assess the effectiveness of its transition programs, so as to allocate the necessary resources to ensure their continued success?

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	IT and data: a) How does the institution leverage ICT resources to ensure a smooth and efficient application and admissions process, as well as to facilitate, track, and monitor the success of students' transition into your institution? b) What data fields are critical to the institution's planning in respect of transitions? And how does the institution use the date to reflect on progress in relation to institutional objectives?
Leadership empowerment	a) How is the leadership creating an enabling environment to promote equity in relation to their student profile? b) How does the institution measure the impact of leadership to promote accountability in steering transformative transitioning into the institution?
Staff empowerment	a) How are staff equipped with the knowledge and skills to implement broadened policies in support of students transitioners with diverse characteristics and needs and different ways of knowing? b) How does the institution strengthen staff members' understanding of their role in the transitioning process? c) How does the institution solicit and incorporate feedback from its staff regarding the challenges encountered in supporting the transition process, and does it take prompt and constructive action, providing regular updates and feedback based on such inputs? d) Are institutions flexible enough for staff to be innovative when conducting their support and academic responsibilities?

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Student empowerment	a) What structured opportunities are provided for mature aged students to review their prior learning, to enable informed decisions about their choices and plans for further study as well as the choices that may need to be made to sustain a programme of study towards a qualification? b) How are students with diverse characteristics and needs empowered to recognise and report on their different knowledges in order to navigate boundaries between their past learning and the desired qualification/course they wish to transition into? c) How does the institution solicit and incorporate feedback from its students regarding the challenges encountered in the transition process, and does it take prompt and constructive action, providing regular updates and feedback based on such inputs?
Institutional support	a) Are there any plans in the institution to ensure the practice of agency and academic freedom among students and staff? b) What kinds of challenges have been experienced by the institution in relation to implementing policies related to the recognition of different forms of knowledge for the purposes of admission?
Social justice and engagement	a) What are institutions doing in embracing the needs of their surrounding communities? b) How are institutions ensuring that the gap between HE and their surrounding communities is not too wide, and that they are contributing to sustainable and equitable society?

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

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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.

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