



Title: Higher Education Practice Standard for
Transitions through Higher Education

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

Transitions into Higher Education (HE) HEPS provides a framework focusing on the promotion of access for success to address the high levels of inequality, poverty and low generational mobility that continues to characterise the South African Higher Education landscape. While *Transitions from HE* HEPS provides a framework focusing on the employability and mobility in industry of graduates upon leaving the South African Higher Education landscape. The Standard on *Transitions through Higher Education* expands on this theme with an emphasis on value for money, and fitness for/of purpose to ensure that students who have successfully entered the HE system are able to navigate their academic journey seamlessly where necessary by articulating within and with different Higher Education institutions. 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."

There is a need to promote a single, coordinated, and integrated National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Post-school Education and Training (PSET) system through which students can seamlessly transition, thus ensuring a successful and integrated learning experience. This process also alludes to the portability of qualifications and programmes within, between and through Higher Education institutions. To address this need a differentiated Higher Education sector necessitates a transformative, contextually relevant student experience to ensure a seamless transition within an institutional framework; within legislation and policy, within the (PSET sector, Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), and National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Transitions through Higher Education are comprehensive and involve creating a flexible, inclusive, and interconnected PSET system. It encompasses both academic support systems and financial considerations for the smooth mobility of students. The HEPS *Transitions through Higher Education* acknowledges the diversity of institutions and encourages the adoption of innovative approaches to ensuring and maintaining learning mobility such as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), CAT, augmented learning, extended curriculum, predictive learner analytics, etc.

The purpose of this Standard is to encourage the growth of a transformative educational environment within South Africa, building upon existing strengths and facilitating harmony between institutional and regulatory frameworks. The Standard aims to facilitate the successful mobility of students by closing the articulation gap within the higher education sector, both internally within institutions and between different types of institutions, to ensure a transparent and open framework that allows for an enhanced student experience throughout their educational journey.

The scope of this HEP will cover aspects related to the refinement of learning pathways and articulation both within and between educational institutions, the governance and operational frameworks required to facilitate such mobility, and the support services that ensure a comprehensive student-centred culture, leading towards a positive and successful academic journey.

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

The need for this Standard encompasses all aspects that contribute towards the successful educational experience of a currently enrolled student, including a transparent and clearly defined learning pathway framework that allows for enhanced student engagement leading towards success. This would include aspects related to learning pathways (articulation, RPL, CAT, Augmented Learning, etc.) both internally and between institutions, through to the pedagogical methodology and delivery aspects.

The Standard has been framed within the Systems Theory, the transitional models of Tinto and Schlossberg's. Therefore, the following dimensions were identified in which to couch the guidelines for the Standard:

1. Effective, Efficient, and Functional Structures, Systems, and Processes;
2. Transparent Articulation Pathways for Personalised and Adaptive Learning;
3. Holistic Student Support for a Positive Student Experience and Learning Journey.

Philosophical Underpinnings

The convergence of Systems Theory, Tinto's Institutional Commitment to Student Success Theory, and Schlossberg's Transition Theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding transitions through South African higher education. Systems Theory underscores the importance of systemic coordination, ensuring the seamless integration of academic, support, and financial elements, aligning with the goals of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). Tinto's theory complements this by emphasising institutional commitment to student success, advocating for a student-centred culture through clear missions, supportive leadership, resource investment, and transformative policies. Simultaneously, Schlossberg's Transition Theory adds dynamism by focusing on the ongoing process of educational transitions, including academic, psychosocial, and financial dimensions.

From an African Philosophical perspective the philosophies of communalism and humanness most closely aligned with the above theories. Communalism refers to sensitivity towards others, and caring for others are all aspects of ubuntu as a philosophy of life (Le Roux, 2000, p. 43). The community, and belonging to a community, is part of the essence of traditional African life. Philosophy of life and Philosophy of Education, thus go together, because a philosophy of life helps to identify the goals and purposes that a particular society holds dear. Humanness is equally very important in African philosophy in the sense of seeing human needs, interests and dignity as fundamental to human existence, and therefore it will also be important in African Philosophy of Education (Letseka, 2000, p. 182).

The resulting cohesive framework addresses the multifaceted aspects of transitions, providing a pathway for South African students to navigate higher education successfully. African Philosophical Perspectives (Communalism and Humanness). Integrating these theories, the comprehensive framework for South African higher education would look like this:

- Educational institutions operate as coordinated systems (Systems Theory), with a commitment to student success at their core (Tinto's Theory).
- These systems are dynamic and responsive to the transitions and individual needs of students (Schlossberg's Theory).
- Underpinning all these is a philosophy that values community, caring, and the dignity of the individual (African Philosophical Perspectives).

Such an integrated approach ensures that higher education in South Africa is not only effective and efficient but also culturally relevant and ethically grounded, promoting both individual success and the well-being of the wider community.

Schlossberg Transition Model:

- Schlossberg's model focuses on individual transitions and how people cope with change. Applying this to higher education, students experience various transitions such as entering HE, changing majors, or graduating.
- The model can be used to identify stressors that students may face during transitions. Also, identify support systems that can help them navigate these transitions successfully.
- Advisors can utilise the model to understand students' reactions to transitions and provide targeted support. Counselling services can also tailor interventions to address specific challenges students face during these transitions.

Tinto's Institutional Commitment to Student Success:

- Tinto's model emphasises the importance of institutional commitment to student success. Higher education institutions can develop and implement retention strategies to support students throughout their academic journey, such as mentorship programs, academic support services, and community-building initiatives.
- Tinto's model helps identify institutional barriers that may hinder student success, such as lack of academic resources, inadequate support services, or poor campus climate. Institutions can then work to address these barriers to enhance student retention and success.

Systems Theory:

- Systems theory encourages a holistic understanding of the higher education environment. It views educational institutions as complex systems with interconnected components. Analysing the system as a whole helps identify how different elements interact and influence student experiences.
- Systems theory suggests that interventions should consider the entire system. Institutions can implement changes at various levels, such as modifying policies, enhancing communication channels, or re-evaluating the curriculum. This ensures a more comprehensive and sustainable impact on student success.

African Philosophical Perspectives (Communalism and Humanness):

- The African philosophies of communalism and humanness provide a cultural and ethical dimension to the integration of these theories.
- Communalism resonates with the idea of systemic coordination and institutional commitment by emphasizing sensitivity and care for others, reflecting the communal

aspect of African life. This perspective supports the notion that education is not just an individual journey but a communal endeavour.

- Humanness aligns with all three theories by placing human needs, interests, and dignity at the forefront. It reinforces the idea that educational systems and transitions should be designed to uphold and enhance human dignity and development.

Integrating the theories:

- Comprehensive Student Support Programs: Combining these theories allows for the development of comprehensive student support programs. These theories address individual transitions using Schlossberg's model, leverage institutional commitment based on Tinto's model, and consider the systemic aspects through systems theory.
- Utilising data-driven approaches to identify trends, assess the effectiveness of interventions, and make informed decisions. This aligns with both Tinto's emphasis on institutional commitment and the systemic perspective of systems theory.

The following three dimensions have been identified for this HEPS:

Structures, Systems, and Processes:

The first dimension within this Standard encompasses all aspects related to the operational and governance policies and procedures of the Higher Education Institution and how these are aligned both internally and externally to relevant governmental policies and legislations. There should be a clear indication of data-informed decision-making processes and transparency when communicating and/or collaborating with various stakeholders; inclusive of systems designed for continuous monitoring, evaluation, and improvement. Evidence of strategies for the continuous professional development of both academic and support staff fall within this category to ensure that administrative processes are conducive towards academic success and a positive student experience.

Personalised and Adaptive Learning Pathways:

The second dimension within this Standard focuses on encouraging the development of adaptive learning pathways and clear articulation routes both internally and between higher educational institutions, thus meeting the need for a more integrated PSET sector that allows for increased student mobility and access for success. The utilisation of technology and collaborative tools is encouraged to aid in personalising the learning journey for individual students' needs. Cognisance is taken of the progression and the transitional experiences of students in their first and subsequent years of study, exploring knowledge translation from introduction, intermediate and advanced through to postgraduate study with the aim of ensuring industry-relevance and post-study employability.

Positive Student Experience and Learning Journey:

The third dimension within these Standard focuses on the Higher Education Institution's ability to contribute towards a positive student experience and learning journey. Aspects related to student diversity and transformation initiatives will be explored, together with how the institution encourages and supports the students' personal growth, academic journey, and sense of belonging through a conducive student-centred culture.

Legislative and Policy Considerations

The following legal framework documents informed this HEPS:

- CHE Policy on Articulation into and within Higher Education
- Distance Higher Education Programmes in a Digital Era: Good Practice Guide
- Higher Education Act, 1997 (Act No. 101 of 1997)
- National Qualifications Framework Act, 2008 (Act No. 67 of 2008)
- Policy for the Provision of Distance Education In South African Universities in the Context of an Integrated Postschool System
- Policy Framework for Internationalisation of Higher Education in South Africa
- Policy on Articulation into and within Higher Education.
- The Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996 (Act No. 108 of 1996)
- White Paper for Post-School Education and Training,

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

3. The HEPS Statement for Transitions through Higher Education

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 higher education institution should be able to reflect on their ability to provide for the successful and seamless mobility of students and portability of programmes and qualifications within, between and through PSET institutions. This is achieved through:

- a) Evidence of effective, efficient and functional structures, systems and processes aligned to policy and supportive of institutional values, creating a conducive learning culture, including collaboration, partnerships and stakeholder engagements.
- b) Clear and transparent learning pathways within, between and through the PSET sector to allow for augmented and personalised learning, inclusive of articulation options.
- c) A structured and functional holistic student support that contributes towards a positive student experience and journey, supported by regular monitoring and evaluation for the identification of potential risk and opportunity factors.

4. Guidelines for the HEPS on *Institutional Identity and Agency*

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.

Dimension 1: Structures, Systems and Processes	
Sub-dimensions:	Guidelines
1. Holistic support services (psychosocial, economic, academic,	a) How are the institutions' systems and processes designed to ensure that students are supported, have a positive journey, and contribute towards student throughput?

Dimension 1: Structures, Systems and Processes	
Sub-dimensions:	Guidelines
career counselling, advising, etc).	b) How can the institution enhance comprehensive student support services to create a positive and supportive learning environment that addresses the diverse needs of students, and assists them in navigating challenges throughout their academic journey? c) What financial support services are available to the students and how do you ensure the eligibility requirements are fair to all? d) How does the institution assess and continuously improve its student support services to effectively meet the evolving needs of students, and what strategies are implemented to integrate feedback from students into the enhancement of these services?
2. Monitoring, evaluation, feedback systems and continuous improvement	a) How can the implementation of comprehensive monitoring, evaluation, and feedback systems specifically enhance the continuous improvement culture in student support departments? b) What targeted methods and strategies does the institution utilize to proactively uncover specific barriers in student support, and how are these methods evaluated for effectiveness? c) Can you detail the process the institution follows to systematically address the challenges identified in student support, ensuring inclusivity and effectiveness for all student demographics? d) How frequently are monitoring and evaluation activities conducted within student-focused departments, and which department is responsible for maintaining these records and insights? e) What specific mechanisms are in place to ensure effective inter-departmental and stakeholder collaboration, and how do these mechanisms

Dimension 1: Structures, Systems and Processes		
Sub-dimensions:	Guidelines	
	contribute to the holistic improvement of student support services?	
3. Alignment to internal and external policies and legislation	a) How do you ensure that the institution's policies are aligned both internally and externally to legislation? b) How are the policies, systems and processes communicated to all relevant staff, students and stakeholders? c) In what ways does the institution actively seek to engage with and incorporate feedback from staff, students, and external stakeholders in the policy-making process, ensuring that policies remain relevant, comprehensive, and effectively implemented?	
4. Transparency and clear communication protocols	a) How does the institution's vision and mission statements shape and direct the policies, systems, and processes? b) Who is responsible for official communications to both internal and external stakeholders, and what is the process for authorisation before release? c) How does the institution ensure that its vision and mission are consistently reflected in the everyday practices and interactions at all levels, and what mechanisms are in place to periodically assess and align these operational activities with the stated vision and mission?	
5. Collaboration partnerships and with stakeholders	a) Who are the institution's internal and external stakeholders? b) What are the roles and responsibilities of the identified stakeholders within the institution?	

Dimension 1: Structures, Systems and Processes	
Sub-dimensions:	Guidelines
	c) How are stakeholders engaged with, and to what extent are their contributions incorporated into internal operational and governance decisions? d) From an administrative perspective how are the engagements with various stakeholders recorded? e) How does the institution evaluate the effectiveness of stakeholder engagement in influencing its policies and operations, and what steps are taken to enhance or modify these engagement strategies to ensure meaningful and productive collaboration?
6. Data-informed decision making	a) How do you ensure integrity and use data to inform decision-making processes within the institution? b) What ways do you think the data could be further enhanced or expanded to improve overall effectiveness and outcomes? c) How can data inform decision-making on student transition through higher education?
7. Continued Professional Learning: Support staff are adequately qualified, and their knowledge and skills are regularly updated	a) How can the institution ensure that its support staff possess the necessary qualifications and actively engage in continued professional development, ensuring their knowledge and skills stay current and relevant to meet evolving challenges and demands? b) How regularly does the institution engage in staff development activities and how do you identify the areas requiring upskilling?

Dimension 2: Personalised and Adaptive Learning Pathways	
Sub-dimensions:	Guidelines
1. Tailoring education experience to individual student needs (adaptive / augmented)	a) How is the mode of provision for a programme(s) tailored to meet the needs of the curriculum and students? b) How have you ensured that all relevant stakeholders (staff and students) know what is involved and expected from them in the particular mode of provision? c) How do you ensure the quality and integrity of a curriculum design is maintained in the event of an augmented delivery to meet student needs?
2. Technology and collaborative tools	a) To what extent has the institution considered and/or implemented technological, the use of artificial intelligence and collaborative tools into the programme designs at the curriculum, various learning needs and delivery levels? b) How are technology, artificial intelligence apps and collaborative tools introduced to the students to ensure a successful journey for diverse students. c) How do you think the integration of AI in higher education has impacted the student's learning experience? d) In what ways could AI be further utilised or improved to enhance their educational journey?
3. Clear and transparent articulation pathways	a) How does the institution communicate the articulation pathways for programmes on offer, inclusive of qualification accreditation details (SAQA ID, NQF Level, Credits, etc.) b) How does the institution engage in national qualification benchmarking during new qualification design or existing qualification review to allow for potential articulation between institutions?

Dimension 2: Personalised and Adaptive Learning Pathways	
Sub-dimensions:	Guidelines
	c) How does the institution engage in international qualification benchmarking with respect to potential credit transfers and academic continuity? d) What are some of the challenges and successes experienced by the institution in the processes of articulation and international benchmarking, and how have these experiences shaped the current practices and policies?
4. Industry, employability relevance	a) How does the institution prepare students for the world of work? b) How does the institution ensure that students are given the opportunity to learn and develop the soft skills to increase their potential for success in the working place, either as elements within curriculum or as supplementary activities? a) How does the institution expose students to the relevant industries? b) How can the institution ensure that the articulation strategies are not only designed by default but are also systemic and deliberate in their approach? c) In what ways can curriculum design teams collaborate with industry groups to create curriculum guidelines that optimize articulation at both programmatic and curricular levels? d) How has the institution balanced systemic articulation, based on policies and legislation, with specific articulation that focuses on practical agreements and individual needs? e) What measures has the institution implemented to ensure the articulation strategies promote redress, equity, social justice, and inclusiveness? f) How has the institution enhanced the flexibility of the education and training system to facilitate learner

Dimension 2: Personalised and Adaptive Learning Pathways	
Sub-dimensions:	Guidelines
	migration across different qualifications and institutions? g) What role does the governance structures play in developing and implementing effective institutional articulation policies? h) What strategies has the institution employed to establish effective inter-institutional partnerships that promote comprehensive articulation? i) How has the institution ensured that the qualifications and articulation agreements clearly define learning pathways and are regularly reviewed for effectiveness? j) What methods has the institution implemented to effectively gather and incorporate student feedback on their articulation experiences?

Dimension 3: Positive Student Experience and Learning Journey	
Sub-dimensions:	Guidelines
1. Student journey, sense of belonging & culture	a) How can the institution foster a student journey that enhances a strong sense of belonging and promotes a supportive culture for diverse learning experiences? b) In what ways does the institution consider the students' self-identity, personal growth, and lived experiences? c) How does the institution acknowledge and respect the diverse identities of its students, including cultural, ethnic, and gender identities?

Dimension 3: Positive Student Experience and Learning Journey	
Sub-dimensions:	Guidelines
2. Diversity and Transformation (equal opportunities)	a) How can the institution ensure that equal opportunities are not just a stated goal but a reality that promotes inclusivity and empowerment across the institution?
3. Student-centered culture	a) How is student-centeredness and lived experience embedded within the institution's identity, agency and vision, mission, and strategic goals? b) How does the student-centred culture address transformation and the needs of a diverse student demographic?

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 the first iteration of the QAF, for 7 years.

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

7. References

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