



QAF MANUAL FOR STANDARD DEVELOPMENT

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CHE	Council on Higher Education, the Council
CD	Capacity Development
CoP's	Communities of Practice
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EQA	External Quality Assurance
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEMIS	Higher Education Information Management System
HEPS	Higher Education Practice Standards
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
QA	Qualification Assurance
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
QS	Qualification Standard
QPCD	Quality Promotion and Capacity Development
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
WIL	Work-Integrated Learning

DEFINITIONS OF KEY TERMS AND CONCEPTS

Accreditation	Accreditation refers to the process of evaluating qualifications and programmes intended for offering by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in accordance with higher education practice standards (HEPS), qualification standards and the criteria for qualification and programme accreditation by the CHE through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC).
Capacity Development	Capacity development refers to a variety of dedicated engagements that the CHE will arrange with the sector, with sub-sectors, as well as with individual institutions to develop the required capacity in the sector and in institutions for the implementation of the QAF, but also for quality assurance, promotion and enhancement more broadly.
Codes of Practice	Codes of practice articulate the expectations for acceptable levels of educational provision and experiences for higher education students and the public. The Codes may provide guidance on how to judge measures of quality. Codes of practice may also be developed for research and community engagement, as well as for support functions such as student administration, student support or continuous professional development. They support the generation of criteria for such judgements but do not in themselves provide specific criteria for such judgements.
Communities of Practice (CoPs)	Communities of Practice Communities of Practice (CoPs) are expert groups of peers representing knowledge fields and disciplines, or professional practices in higher education, and are the preferred origins of standards for the QAF.
Conceptual / contextual relevance	Reference to 'conceptual relevance' and 'contextual relevance' indicates distinguishable but often over-lapping bands of relative importance on a spectrum of qualification purposes, rather than two wholly distinctive categories of purpose. 'Conceptual relevance' refers to knowledge grounded in principles, concepts and theories that characterize a specialized discipline or field of study, which can be relevant to a diverse and changeable range of contexts and claims coherence independent of any specific context. 'Contextual relevance', on the other hand, refers to the relationship between knowledge and its application to a particular context, which is the primary arbiter of the coherence of knowledge with its application. In most cases, contextual relevance is assessed through work-integrated learning, in either simulated or, more usually, actual workplace situations. All higher qualifications need to demonstrate coherence both conceptually and contextually, although in different proportions depending on the purpose and intended outcomes of the qualification. Critical issues are the appropriate ratio between conceptual and contextual relevance, the particular requirements of each, and how they are inter-related.

Contexts and conditions for assessment	<p>Context and conditions for assessment is described as how assessment of the graduate attributes reflects that purpose. These attributes indicate the appropriate blend of conceptual and contextual competence (knowledge, skills and applied competence) required for the qualification to be awarded in a particular field of study or discipline. Where, for example, work-based learning (WIL) is fundamental to the purpose and achievements, this is addressed in the standard, but the standard does not prescribe the actual ratio or sequence of institution-based and work-based learning. Nor does it prescribe the methods by which either form of learning is to be assessed.</p>
Criteria	<p>Criteria 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 are derived from one or more of the following Standards and Guidelines. Criteria are developed specifically for an EQA activity to enable peer evaluators to make quality judgements. Even though Criteria may be based on the same HEPS, we will distinguish between Distinguish between criteria for minimum entry-level criteria for new programmes, qualifications, sites and institutions, and criteria for the external quality reviews of existing programmes, qualifications, sites and institutions.</p>
Credits	<p>Credits are the measure of the contributing volume of learning that counts towards the full volume of learning required for a specified qualification. It is quantified as a contributing number of notional hours of learning required to achieve the learning outcomes specified for a qualification.</p>
Curriculum	<p>The curriculum is a structure that distributes access to knowledge and to knowing by specifying what is taught, who is taught, who teaches, how it is taught and how learning is assessed. The curriculum is therefore politically, socially and culturally constructed.</p> <p>The term curriculum encompasses:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Knowledge, such as the list of subjects, topics and resources included in a course of study. • Ways of knowing, skills, values and practices • Teaching methodologies, including modes of provision. • Assessment practices. <p>All curricula are informed by the nature of the discipline/field, the philosophical beliefs of the designer(s), who the students are, the institution and its identity and the broader context in which the curriculum is enacted. A curriculum encompasses the planned process, the actual implementation of the teaching and the students' experiences of the learning process. It also includes awareness of the 'hidden curriculum', that is, the unwritten, unofficial and often unintended lessons, values and perspectives that a curriculum promotes and enacts.</p>

Differentiation	Differentiation, in the context of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF), refers to institutional functional differences and their differences in respect of identities, missions and quality management maturity and functionality.
Designator	Designator indicates a generic field of study and a it is stated in the qualification nomenclature. A designator meets the generic specifications laid down for the qualification type of which it is a variant. Only degrees have designators.
Discipline	A discipline is a recognised knowledge- or skills-based subject. As used in the Framework, 'discipline' generally refers to a CESM 'second order' category. In some exceptional cases, it may refer to a 'third order' (or, rarely, to a 'fourth order') category.
External Quality Assurance (EQA)	External quality assurance is the means by which an external quality agency or quality council ensures that institutions have Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems in place to manage the quality of their activities and educational provision. It also ensures that the qualifications and programmes that they offer have been peer-reviewed to ensure that the provisioning meets the quality standards and criteria of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) which is the legislated quality council mandated for higher education in South Africa.
Generative Methodology	A generative methodology, in the context of the QAF, is a method for creating and developing standards and their associated guidelines that creates a deeper understanding in the users of the standards and guidelines to find opportunities for solutions and innovation in order to stay agile and be relevant.
Graduate Attributes	Graduate attributes are the qualities, knowledge, skills and values that students should acquire at an institution through their varied experiences. They include critical thinking, the ethical and professional behaviour of a graduate and the capacity of a graduate to take what has been learnt beyond the site of learning in order to become an active citizen and professional.
Guidelines	Guidelines, in the context of the QAF, explain why a particular standard is important and describes how standards might be interpreted and implemented in different contexts, thus giving effect to the notion of a differentiated approach to quality assurance. The Guidelines in the HEPS and QS in the Annexures are intended for developmental purposes and to assist institutions in following a reflexive-generative approach in the continuous improvement in their practice in the longer term with a future view. The Guidelines are therefore not intended for use in EQA processes, except as guidelines to clarify and assist institutions. The Guidelines explain why the Standard is important and describe how Standards 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 reflexive questions and support innovation.
Higher Education Practice Standards	Higher Education Practice Standards (HEPS) are codes of practice for specific functional areas/areas of practice in higher education where quality must be maintained, such as learning and teaching, assessment, student achievement, governance, student support, etc.
Internal Quality Assurance (IQA)	IQA refers to the integrated institutional system, policies, processes, implementation, and monitoring and evaluation, used by an institution to manage the quality of its core and associated functions of learning and teaching, research and community engagement, determined by the outcomes of that institution.
Level descriptors	Level descriptors provide guidelines for differentiating the varying levels of complexity of qualifications on the framework. The level descriptors are the outermost layer of qualification specification. At each level, they describe the generic nature of learning achievements and their complexity, and they are the broad qualitative statements against which more specific learning outcomes can be compared and located.
Professional Body	<p>A Professional Body is an organisation of expert practitioners in an occupational field, including a profession, that may be statutory or non-statutory, and typically regulates the practice in that profession or occupation.</p> <p>There are two broad categories of professional bodies:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-statutory professional body means a body registered as a non-profit organisation by the Company Intellectual and Property Commission/Department of Social Development and recognised in terms of the NQF Act to set professional standards and to award professional designations to individual expert practitioners in an occupation field. • Statutory professional body means a body established by a statute and recognised in terms of the NQF Act to set professional standards and to register and award professional designations to individual expert practitioners in an occupational field. <p>Professional registration usually affirms proven competence to perform in a specific work context.</p>
Professional designator	Professional designation means an NQF-recorded title or status conferred by a professional body to recognise a person's expertise and/or right to practise in an occupational field.
Programme	A programme refers to a purposeful and structured set of learning activities designed to enable a student to meet the outcomes necessary for the award of a qualification. Learning Programmes are specialisations of a generic qualification accredited to an institution and recommended to be recorded against the institutional generic qualification on the NQF.
Qualification	A qualification refers to the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by a higher education institution and that is registered on the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF).
Qualification Standards	A qualification standard is a generic statement of the learning domains, the level of achievement and the graduate attributes that

	characterise, and are required for the award of, the qualification. As generic statements of achievement, qualification standards apply to all programmes leading to the award of the qualification.
Qualifier	Qualifier refers to the qualification specialisation. All programmes can have qualifiers.
Quality Assurance	Quality assurance in higher education in South Africa involves evaluating and providing evidence of the extent to which institutions have put in place the measures needed to achieve it) the goals and purposes they have identified for themselves, and ii) offer quality programmes that are able to deliver a set of learning experiences which will support students in attaining the qualifications to which they lead.
Quality Management System	A quality management system refers to the institutional arrangements, in the form of a deliberate design, including policies, planning and resourcing for assuring, supporting, developing and enhancing, as well as monitoring the quality of learning and teaching, assessment, research, and community engagement.
Quality Promotion	Quality promotion is the development of a programme of activities to institutionalise a quality culture in higher education, in addition to the institution's commitment to continuous quality improvement.
Quality Review	A quality review is a peer-driven evaluation of an aspect of the provision of education by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) across the sector, e.g., programmes or qualifications, or on a particular Higher Education Practice as a themed review aimed to ensure that threshold standards are being met. Quality reviews can have different units of analysis ranging from the institutional level to smaller areas within an institution. Quality reviews may be focused on one institution, a group of institutions, or may be conducted at national level.
Reflexivity	Reflexivity, in the context of the QAF, is the cyclical process of reflection on, and in action, for sustained and continuous improvement of quality over time.
Standards	Standards are codes of practice for quality assurance in higher education, considered and adhered to by HEIs in all aspects of their activities and in all types of higher education provision. Within the context of the QAF, standards are intended to form the basis of a reflexive and generative quality culture in institutions to support continuous improvement, but also to provide accountable thresholds that all institutions have to achieve.
Standards Development	Standards Development is the process facilitated by the CHE through which relevant stakeholders work together to develop and agree on the relevant Standard.
Standard statement	The Standard Statement is an overall statement of the agreed benchmark in the higher education practice are or qualification that all institutions must adhere to.
WIL (see also the HEPS on Experiential Learning)	Work-integrated learning is a curricular practice that integrates academic learning with experiential learning that is structured, monitored and assessed to demonstrate that the specified graduate attributes have been acquired. It is worth emphasising that the alignment between work and education implied in WIL is not restricted to work placement. There are many different WIL practices along a continuum from more theoretical to more practical forms.

1. INTRODUCTION

This *Manual for Quality Assurance Framework 2024* (henceforth the *Standards Development Manual 2024*) must be read as a complementary document to the *Quality Assurance Framework (2020)* (henceforth the *QAF*). The *Standards Development Manual* provides details of an operational nature for planning, capacity development and the EQA process of Standards Development by the CHE.

The process described in this *Manual* was largely built on the development of the qualification standards since 2013 as described in the *Framework for Qualification Standards (2013)*. The purpose of this *Manual* is to describe a single uniform, integrated and combined process for standards development for all CHE Standards. There will be a transitional phase between current Qualification Standard development processes (based on the 2013 *Framework*) and the development of future Qualification Standards within the QAF. Any new Qualification Standards initiated after the HEQC approval of this *Manual* will be based on the processes as described here. Individual in-process Qualification Standards development processes based on the 2013 *Framework* will be completed. This *Standards Development Manual* therefore replaces the *Framework for Qualification Standards (2013)*. The replacement date and implementation date for this *Manual* will be the date on which the HEQC approves the *Manual*.

The standards development process as described here has been piloted and fine-tuned in preparation for the implementation of the QAF since 2022 through the development of the Higher Education Practice Standards (HEPS). HEPS are already being developed on the basis of this *Manual* as part of a pilot process and will continue within the framework of this *Manual*.

The QAF provides the legislative and educational context for the CHE's EQA functions. It describes the quality-related context within which Standards Development is to be conducted. The nature of Standards Development is further detailed in the *Implementation Protocols for the external quality assurance functions of the QAF (2024)*. The purpose of this *Standards Development Manual* is to provide procedural clarity on the process of Standards Development to be undertaken by the HEQC.

2. THE PURPOSE OF STANDARDS AND STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT

The CHE performs its quality assurance and quality promotion functions in terms of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997), and in its capacity as the sole Quality Council (QC) for higher education, in terms of Section 25 of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended), (hereafter the NQF Act). The

HEQSF, in turn, assigns to the CHE the responsibility for developing standards for all higher education.

Standards are one of the main drivers of higher education quality in the South African context. Standards are used as a basis for the external quality (EQA) processes of the CHE and provide guidance to institutions for the development of their internal quality assurance (IQA) systems.

Standards in the QAF are intended to form the basis for capacity development and quality promotion in higher education. As part of the QAF, the CHE is re-invigorating the notion of building extensive capacity in the system and promoting quality at all levels of institutions. Capacity development programmes will be designed based on the Standards and will be used to socialize the standards in and throughout all institutions.

The Standards will also form the structural framework for the integration of the CHE's Management Information System (CHE-MIS) to create an integrated digital track record of the institution's performance in the CHE's EQA activities. All HEQC outcome decisions will be recorded against a Standard, which will provide a comprehensive and holistic view of each institution, as well as of the sector as whole, or in various parts, in the form of QA-Dashboards, in terms of the quality assurance outcomes as decided by the HEQC. The QA-Dashboards will form a major part of the input to the HEQC to make a decision on the overall functionality of an institution's IQA functionality.

Standards are described at a sufficiently high level to enable their interpretation and application across diverse contexts. The main aim of a national set of standards, as mandated to the CHE, is not to displace existing, internal means of quality assurance, but to provide for an agreed matrix of benchmarks as expectations against which institutional quality assurance and academic awards such as certificates can be evaluated, and the IQA functionality of an institution can be determined by the HEQC.

The role of Standards is to provide benchmarks, developed and agreed on by Communities of Practice (CoPs),

- to inform and guide the design of institutional quality assurance systems, as well as
- to inform and guide the design, approval and provision of programmes and qualifications, and
- where required, to inform and guide the improvement of provision and other activities in higher education.

While acknowledging responsibility for reaching clearly defined standards as envisaged by the CHE mandate, the QAF emphasizes the developmental aspect of the process, considering the many conceptual and contextual issues that are associated with the formulation of nationally agreed-to and applied higher education standards.

The Standards Development process, therefore, plays an important part in contributing to the successful implementation of the HEQSF and of the QAF. The process gives

opportunity for reflection and improvement of both IQA and EQA activities, i.e. for institutions to understand themselves and their conceptions of quality and IQA, to question the routine ways of working, to criticize the established procedures and then to analyze the outcomes of their activities and to generate new practices to overcome barriers, improve and enhance processes and outcomes and to take ownership of them.

2.1 What can, and cannot, be expected of Standards

Standards are written in a way that allow all types of institutions to inspire them and be able to achieve their quality expectations at different levels of analysis, from the institution to qualification, programme and module level. Standards development is distinct from, but goes in parallel with, and will inform other quality assurance processes. Institutions may use the standards as benchmarks to guide the design of their internal quality assurance (IQA) system, new or existing programmes, and review of their existing policies and evaluating the national and international comparability of their own qualifications. Standards should assist institutions in their relations with professional bodies, employers and the public at large.

While the potential benefits of standards development in higher education are known, it is important to identify limits on what standards can be expected to achieve.

Standards should NOT:

- be designed to interfere with institutional rights and responsibilities in their own matters or learning context
- be expected to provide a resolution to all issues surrounding the academic quality of learning programmes and associated qualifications
- enforce the adoption of a particular educational philosophy, pedagogical model or assessment regime
- engage directly with the curriculum and content of programmes
- dictate to institutions the design of their programmes, other than the need to ensure specified student achievements at the appropriate level of the qualification, and in line with its purpose
- guarantee the recognition of learning credits for students moving from one qualification to another or one educational provider to another; nor
- be expected to provide a platform for addressing institutional issues that fall outside of the purposes of standards development.

Once Standards are developed, it will be the responsibility of the institution itself, as part of its internal quality assurance to implement a standard in its appropriate domain, sometimes in liaison with a professional body. The role of the CHE during its accreditation process will be to ensure that any programme recommended to SAQA for registration as a qualification, meets the standards of the qualification type and standard. The CHE will also use the standards in quality review processes, wherein each quality review process will have its own set of Criteria which would have been based on the Standards.

3. THE PRINCIPLES AND METHODOLOGIES UNDERPINNING STANDARDS AND STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT IN THE QAF

Within the QAF context, Standards are guided by principle that all HEI's are responsible for their own quality and their IQA.

Standards are underpinned by the principle of consulting communities of practice, in that the preferred origins of standards are that they are developed by a CoP and consulted widely in the sector. Standards are also intended to be embedded in research and good practice.

Standards are intended to be developed by the CoPs by using a reflexive and generative methodology. The reflexive methodology is a method for developing and reflecting on standards and their associated guidelines. This method aims to foster a deeper understanding among users of the standards and guidelines and then allow them to find opportunities for solutions and innovation in order to stay agile and relevant, and to generate continuous improvement and innovation. These methodologies have the potential to produce more lasting, extensive and transformative outcomes with regard to the generation of innovative approaches to quality and mutually beneficial interactions with the sector, thereby fostering connectedness whilst acknowledging differences. Inherent in these methods to reinvent IQA and EQA activities, all QAF Standards will be using a reflexive and generative methodology.

In line with the developmental approach in the QAF, the CHE will engage with institutions around standards and guidelines in a reflexive and generative way within the context of their own strategic plans and goals, missions, aspirations, histories and challenges. This approach emphasizes the notion that standards are envisaged as developmental guides for IQA systems and programme design and delivery, rather than as rigid instruments for regulating compliance. The shift in the QAF to the developmental approach is underpinned by the reflexive and generative methodologies and is intended to drive and nurture continuous sector-wide efforts to improve quality.

4. TWO TYPES OF STANDARDS IN THE QAF

The implementation of the QAF is reliant on the use of two types of Standards, namely Qualification Standards and Higher Education Practice Standards (HEPS).

Higher Education Practice Standards (HEPS) are generic and focus on institutional-level practices. Higher Education Practice Standards (HEPS) are codes of practice for specific functional areas/areas of practice in higher education where quality must be maintained, such as learning and teaching, assessment, student achievement, governance, student support, etc.

The CHE will continue the development of Qualification Standards as described in the *Framework for Qualification Standards* (CHE, 2013), and continuing with this *Manual*

once it is approved by the HEQC. A Qualification Standard is a nationally established threshold, which all programmes leading to the qualification must meet. The development of Qualification Standards is also in line with the HEQSF. All qualification-level and programme-level standards and practices should be aligned to the HEPS as well as to the relevant Qualification Standard.

In the first iteration of the QAF, the CHE will focus on the development of HEPS and Qualification Standards. The possibility or need may, however, arise in the future for the development of other types of standards. The CHE will consider these as and when required.

5. THE PROCESS FOR STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT AS AN EQA ACTIVITY

The Standards development process is consultative and collaborative which means that, in addition to the Communities of Practice (CoP), other stakeholders will play a crucial role in the process. Stakeholders can be defined as any individual, group or constituency that will be affected directly or indirectly by the relevant higher education practice under consideration, and includes students, staff, alumni, the public, future employers, professional bodies and others.

Qualification Standards have to be developed by an appropriate community of scholars, professionals, government, society and industry specialists who may have an interest in the graduates of the qualification for Qualification Standards, or in higher education in general for the HEPS. Qualification Standards have to be in touch with intellectual and disciplinary developments and trends. HEPS, on the other hand, do not represent disciplinary or professional areas, but represent higher education practices which means that there should be broad representation from the various sectors in higher education for each area of practice, such public and private higher education institutions, various types of institutions, various sizes of institutions, amongst others.

5.1 Standards development preparatory stage

The Standards Development process is usually initiated by the CHE itself. It may, for example, be based on needs analyses, trends and challenges in the sector that need attention and that fall within the mandate of the CHE.

Standards Development may also be based on formal requests made by interested stakeholders, such as professional bodies, associations, industry or other relevant stakeholders. Such formal requests have to be based on a needs analysis and will be followed up with a consultation process which will include the prioritization and funding of the standards development process. The HEQC finally approves that the Standard should be developed.

5.1.1 Initial consultative process stage

The CHE undertakes broad stakeholder consultation to confirm the need for the Standards and to get input on its general description, purpose and scope; to identify the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities in the sector related to the

Standards, and to identify who the relevant peer experts for the Community of Practice (CoP) should be. The process will require, as an initial consultative step, extensive discussion with all interested parties.

5.1.2 Selection of Community of Practice (CoP) stage

The process for constituting CoPs is intended to be open, transparent and consultative. Once the HEQC has approved the need for the Standard, the CHE informs the sector or the relevant academic or professional community, if possible, via a relevant association or body, by a call for nominations for the CoP.

A register of peer academics, including professional and support staff, with relevant expertise is created based on:

- Calls for nominations in the sector (including public and private HE institutions, professional bodies, academic or other relevant associations, as well as other stakeholders, such as DHET, SAQA, USAf, APPETD and SAPHE to develop partnerships and synergies). Head-hunting for specific skills may be done, if required.
- A CoPs should represent a fair balance of relevant expertise (which may include qualifications, a research focus, experience and practice, with skills and experience of writing policy-type documents for the sector) and representation as follows:
 - CoPs should be balanced in terms of demographics, particularly race, gender, disability and experience.
 - Collectively, CoPs should have membership that draws from all types of institutions: public / private; traditional universities, comprehensive universities and Universities of Technology, and large / small institutions.
- There should not be more than one member in the CoP from any one institution.

The CHE will explore the possibility of including students in the standards development process in the future.

The CoP members do not represent their institutions or organisations, and their participation is based on their individual expertise.

5.1.3 The CoP stage

The work of communities of Practice (CoPs) is underpinned by the fundamental principles of inclusivity, transparency and consensus. The CoP is inducted by the CHE into its work and specifically into the use of the using a reflexive-generative methodology.

The Community of Practice as CoP, supported by the CHE, undertakes the necessary research including relevant legislation, review of the literature and benchmarking to inform the development of the Standards. The CoP starts drafting the Standard using the reflexive-generative methodology and using the guiding formats. The draft Standards format is described in Annexure A for Qualification Standards and Annexure B for HEPS.

The CoP continues its work until consensus is reached on a draft Standard to enable consultation on it. The group will convene for both in-person and virtual meetings, and the standards will undergo multiple revisions and iterations.

5.1.4 Broad consultative post-drafting stage

Once the CoP submits the draft Standard to the CHE, the draft Standard is presented to the relevant HEQC subcommittee for input. The draft Standard is then disseminated to institutions and to other interested parties, including, in the case of professional and vocational qualifications, the body or bodies representing practitioners in the field. This consultation may be done in various modes, for example, narrow consultation in focus groups, written feedback, workshops, etc. Broad consultation is done by sending the draft Standard out for comments on public media. All comments and feedback are considered by the CoP and amendments to the draft are made to develop the final draft Standard.

5.1.5 Governance structures for the final approval stage

The final draft Standard is submitted to the HEQC subcommittee for comment and recommendation to the HEQC. The draft Standard is thereafter presented to the HEQC for final approval.

5.1.6 Dissemination of approved Standards stage

The approved Standard is published and widely disseminated in the sector.

The HEPS are used for

- capacity development and continued quality assurance improvement and enhancement activities in the sector
- institutions to further develop their IQA systems
- the development of Criteria for EQA functions such as Accreditation and Quality Reviews by the CHE, and
- the recording of institutional achievement in terms of their IQA functionality in the QA-Dashboards.

The Qualification Standards are used

- capacity development and continued quality assurance improvement and enhancement activities in the sector
- by institutions to develop new qualifications or to align their existing qualifications
- by the CHE for the accreditation of these qualifications
- by the CHE for qualification reviews.

5.1.7 Review of the Standards

Standards will be reviewed and revised as required in an iterative way to account for the ever-changing environment and context in higher education. The same process of standards development will be used for the review of a standard. Standards may be removed, replaced, updated, or consolidated. It would, however, be important to achieve stability by allowing institutions to work with Standards in a particular format for some time. Each of the Standards is also intended to include considerations for potential disaster and changing world environments.

6. THE STRUCTURE OF A STANDARD

The template for a Qualification Standard is given in Annexure A and for a HEPS in Annexure B respectively.

DRAFT FOR CONSULTATION

ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Format for a Qualification Standard

(Note: the template is illustrative and may be adjusted according to the distinctive features of a particular qualification type, NQF level and field of study.)

Qualification Standards are to be structured as follows:

Introduction

The CHE provides a summary of the national policy and legislative context in which the standard is developed, and an outline of the process followed.

Qualification title

Title from the HEQSF

(E.g., Bachelor's degree)

Qualification type: general characteristics

This is extracted from the HEQSF. It is augmented, if and as required, by addressing the questions outlined in Section 7 of the Framework.

Preamble

This provides a brief statement outlining the discipline-based context in which the standard has been developed.

Purpose statement

The purpose statement sets out in some detail how the characteristics of a qualification are manifested in the pathway(s) on which it is offered, and the combination of learning domains and assessment contexts that are appropriate for the realisation of those characteristics. The generic purpose of a qualification type (or type variant) is interpreted in the light of the distinctive characteristics and expected graduate attributes of the field or discipline.

When standards are developed for a qualification type that has more than one variant (e.g., general and professional master's degrees, 360-credit and 240-credit diplomas), it may be necessary to elaborate on the purpose statement above, to identify the particular aspects of purpose that underlies each variant.

HEQSF specification

The exit level of the qualification on the NQF is stated, together with the minimum total number of credits and the minimum number of credits at the exit level.

(Note: the standard does not prescribe the duration of study. It may, however, state a normal duration.)

Standard for the award of the qualification

(Note: when a qualification type may be awarded on more than one NQF level, e.g., a bachelor's degree and a diploma, it will be necessary to develop an appropriate standard for each NQF level.)

Graduate Attributes

Statement relating to the depth and breadth of **knowledge** required in a field of study, whether comprising one or more disciplines, and the extent of understanding of fundamental principles, concepts, theories, rules and practices underlying the field, the extent of attention given to the forefront of developments in the field/discipline, and awareness of the evolving nature of knowledge in that field.

Statement of **skills and techniques** developed, and the range of relevant methods of inquiry, such as the gathering from multiple sources, processing and validation of data and other kinds of information,

Contexts and conditions for assessment

The focus of this section is on the purpose of the qualification and how assessment of the graduate attributes reflects that purpose.

Award of the qualification

The qualification may be awarded when the qualification standard has been met or exceeded.

Progression

As stipulated in the HEQSF.

Guidelines

Guidelines accompanying a standards statement may include how the Qualification Standard might be interpreted and implemented. They may elaborate and give an explanation of any terms used in the Standard Statement. They set out good practice for consideration by the actors involved.

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.

Guidelines accompanying a standards statement may include some or all of the following:

- recommendation for the appropriate pathway(s) on which the qualification type will normally be offered, with commentary on the relationship of the recommended pathway(s) and the appropriate blend of conceptual and contextual knowledge, and the consequent mix of knowledge, skill and applied competence, together with the recommended ratio of institution-based and workplace experience;

- elaboration and explanation of any terms used that are distinctive of the standards statement of a particular qualification type or field/discipline;
- guidelines for above-threshold policy, approach and practice relating specifically to the award of the qualification type.

References

Guidelines accompanying a standard statement may include providing citations of sources of information. The final section in the Qualification standard description will be the list of references that the Community of Practice used in drafting the standard statement.

Annexure A

- NQF Level descriptors

Annexure B

- Members of Community of Practice of the Standard Development Group

Annexure B: Format for a Higher Education Practice Standards

HEPS are to be structured as follows:

Title

The HEPS is given a title using the following format:

Higher Education Practice Standard for(Area of Practice)

Preamble

The Preamble starts off by explaining the link of the HEPS generally to the QAF and how the HEPS has been developed by a Community of Practice using a generative, reflexive approach. This introductory statement focuses on the need, rationale, context, scope and purpose for the relevant HEP Standard. This requires a delineation and description of the domain and scope of work within higher education that will be covered by the HEPS. The description is located within a consideration of legislative and policy requirements (if any) and it should also reflect on the context and history of practice in the domain, and trajectory into the future.

Crucially, it should also reflect on the contribution of practice in the area to the transformation of higher education institutions and to social transformation, and how effective practice in the area contributes to the enactment of the identity, vision, mission, and mandate of institutions and to the three core higher education missions of teaching and learning, research and innovation and community engagement.

A generic statement will also be included in all HEPS as follows:

“Whenever an External Quality Assurance (EQA) activity is to be undertaken, the CHE will convene a Community of Practice to develop the relevant criteria for the HEPS for the specific exercise.” These Criteria will be made well known in advance to the sector to enable them to prepare for the EQA activity.

Rationale

The Rationale explains why this particular HEPS is important. It will give a description of the points of departure and philosophical stance that underpins the HEPS as developed by the relevant CoP. This section may expand on the purpose of the Standard in describing what the HEPS tries to achieve in more detail. The Rationale will also include a brief summary, a description of the literature that informed the Standard, as well as any international benchmarking with, relationship with, or alignment to other Standards such as the ESGs and ASGs.

The HEPS Statement

The HEPS statement is an overall statement or set of statements that explicitly describe the codes of practice and agreed-on norms that describe 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 Statements are open-ended to allow for innovation, application in context and to provide the basis for differentiation.

Guidelines for the HEPS

Guidelines accompanying a standards statement may include how HEPS might be interpreted and implemented. They may elaborate and give an explanation of any terms used in the HEPS statement within the area of practice. 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 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.

Review of the HEPS

It is understood that the HEPS will be regularly reviewed and revised in an iterative way to account for the ever-changing environment and context in higher education. Standards may be removed, replaced, updated, or consolidated. It would, however, be important to achieve stability by allowing institutions to work with Standards in a particular format for some time. Each of the Standards is also intended to include considerations for potential disaster and changing world environments.

A statement is therefore included that indicates by when the HEPS should be reviewed, typically after 5 years, or in terms of the possibility of an envisaged or experienced change in the higher education sector. This may be closely related to the area of work that a particular Standard covers, for example, a Standard related to ICTs might require a shorter term for revision.

References

The final section in the HEPS description will be the list of references that the Community of Practice used in developing the HEPS.