



Criteria for Programme Accreditation

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ACRONYMS

CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority

1. Introduction

Quality assurance is the responsibility of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), which it discharges through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), a permanent committee of the CHE, established by the Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997). The CHE is also a Quality Council as established by the NQF Act (No. 67 of 2008).

The CHE's responsibilities are to:

- Advise the Minister at his/her request or proactively on all matters related to higher education.
- Assume executive responsibility for quality assurance within higher education and training.
- Monitor and evaluate whether the policy goals and objectives for higher education are being realised.
- Contribute to developing higher education through publications and conferences.
- Report to parliament on higher education.
- Consult with stakeholders on higher education matters.

The specific functions of the HEQC are to:

- Promote quality assurance in higher education.
- Audit the quality assurance mechanisms of institutions of higher education.
- Accredite programmes of higher education.

According to the NQF Act, a Quality Council is required to:

- Develop and manage its qualifications sub-framework and advise the Minister on matters relating to it
- Develop and implement policy and criteria for the development of qualifications as needed in the sector
- Recommend qualifications to SAQA for registration
- Execute a quality assurance function within its sub-framework
- Maintain a database of learner achievements and related matters and submit data such to SAQA for the NLRD
- Conduct research on matters pertaining to its sub-framework.

The accreditation function of the CHE, as one of its quality assurance mechanisms carried out by the HEQC, is related to specific Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) functions and activities:

- The DHET approves the programme and qualification mixes (PQMs) of public higher education institutions, and funds programmes that are accredited by the HEQC.

- The HEQC of the CHE accredits programmes offered by institutions of higher education in terms of a set of quality criteria.
- The DHET registers all private higher education programmes and their associated accredited programmes before they are allowed to operate.
- SAQA registers each accredited learning programme offered by an institution of higher education on the NQF.

Quality-related criteria constitute a crucial element in the execution of the HEQC's functions, fulfilling the dual purpose of serving as evaluative tools for the HEQC's audit, review and accreditation activities, as well as setting broad benchmarks for quality management arrangements in higher education. The criteria are intended to enable institutions to analyse and reflect on their quality management arrangements and to guide the production of self-evaluation reports or accreditation applications.

This document deals with the HEQC's criteria for programme accreditation and indicates the minimum standards for academic programmes. The criteria are intended to be used by -

- (i) Higher education institutions –
 - In applications for the accreditation of new programmes or the re-accreditation of existing programmes.¹
 - As guidelines for follow-up activities after HEQC decisions on accreditation or re-accreditation of programmes.
- (ii) The HEQC's programme evaluators in evaluating applications for the accreditation of new programmes or the re-accreditation of existing programmes.
- (iii) Stakeholders, especially students, as indicators of the minimum standards that the HEQC requires for programme quality.

The HEQC has taken the following contextual imperatives into account in developing the programme accreditation criteria:

- National policy for higher education as articulated in a range of government legislation, regulations and planning documents.
- The HEQC's own policy positions as laid out in the *Founding Document, Programme Accreditation Framework* and other policy documents.
- National benchmarks set by the Department of Higher Education and Training for institutional efficiency, which include increasing enrolments and graduate outputs, increasing research productivity and improving the diversity profile of graduates.
- The institutional quality landscape, which includes varying levels of capacity, as well as the fact that a number of institutions have been involved in mergers and

¹ A new programme is one that has not been offered before, or is a programme whose purpose, outcomes, field of study, mode or site of delivery has been considerably changed, that is, by more than 50%. An existing programme is one that is registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and has been accredited by the HEQC.

incorporations, and in changes of mission, focus or identity, as in the case of comprehensive institutions and universities of technology.

- Partnerships in higher education provision, which include collaboration between and among institutions on a regional basis, between public and private provider sectors, between universities and universities of technology, between higher education institutions and the business sector, and between institutions across national borders.
- Increasing instances of cross-border provision by foreign and South African higher education institutions, as well as the use of new modes of provision.

2. General remarks on the criteria for programme accreditation

The HEQC's criteria for programme accreditation should be used as the basis for an institution's application submitted for accreditation, along with additional benchmarks which the institution might set for itself. The HEQC will use the criteria, the information in the application and supporting evidence provided by the institution, in the evaluation of applications for programme accreditation (new programmes) or re-accreditation (existing programmes).

The following should be noted:

- (i) The HEQC's criteria for programme accreditation are categorised into those relating to new programmes and those relating to existing programmes. However, there are some criteria that relate to both. A case in point is programme management, which is important in considering a new programme application, but which also entails a range of activities which have to do with the delivery of the programme.
- (ii) The criteria apply to all programmes at main campuses, satellite campuses and tuition centres, and all sites of delivery.
- (iii) South African higher education institutions that offer programmes outside the country are subject to the HEQC's programme accreditation requirements for all their local as well as cross-border academic programmes. In addition, the quality requirements of the importing country have to be complied with. The HEQC will cooperate with national quality assurance agencies in countries where South African higher education institutions have an operational presence in order to share relevant accreditation and audit information.
- (iv) Foreign institutions that offer higher education programmes in South Africa, including those institutions which are subject to accreditation requirements of other national, regional or international agencies, are subject to the HEQC's programme accreditation requirements. In addition, these institutions must satisfy the registration requirements of the DHET and the qualification registration requirements of SAQA.
- (v) The criteria apply to contact, distance education and e-learning programmes. Requirements pertaining specifically to distance education or e-learning are indicated, where applicable. Where necessary, additional criteria for distance learning provision, universities of technology and comprehensive institutions may be developed to supplement the criteria set out in this document.

- (vi) The HEQC ordinarily requires an accredited programme to establish itself reasonably well before a higher level programme in the same field can be applied for. For example, application could be made for a Master's programme once an institution has received accreditation for the Honours programme and it has proved its capacity to deliver it effectively.
- (vii) In addition to the HEQC's criteria, programmes are required to comply with the following national requirements:
 - In the case of public providers, the programme must be part of the institution's programme and qualification mix (PQM), as approved by the DHET.
 - In the case of private providers, the institution must apply for registration to the DHET in terms of the requirements of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 and the Regulations of the Department of Education (2002), before the programme is provisionally accredited for the candidacy phase.
 - The programme must meet the requirements of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF).
 - The programme should be registered by SAQA on the NQF.
 - The stipulations of the Labour Relations Act and conditions of service with regard to recruitment and employment of staff.
 - Relevant labour legislation and regulations on health and safety in the workplace.

3. Criteria for new programmes

3.1 Criteria for new programmes

In its application for the accreditation of a new programme, an institution must demonstrate that it meets the provisions of the HEQF and the HEQC's criteria for the new programmes, or that it can demonstrate its potential or capability to meet these criteria in a stipulated period of time. In the application the institution should also indicate its implementation plan for the delivery of the programme applied for.

An academic peer/s appointed by the HEQC will undertake the initial evaluation of applications for new programmes and further evaluation processes will be undertaken by the Accreditation Committee, a committee of peer experts, with the final decision on a programme's outcome taken by the HEQC. Site visits by academic peers and CHE staff members may be conducted as part of the evaluation process where necessary, most especially in the case of new institutions. If the criteria are met, the HEQC will accredit the new programme, and may specify certain conditions that need to be fulfilled within specific timeframes for that accreditation status to hold.

The HEQC may at any time after accreditation is granted conduct a site visit to an institution to ascertain how effectively the criteria are being fulfilled in practice and may require a progress report which will be peer-evaluated. The progress report should provide details on the

following:

- Steps taken to address issues identified by the HEQC for urgent attention
- Progress with the implementation of the programme in relation to the implementation plan submitted to the HEQC. This includes implementation of the policies, strategies, conditions, etc., specified in the criteria for new programmes, as well as the provision of the required infrastructure. This will provide an early warning (to the institution and to the HEQC) about problem areas, as well as an opportunity for appropriate developmental intervention, where necessary.
- Structures, strategies, processes, etc., which are in operation or in development to ensure that the HEQC's criteria for programme accreditation are met.

The criteria for a new programme indicate the minimum standards for activities, resources, conditions, etc., which should take place/be available or present in order to offer the programme. Proper conceptualisation and design of a programme are important first steps towards achieving high quality educational provision. Policies and procedures should ensure that the programme is part of the institution's mission and planning and is provided for in its resource allocation, is academically sound, takes the needs of students and other stakeholders into consideration, and articulates with other programmes, where possible.

Student recruitment needs to be undertaken as part of the marketing of the programme, and admission and selection policies and practices should be commensurate with its academic nature, within the framework of widening access and promoting equity in higher education.

Staff competence and effectiveness is a critical area for programme quality. An institution should provide incentives, resources and development opportunities for staff to meet professional goals, to contribute to the realisation of the institution's mission through the programme and to respond to challenges currently facing professionals in higher education.

A strategy for teaching and learning is important in facilitating student learning. It should be appropriate for the institutional type, mode of delivery and student composition, and make provision for appropriate teaching and learning methods and the upgrading of teaching methods. It should set targets, develop plans for implementation, and ways to monitor, evaluate and effect improvement in teaching and learning.

Student assessment and success are central indicators of teaching and learning effectiveness. An effective assessment system can support the goals of widening access, improving retention and throughput rates, and producing graduates with appropriate knowledge and skills. Although the curriculum may target knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the goals of social and economic transformation, if assessment procedures fail to prioritise and test these competences, students are unlikely to acquire the intended learning outcomes. Assessment also has a critical influence on the quality of teaching and learning and can be used as a powerful point of leverage for change and improvement in education.

Suitable and adequate infrastructure, including library resources appropriate for the programme, support and access, is indispensable to support quality teaching and learning in a programme. Academic resources, whether physical or digital, must be accessible by students, and engagement with such must be an integral part of the curriculum. Codes for clinical conduct and laboratory practice and safety are also necessary in the relevant programmes.

Programme administrative services fulfil an important role in providing information to students on programme issues, managing the programme information system of records of students in the programme and ensuring the integrity of processes leading to certification of the qualification. Administrative services must also be appropriate for the mode of delivery envisaged.

Postgraduate studies and research training in the context of these studies is a core academic activity for many higher education institutions worldwide. Enabling policies and procedures must be in place in order to maintain and enhance the quality of postgraduate programmes.

Table 1: Criteria for programme input: areas and relevant aspects

AREAS	RELEVANT ASPECTS	CRITERION
1. Programme design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relation to institution’s mission and planning ▪ Needs of students and other stakeholders ▪ Intellectual credibility ▪ Coherence ▪ Articulation ▪ Characteristics and needs of professional and vocational education ▪ Learning materials development 	Criterion 1
2. Student recruitment, admission and selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Recruitment ▪ Legislative issues ▪ Widening of access ▪ Equity ▪ Assumptions of learning ▪ Professional needs ▪ Capacity of the programme to offer quality education 	Criterion 2

8. Postgraduate policies, regulations and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Policies, regulations and procedures ▪ Equity and access ▪ Preparation of students 	Criterion 9
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3.1.1 Programme design

CRITERION 1: *The programme is consonant with the institution’s mission, forms part of institutional planning and resource allocation, meets national requirements, the needs of students and other stakeholders, and is intellectually credible. It is designed coherently and articulates well with other relevant programmes, where possible.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) The programme is consonant with the institution’s mission and goals and was approved by the appropriate institutional structures, including Senate /equivalent structure. Provision is made for the programme in the institution’s planning and resource allocation processes.
- (ii) The programme meets the requirements of the HEQF.
- (iii) Learning outcomes, degree of curriculum choice, teaching and learning methods, modes of delivery, learning materials and expected completion time cater for the learning needs of its target student intake. Competences expected of students who successfully complete the programme are made explicit.
- (iv) The design maintains an appropriate balance of theoretical, practical and experiential knowledge and skills. It has sufficient disciplinary content and theoretical depth at the appropriate level, to serve its educational purposes.
- (v) The design offers learning and career pathways to students with opportunities for articulation with other programmes within and across institutions, where possible.
- (vi) Modules and/or courses in the programme are coherently planned with regard to content, level, credits, purpose, outcomes, rules of combination, relative weight and delivery. Outsourcing of delivery is not permitted.
- (vii) There is a policy and/or procedures for developing and evaluating learning materials and ensuring their alignment with programme goals and underpinning philosophy. Where necessary, members of the academic staff are trained to develop learning materials.
- (viii) Programme outcomes meet national and/or regional labour market, knowledge or other socio-cultural needs. The requirements of professional bodies are taken into consideration, where applicable. Relevant stakeholders, including academic peers from outside the institution, and employers and professional bodies where applicable, are involved in the development of the programme.
- (ix) The characteristics and needs of professional and vocational education are catered for in the design of the programme, where applicable. This includes the following, in

addition to (i) – (vii) above:

- The programme promotes the students' understanding of the specific occupation for which they are being trained.
 - Students master techniques and skills required for a specific profession or occupation.
 - Work Integrated Learning (WIL) including workplace-based learning and placement in a work-based environment form an integral part of the curriculum according to the HEQF qualification type selected
- (x) In the case of institutions with service learning as part of their mission:
- Service learning programmes are integrated into institutional and academic planning, as part of the institution's mission and strategic goals.
 - Enabling mechanisms (which may include incentives) are in place to support the implementation of service learning, including staff and student capacity development.

3.1.2 Student recruitment, admission and selection

CRITERION 2: *Recruitment documentation informs potential students of the programme accurately and sufficiently, and admission adheres to current legislation. Admission and selection of students are commensurate with the programme's academic requirements, within a framework of widened access and equity. The number of students selected takes into account the programme's intended learning outcomes, its capacity to offer good quality education and the needs of the particular profession (in the case of professional and vocational programmes).*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) Advertising and promotional materials contain accurate and sufficient information on the programme with regard to admission policies, completion requirements and academic standards. Marketing and advertising are done according to DHET and SAQA regulations and accurate information is provided about the NQF level and the accreditation status of the programme.
- (ii) Admission, matriculation exemption, age exemption, etc., adheres to current legislation.
- (iii) The programme's admission criteria are in line with national legislation. Equity targets are clearly stated as are the plans to attain them. Provision is made, where possible, for flexible entry routes, which includes RPL with regard to general admission requirements, as well as additional requirements for the programme, where applicable. Admission of students through an RPL route should not constitute more than 10 percent of the student intake for the programme.²
- (iv) Admission requirements are in line with the degree of complexity of learning required in the programme, within the context of widening access and promoting equity.
- (v) Selection criteria are explicit and indicate how they contribute to institutional plans for diversity. The number of students selected for the programme does not exceed the

² Only in exceptional circumstances and only in undergraduate programmes will admission of students through an RPL route be allowed to exceed 10% of the total number of students in the programme.

capacity available for offering good quality education. The number of students is balanced against the intended learning outcomes of the programme and takes into account the mode(s) of delivery and the programme's components (modules/courses).

- (vi) In the case of professional and vocational programmes, the quality and number of students admitted takes into account the needs of the particular profession, consonant with the appropriate equity considerations and institutional infrastructural capacity.

3.1.3 Staffing

CRITERION 3: *Academic staff members responsible for the programme are suitably qualified, have sufficient relevant experience and teaching competence, and their assessment competence and research profile are adequate for the nature and level of the programme. The institution and/or other recognised agencies contracted by the institution provide opportunities for academic staff members to enhance their competences and to support their professional growth and development.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) Academic staff members for undergraduate programmes have relevant academic qualifications higher than the exit level of the programme. Academic staff members for postgraduate programmes have relevant academic qualifications at least on the same level as the exit level of the programme. At least 50 percent of the academic staff members for postgraduate programmes have relevant academic qualifications higher than the exit level of the programme.³ The qualifications of academic staff members were awarded by recognised higher education institutions.
- (ii) The majority of full-time academic staff members have two or more years of teaching experience in a recognised higher education institution, and in areas pertinent to the programme. In the case of professional programmes, a sufficient number of academic staff members also have relevant professional experience. Qualified and experienced academic staff members design the learning programme, although junior or part-time tutors may act as facilitators of learning.
- (iii) Academic staff members are competent to apply the assessment policies of the institution. Some of the academic staff members responsible for the programme have at least two years' experience of student assessment at the exit level of the programme. There is ongoing professional development and training of staff in assessment.
- (iv) Academic staff members have research experience through their own research and/or studies toward higher education qualifications. The research area(s) of some of the academic staff members are relevant to the subject areas of the programme. In the case of postgraduate programmes, the research profile of the staff includes recognised research outputs.
- (v) The institution and/or other recognised agencies contracted by the institution provide orientation and induction opportunities in which new academic staff members

³ This does not apply to doctoral programmes, or to master's programmes in certain fields of study, for example medicine, where M Med degrees are regarded as adequate.

participate. Provision is made for regular staff development opportunities in which relevant academic staff members participate.

CRITERION 4: *The academic and support staff complement is of sufficient size and seniority for the nature and field of the programme and the size of the student body to ensure that all activities related to the programme can be carried out effectively. There is an appropriate ratio between full-time and part-time staff. The recruitment and employment of staff follows relevant legislation and appropriate administrative procedures, including redress and equity considerations. Support staff members are adequately qualified and their knowledge and skills are regularly updated.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) The staff: student ratio expressed as full-time equivalents is suitable for the nature and field of the programme and number of enrolled students. Sufficient support staff members dedicated to the programme are available, where appropriate.
- (ii) The programme has an appropriate ratio between full-time and part-time staff to ensure working conditions conducive to teaching and learning and research. Part-time and junior staff members and tutors are trained, where necessary, and monitored by full-time staff.
- (iii) Recruitment and employment of staff members adhere to the stipulations of the Labour Relations Act and to conditions of service, and there are appropriate administrative procedures for the selection, appointment, induction and payment of staff members and tutors. Redress and equity considerations receive due attention in the appointment of staff.
- (iv) The academic staff complement is such that it ensures that students are exposed to a diversity of ideas, styles and approaches, and that there is experience in the particular requirements of the mode of delivery used.
- (v) There is provision for the academic coordination of the programme as in Criterion 10.
- (vi) Contractual arrangements relating to the hours and workload of staff ensure that all programme quality assurance, teaching, research, learning support, materials development, assessment, monitoring of part-time staff members (where applicable), counselling and administrative activities take place.
- (vii) Administrative, technical and academic development support staff members are adequately qualified for their duties, and opportunities exist for staff development.
- (viii) For distance learning programmes, sufficient administrative and technical staff members are employed to manage the specialised tasks of registry, dispatch, management of assignments, record-keeping, and other issues in relation to student needs.

3.1.4 Teaching and learning strategy

CRITERION 5: *The institution gives recognition to the importance of the promotion of student*

learning. The teaching and learning strategy is appropriate for the institutional type (as reflected in its mission), mode(s) of delivery and student composition, contains mechanisms to ensure the appropriateness of teaching and learning methods, and makes provision for staff to upgrade their teaching methods. The strategy sets targets, plans for implementation, as well as mechanisms to monitor progress, evaluate impact and effect improvement.

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) Recognition of the importance of the promotion of student learning is reflected in the institution's central operating policies and procedures, including resource allocation, provision of support services, marketing, appointments and promotions.
- (ii) A teaching and learning strategy is in place which –
 - Is appropriate for the institutional type as reflected in its mission (programme types, research: teaching), mode(s) of delivery (contact / distance / e-learning), and its student composition (age, full-time / part-time, advantaged / disadvantaged), etc.
 - Employs mechanisms to ensure that teaching and learning methods are appropriate for the design and use of learning materials and instructional and learning technology.
 - Provides for staff development opportunities where staff can upgrade their teaching methods.
 - Contains targets, plans for implementation, ways of monitoring progress and evaluating impact, and mechanisms for feedback and improvement.

3.1.5 Student assessment policies and procedures⁴

CRITERION 6: *The different modes of delivery of the programme have appropriate policies and procedures for internal assessment; internal and external moderation; monitoring of student progress; explicitness, validity and reliability of assessment practices; recording of assessment results; settling of disputes; the rigour and security of the assessment system; RPL; and for the development of staff competence in assessment.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) The programme has appropriate policies and procedures in all modes of delivery for:
 - Internal assessment of student learning achievements by academic staff responsible for teaching a course/module of the programme in a system that includes internal moderation.
 - External moderation of students' learning achievements by appropriately qualified personnel. Moderators are appointed in terms of clear criteria and procedures and conduct their responsibilities in terms of clear guidelines.
 - Monitoring student progress in the course of the programme.

⁴ Student assessment practices are discussed under Criteria for Existing Programmes; section 3.2.1.4.

- Ensuring the validity and reliability of assessment practices.
 - Secure and reliable recording of assessment results.
 - Settling of student disputes regarding assessment results.
 - Ensuring the security of the assessment system, especially with regard to plagiarism and other misdemeanours.
 - Development of staff competence in assessment.
- (ii) There are appropriate policies and procedures for RPL, including the identification, documentation, assessment, evaluation and transcription of prior learning against specified learning outcomes, so that it can articulate with current programmes and qualifications. Assessment instruments are designed for RPL in accordance with the institution's policies on fair and transparent assessment.

3.1.6 Infrastructure and library resources

CRITERION 7: *Suitable and sufficient venues, IT infrastructure and library resources are available for students and staff in the programme. Policies ensure the proper management and maintenance of library resources, including support and access for students and staff. Staff development of library staff takes place on a regular basis.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) Suitable and sufficient venues are available at all official sites of learning where the programme is offered, including teaching and learning venues, laboratories and clinical facilities, where appropriate. Codes for clinical conduct, laboratory practice and safety exist, where appropriate. Venue allocation and timetabling are carefully planned to accommodate the needs of students.
- (ii) Suitable and sufficient IT infrastructure, as determined by the nature of the programme, is available at all sites of learning. This includes functionally appropriate hardware (computers and printers), software (programmes) and databases. The infrastructure is properly maintained and continuously upgraded and adequate funds are available for this purpose. Students and staff are trained in the use of technology required for the programme.
- (iii) Suitable and sufficient library and other academic resources exist which:
 - Complement the curriculum.
 - Provide incentives for students to learn according to their own needs, capacity and pace.
 - Support appropriate professional and scholarly activities of students and staff involved in the programme.
- (iv) Policies exist for the proper management and maintenance of library and other academic resources, as well as for their continuous renewal and expansion. These policies are integrated into the institution's financial plan.
- (v) On- and off-campus students have adequate library support and adequate access to library research and computing facilities.
- (vi) Staff development takes place on a regular basis to update the knowledge and skills of

library staff.

3.1.7 Programme administrative services

CRITERION 8: *The programme has effective administrative services in order to provide information, manage the programme information system, deal with a diverse student population, and ensure the integrity of processes leading to certification of the qualification obtained through the programme.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) The programme information system is managed effectively in order to provide reliable information on the following:
 - Venues, timetables, access to library and IT facilities, availability of academic and support staff for student consultations, and student support services. Information and communication needs of students in remote (rural) areas receive due attention.
 - Records of the students in the programme, including admission, progression, grades/marks, fees and graduation.
 - Records of students in the programme for the National Learner Records Database (NLRD) of SAQA.
- (ii) Effective administrative systems are in place for:
 - Identifying academically non-active students, particularly in distance education programmes.
 - Monitoring student performance in order to ensure timely identification of at-risk students. There are strategies for advising students on improving their chances of success and for referral to appropriate academic development programmes. Rules for re-admission to programmes are clear and are sensitively applied.
 - Dealing with the needs of a diverse student population.
- (iii) Clear and efficient arrangements are in place for ensuring that the integrity of certification processes for the qualification obtained through the programme is not compromised. These include:
 - Effective mechanisms to assure the quality of processing and issuing of certificates.
 - Effective security measures to prevent fraud or the illegal issuing of certificates.

3.1.8 Postgraduate policies, procedures and regulations⁵

CRITERION 9: *Postgraduate programmes have appropriate policies, procedures and regulations for the admission and selection of students, the selection and appointment of supervisors, and the definition of the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students, etc.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

⁵ The delivery of postgraduate programmes is dealt with in section 3.2.1.6 .

- (i) Appropriate policies, procedures and regulations are in place for student admission, selection and assessment. These are communicated to all postgraduate students, and academic and administrative staff, and implemented consistently across the institution and programme.
- (ii) The selection and appointment criteria in place for postgraduate supervisors are acceptable to the research community in the area of study. These include the following:
 - The supervisor has a qualification in a relevant field of study higher than, or at least at the same level as, the exit level of the postgraduate programme he/she is supervising.
 - The supervisor has an appropriate research track record, as well as experience, expertise and peer recognition in the field of study.
 - In the case of inexperienced or new supervisors, there is ongoing staff development and support, and joint supervision is explored as an option.
- (iii) Explicit guidelines exist on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students and other matters relevant to the performance of research. These include the following:
 - The nature, format and expected turnaround time for work submitted to the supervisor.
 - Forms of assessment, and the communication of feedback to the student, which includes:
 - The periodicity of contact between student and supervisor, the schedule for the submission of progress reports and written work.
 - Research ethics, code of conduct, regulations on plagiarism and intellectual property rights.
 - Examination and qualification requirements.

3.1.9 Conditions

Where accreditation has been granted with conditions, institutions must

- (i) Demonstrate by way of progress reports by the stipulated deadlines, that the conditions have been met
- (ii) Where requested, the institution must submit a programme improvement plan to address areas in need of attention as identified in any of the HEQC's evaluation processes, including site visits.

It should be noted that institutions will have the opportunity to further develop the programme where it does not meet the required criteria, on the expectation that they have the ability to remedy the problem areas and attain minimum standards within a stipulated period of time.

3.2 Criteria for the reaccreditation of existing programmes

These criteria pertain to processes and activities which relate to the delivery of the programme.

The programme must be effectively coordinated in order to facilitate the attainment of its intended purposes and outcomes. Opportunities should also exist for student input and participation in the process, where relevant.

Academic development plays an important role in addressing the social imperatives of greater access and equity. Student and staff academic development can play a role in improving retention and graduation rates, as well as in increasing the number of students completing postgraduate qualifications, especially under-prepared students from historically disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is important that teaching and learning interactions are effective and based on sound insights into the processes of teaching and learning. Teaching and learning methods, as well as learning materials, should be appropriate in order to facilitate achievement of the purposes and outcomes of the programme.

Effective assessment practices, which include internal and external assessment and moderation, are critical in testing student competence to acquire the intended learning outcomes and to improve the quality of teaching and learning. The assessment system should also be reliable, rigorous and secure.

Work Integrated Learning, including workplace-based learning forms an essential part of many professional and vocational programmes. Coordination of workplace-based learning should be effective and contribute to achieving the purposes of the programme.

Table 2: Criteria for existing programmes: areas and relevant aspects

AREA	RELEVANT ASPECTS	CRITERION
1. Programme coordination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mandate and responsibilities of the programme coordinator(s) ▪ Student input and participation ▪ Implementation of policies for ensuring the integrity of certification 	Criterion 10
2. Academic development for student success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Student and staff development ▪ Curriculum development ▪ Additional student academic support 	Criterion 11
3. Teaching and learning interactions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Guidance to students on programme integration and outcomes ▪ Teaching and learning methods ▪ Suitable learning opportunities ▪ Student involvement 	Criterion 12

4. Student assessment practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Integral part of teaching and learning ▪ Internal (or external) assessment ▪ Internal and external moderation ▪ Reliability ▪ Rigour and security 	<p>Criterion 13</p> <p>Criterion 14</p>
5. Coordination of work-based learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Communication ▪ Recording system ▪ Monitoring system ▪ Mentoring system 	<p>Criterion 15</p>
6. Delivery of postgraduate programmes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Management of the postgraduate programme ▪ Assessment ▪ Implementation of policies for student admission and selection ▪ Implementation of criteria for selection and appointment of supervisors ▪ Implementation of guidelines on roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students 	<p>Criterion 16</p>

3.2.1.1 Programme coordination

CRITERION 10: *The programme is effectively coordinated in order to facilitate the attainment of its intended purposes and outcomes.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) An academic is identified as programme coordinator and operates within the framework of an agreed-upon mandate and defined procedures and responsibilities. This includes responsibility for:
 - Ensuring the academic coherence and integrity of the programme and that all conditions for the delivery of the programme are met.
 - Coordination of logistical and other issues regarding:
 - The day-to-day delivery of the programme.
 - All aspects of the programme quality management system, including the provision of resources.
 - The review of the programme and feedback with a view to improvement.
 - Monitoring of expenditure.
- (ii) Opportunities exist for student input and participation in relevant aspects of programme coordination.
- (iii) Policies for ensuring the integrity of certification processes for the qualification obtained through the programme are effectively implemented.⁶ This includes:

⁶ See also 3.1.7 above.

- Mechanisms for monitoring the eligibility of candidates for the award of certificates.
- Mechanisms for quality assuring the processing and issuing of certificates.
- Security measures for preventing fraud or the illegal issuing of certificates.

3.2.1.2 Academic development for student success

CRITERION 11: *Academic development initiatives promote student, staff and curriculum development and offer academic support for students, where necessary.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) Staff responsible for academic development is adequately qualified and experienced for their task, and their knowledge and skills are regularly updated.
- (ii) Student and staff development initiatives are responsive to the needs of the students and staff. This includes foundational and skills-oriented provision for students.
- (iii) Curriculum development at programme and course/module levels includes strategies for language skills development, numeracy and cognitive skills which enhance the use of disciplinary discourse and skills by students.
- (iv) Additional student academic support is offered where necessary.
- (v) The effectiveness of academic development initiatives is regularly monitored and feedback is used for improvement.

3.2.1.3 Teaching and learning interactions

CRITERION 12: *Effective teaching and learning methods and suitable learning materials and learning opportunities facilitate the achievement of the purposes and outcomes of the programme.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) Students are provided with guidance on how the different components of the programme (for example, subjects, courses and/or modules) contribute to the learning outcomes of the programme.
- (ii) There is an appropriate balance and mix between different teaching and learning methods. Teaching and learning methods are appropriate to the design and use of the learning materials and instructional and learning technology.
- (iii) Suitable learning opportunities are provided to facilitate the acquisition of the knowledge and skills specified in the programme outcomes, and within the stipulated time.
- (iv) Students actively participate in the teaching and learning process.
- (v) The staff members have opportunities to upgrade their teaching methods and there is facilitation of suitable learning opportunities.
- (vi) The effectiveness of teaching and learning interactions is regularly monitored and

the results used for improvement.

3.2.1.4 Student assessment practices

CRITERION 13: *The programme has effective assessment practices which include internal (or external) assessment, as well as internal and external moderation.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process and is systematically and purposefully used to generate data for grading, ranking, selecting and predicting, as well as for providing timely feedback to inform teaching and learning and to improve the curriculum.
- (ii) The learning achievements of students are internally assessed by the academic staff responsible for teaching a course/module in terms of a system that includes internal moderation. This includes:
 - Academic staff who teach a course/module are responsible for designing, implementing and marking both formative and summative student assessments, for recording results and for feedback to students.
 - For summative assessment, especially where more than one marker is involved, internal moderation checks are undertaken to ensure the reliability of the assessment procedures.
 - Procedures are in place and are followed to receive, record, process, and turn around assignments within a time frame that allows students to benefit from feedback prior to the submission of further assessment tasks.
- (iii) The learning achievements of students on the exit level of a qualification are externally moderated by appropriately qualified people who have been appointed according to clear criteria and procedures and who conduct their responsibilities in terms of clear guidelines. External moderation includes the following:
 - External moderators are recommended by the examining academic department, are independent experts in their fields, have qualifications at least on the same level as the qualification being examined, are changed regularly, are not appointed as part of reciprocal arrangements (where possible), and are approved by and responsible to Senate/equivalent body.
 - The institution provides information on the curriculum and on continuous assessment, as well as guidelines to assist external moderators in the completion of their reports.
 - External moderators mark fully at the exit level of the programme at least 10 percent of the examination scripts for each paper written and do random checks of at least 20 percent of examination scripts for each paper.
 - Completed external moderator reports are returned to the lecturer concerned and also to the programme coordinator or head of department/school. Problems are discussed with the lecturer concerned and the programme coordinator monitors the implementation of agreed improvements. External

- Marking and grading of results.
- Aggregation of marks and grades.
- Progression and final awards.
- Credit allocation and articulation.

3.2.1.5 Coordination of workplace-based learning⁷

CRITERION 15: *The coordination of workplace-based learning is done effectively in all components of applicable programmes. This includes an adequate infrastructure, effective communication, recording of progress made, monitoring and mentoring.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) Learning contracts or agreements are implemented through which the student, the higher education institution and the employer can negotiate, approve and assess the objectives and outcomes of the learning process. Various parties, i.e. the institution, students, mentors and employers, adhere to the contract or agreement on their roles and responsibilities.
- (ii) Regular and effective communication takes place between the institution, students, mentors and employers involved in work-based learning. Good working relations are maintained between the various parties involved.
- (iii) A system (both at the institution and at the place of employment) is in operation to record and monitor regularly and systematically the progress of the student's learning experience in the workplace.
- (iv) A mentoring system enables the student to recognise strengths and weaknesses in his/her work, to develop existing and new abilities, and to gain knowledge of work practices.

3.2.1.6 Delivery of postgraduate programmes

CRITERION 16: *The postgraduate programme is managed properly, offers opportunities for students to develop research competence, and ensures that research is properly assessed. Policies for student admission and selection, criteria for the selection and appointment of supervisors, and guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students are effectively implemented.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) The postgraduate programme is managed properly and offers students opportunities to develop research competence. This includes the following:
 - A senior academic with research and postgraduate supervision experience coordinates:
 - Research programmes, monitors the progress of postgraduate students and oversees assessment procedures.

⁷ In some professional programmes, e.g. law and theology, work-based learning does not traditionally form part of the curriculum. In some professional fields of study, work-based learning occurs after the award of the qualification, for example, in accountancy.

- Structured master’s and doctoral programmes, monitors the progress of postgraduate students and oversees assessment procedures.
 - Training is provided in research skills, including guidance on research design and methodology. Training is also provided in language, writing and numeracy skills, where required. Employment-related skills are developed, where appropriate.
 - Monitoring and review of the postgraduate system takes place regularly and includes student feedback on the quality of the learning experience, supervision and support infrastructure.
- (ii) Research is properly assessed, which includes the following (in addition to the requirements for assessment specified in 3.2.1.4):
 - At least one examiner external to the institution is appointed per dissertation/thesis.
 - Without undermining the principle of assessment based on academic judgement, assessment decisions are made transparently and students are afforded reasonable access to information (e.g. examiners’ reports).
 - There are opportunities for students to defend their theses (e.g. through an oral defence).
 - Higher degree committees or similar structures consider examiners’ reports and make considered decisions about examination outcomes.
- (iii) Policies for student admission and selection are effectively implemented (see 3.1.7).
- (iv) Criteria for the selection and appointment of postgraduate supervisors are effectively implemented, as well as guidelines on the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students (see 3.1.7).

3.2.2 Criteria for programme effectiveness and impact

These criteria pertain to what is delivered and attained by a programme. Programmes have to be effective with regard to student retention and throughput rates, especially in relation to race and gender equity. The programme should have an impact on enhancing the employability of students and in alleviating shortages of expertise in relevant fields, in cases where these are the desired outcomes of the programme.

Table 3: Criteria for programme effectiveness and impact: areas and relevant aspects

AREAS	RELEVANT ASPECTS	CRITERION
1. Student retention and throughput rates	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Monitoring of information ▪ Remedial action ▪ Profiles of entering and qualifying class 	Criterion 17
2. Programme impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Employability of students ▪ External acknowledgement of programme 	Criterion 18

CRITERION 17: *Student retention and throughput rates in the programme are monitored, especially in terms of race and gender equity, and remedial measures are taken, where necessary.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) The programme coordinator has access to and monitors information on retention and throughput rates for the programme, also in terms of national benchmarks. Appropriate remedial action is taken where necessary.
- (ii) The profile of the qualifying class in terms of race and gender increasingly resembles that of the entering class.

CRITERION 18: *The programme has taken steps to enhance the employability of students and to alleviate shortages of expertise in relevant fields, in cases where these are the desired outcomes of the programme.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is expected at minimum:

- (i) There is evidence that the programme attempted to have an impact on the employability of students, where these are the desired outcomes of the programme.
- (ii) Conscious efforts are made to get the programme acknowledged in the workplace/community and by other institutions. An improvement plan is put into operation, where necessary.

3.2.3 Criteria for programme review

User surveys which gather and analyse information from different stakeholders are important instruments in evaluating the effectiveness of the programme. Examples are student satisfaction surveys, graduate tracking surveys and employer satisfaction surveys.

Reviews of the effectiveness of benchmarking in the programme against equivalent quality reference points, both nationally and internationally, are a useful source of information for goal-setting and continuous self-improvement in the programme.

Impact studies are important instruments for measuring and evaluating the impact of the programme on the employability of students and in alleviating shortages of expertise in relevant fields, where these are the desired outcomes of the programme. Impact studies could also ascertain the degree of acknowledgement of the programme in the community, by other institutions and in the workplace, where applicable.

Table 4: Criterion for programme review: area and relevant elements

AREA	RELEVANT ASPECTS	CRITERION
Programme review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ User surveys ▪ Reviews ▪ Impact studies ▪ Use of results 	Criterion 19

CRITERION 19: *User surveys, reviews and impact studies on the effectiveness of the programme are undertaken at regular intervals. Results are used to improve the programme's design, delivery and resourcing, and for staff development and student support, where necessary.*

In order to meet the criterion, the following is required at minimum:

- (i) User surveys are undertaken at regular intervals for feedback from academics involved in the programme, graduates, peers, external moderators, professional bodies and employers, where applicable, to ascertain whether the programme is attaining its intended outcomes.
- (ii) There are regular reviews of the effectiveness of benchmarking in the programme against equivalent national and international reference points, with a view to goal-setting and continuous self-improvement in the programme.
- (iii) Student throughput and retention rates are regularly reviewed, also with regard to national requirements.
- (iv) Impact studies are regularly undertaken to measure and evaluate the impact of the programme and its graduates on the employability of students and in alleviating shortages of expertise in relevant fields, where these are the desired outcomes of the programme. Impact studies could also ascertain the degree of acknowledgement of the programme in the community, by other institutions and in the workplace, where applicable.
- (v) Results of user surveys, reviews and impact studies are utilised in a regular evaluation of all programme aspects and to develop improvement plans.

4. Criteria and the outcomes of programme evaluation

Academic programmes will be evaluated by HEQC-appointed subject specialist reviewer/s against the criteria indicated above. All the criteria are regarded as relevant for ensuring and enhancing programme quality. The HEQC also recognises the need for flexibility in the interpretation of the criteria, since the relative importance and weight to be attached to specific programme areas and their related criteria may differ between programmes. For example, the availability of advanced computer hardware and software should be more crucial for a programme in computer studies than for one in philosophy. Peer reviewers have the responsibility to use their discipline and subject knowledge to make these judgements within

the context of the programme that is evaluated.

The review panel will first evaluate the programme against each individual criterion, using the following categories to classify the results in each instance:

- (i) Commend: All the minimum standards specified in the criterion were fully met and, in addition, good practices and innovation were identified in relation to the criterion.
- (ii) Meets minimum standards: Minimum standards as specified in the criterion were met.
- (iii) Needs improvement: Did not comply with all the minimum standards specified in the criterion. Problems/weaknesses could be addressed in a short period of time.
- (iv) Does not comply: Did not comply with the majority of the minimum standards specified in the criterion.

The outcomes of the programme evaluation as a whole are determined in a holistic manner and not by merely calculating the sum total of the evaluations against individual criteria. The following classification will be used for the accreditation outcomes of the programme as a whole:

Table 5: Criteria, judgements and outcomes

	Evaluation against HEQC criteria	Classification of accreditation outcomes
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<p>1. All programmes</p>	<p><u>Exceeds minimum standards:</u> All minimum standards specified in the criteria were met and, in addition, examples of good practice and innovation were identified in relation to several criteria.</p> <p><u>Complies with minimum standards:</u> All minimum standards specified in the criteria were met.</p> <p><u>Needs improvement:</u> Not all minimum standards specified in the criteria were met. Problems/weaknesses could be addressed in a short period of time.</p> <p><u>Does not meet minimum standards:</u> Did not meet the majority of minimum standards specified in the criteria.</p>	<p>Accredited.</p> <p>Accredited.</p> <p>Accredited (with conditions).</p> <p>Not accredited.</p>
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