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## **African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA)**

**DRAFT VERSION FOR CONSULTATION**

**May 2017**

### **1.1 Background**

Following several decades of post-independence and post-liberation development on the African continent, much progress has been made on a number of fronts in developing societies; establishing stable governments, and instituting systems of higher education and economic production, amongst others.

Development has been steady in many countries, resulting in a better standard of living for their citizens. It is clear, however, that the colonial and other exploitative legacies have left deep imprints on developmental challenges, which in most instances in more than half a century of self-determination, have hindered African countries from achieving full development particularly on the higher education front. This has been exacerbated by instances of internal and regional conflicts, poor governance, corruption, and injudicious use of resources. In most cases, the scale of challenges related to development has been overwhelming, and disproportionate to the amount of resources available to address them adequately and sustainably.

The objective of higher education in Africa in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century is to increase access and ensure quality of its provision. Access has been widened as a result of growing social demand; increase in the number of higher education institutions (HEIs) - among them private providers; diversification in the provision of higher education, such as delivery of education across borders; and open and distance learning (ODL); e-learning and other forms of technology-enhanced delivery.

However, there are challenges associated with the provision of quality higher education. These have arisen from a shift to market and consumer demand and hence the introduction of courses specific to these demands; and increased competition due to globalisation and internalisation. To address some of these challenges and ensure quality, there is need for collaboration through student exchange and international cooperation to allow for greater mobility; associated with it is the portability of credits and diversification in the provision of higher education. The adoption of the ASG-QA will ensure quality higher education provision; and that the qualifications obtained by

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students and their experience of higher education remain consonant with the programme requirements, institutional mission and the objectives of higher education. While much of the focus on educational development over several decades has been on basic education, it is realised and accepted that investment in higher education yields significant benefits for a nation. Developing economies require high level and skilled human capacity to identify and leverage opportunities flowing from increasing globalisation. Equally, to take advantage of the developments in technology, sophisticated knowledge and insight are required, which mostly flow from higher education. Most importantly, from a developmental perspective, to promote and preserve democratic institutions, governance and sustain cultures, diverse and complex capabilities are required - the sources of which are again found in the higher education sector.

It is also to the advantage of the continent that there is greater cooperation, sharing of resources and the development of common agendas in higher education. These are necessary for the promotion and enhancement not only for higher education but Africa's interests in general – in short, greater multilateralism, without sacrificing sovereignty.

The challenge facing the continent and its higher education system is to take charge of its own destiny and not be forever a developing continent dependent on handouts. In order to liberate its full potential and work cooperatively in the continental interest, and to realise its aspirations, Africa has to: (1) unleash its potential to become self-reliant in its higher education provision, by for example, making good governance the hallmark of its higher education institutions; and (2) assuring fair distribution of resources, greater equity and opportunity for all to access higher education by establishing multilateral relationships and programmes, where joint or cooperative ventures will promote quality assurance, mobility, exchange, and pooling of resources and capacities in higher education.

Higher education institutions are vitally important vehicles to achieve these aspirations. In order to achieve these optimally, a fundamental prerequisite is that higher education institutions inculcate a culture of quality in all their activities. The role of quality assurance is, therefore, crucial in supporting African higher education systems and institutions in responding to the challenges of higher education.

## **1.2 Purpose**

The ASG-QA will support higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Africa in implementing good quality assurance practices; applying the standards and guidelines formulated by competent authorities in higher education; developing adequate internal quality assurance mechanisms that fit international best practices; and assisting higher education institutions in assessing their own quality through self-assessment.

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The specific purpose of the ASG-QA is, therefore, to support higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Africa to: (a) have a common framework and understanding of quality assurance systems for teaching and learning among all stakeholders at continental, regional and national level; (b) develop mutual trust thus facilitate recognition and mobility of students and human resources within and across national borders of the continent; (c) ensure quality improvement/ enhancement in higher education in the continent through self-assessment, external peer review and continuous monitoring and evaluation; (d) promote transparency and accountability by providing appropriate information on quality assurance to the public; (e) support higher education institutions to develop a sustainable quality culture; and (f) promote international competitiveness of Africa's higher education system.

The ASG-QA are a set of standards and guidelines for internal and external quality assurance in higher education. These standards are not meant to be prescriptive but they provide a roadmap for quality attainment in African higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies.

### **1.3 Approach Used in Framing the Standards and Guidelines**

The ASG-QA are stated as common minimum standards or requirements that must be complied with, however, individual higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies can add additional standards that will reflect their own traditions and contexts. The guidelines are there to help achieve the standards and allow for provision of evidence to support the status of quality at higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies.

### **1.4 Principles and Methodologies**

The success of quality assurance in higher education in Africa is based on the following principles of the ASG-QA: (a) quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of higher education institutions; and (b) the autonomy, identity and integrity of higher education institutions are acknowledged and respected.

Higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies adapt the standards and guidelines to fit their own higher education systems and contexts.

The methodologies used in quality assurance in higher education include: (a) the standards have been subject to consultation with stakeholders; (b) the standards have been benchmarked with international standards; and (c) use is made of external peer reviewers with diverse expertise and experience.

### **1.5 Scope**

The ASG-QA apply to all types of higher education institutions in Africa irrespective of the mode of study or place of delivery, including transnational and cross-border delivery. The ASG-QA address students through the whole cycle of their university life, thus referring always to both under- and post-graduate students, unless otherwise stated. Moreover, when addressing the staff of universities, all staff from academic,

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research, and administrative to technical/support staff are concerned, unless otherwise stated.

The ASG-QA should be applied in cognisance of existing qualifications frameworks and credit transfer and accumulation systems operational in the continent, since these also act as catalysts for the enhancement of transparency and mutual trust in the provision of higher education.

The standards and guidelines are presented in three Parts: Part A focuses on the internal quality assurance (IQA) of higher education institutions; Part B describes the methodologies (or standards) used for external quality assurance (EQA); and Part C focuses on the internal quality assurance of quality assurance agencies (QAAs). The quality provision of ODL by higher education institutions is incorporated into the internal quality assurance implemented by institutions. Quality assurance agencies use the principles, practices and methodologies, standards and guidelines for external quality assurance when conducting programme accreditation or institutional audits /accreditation at HEIs, but the agencies also appreciate the internal quality assurance standards and guidelines used by higher education institutions. Thus, Part B (EQA) recognises the standards for IQA (Part A) and so ensure that the internal work undertaken by HEIs is directly relevant to any external quality assurance that they undergo. Likewise, HEIs should also consider the standards and guidelines for EQA especially when developing the self-assessment report (SAR)/self-evaluation report (SER) in preparation of programme accreditation or institutional audit/accreditation conducted by QAAs. Consequently, the three parts of the ASG-QA should be seen as a whole as they are interlinked and together form the basis for an African quality assurance framework. Figure 1 depicts the inter-linkage between the three parts.

These standards and guidelines provide a roadmap for quality attainment in African higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies.

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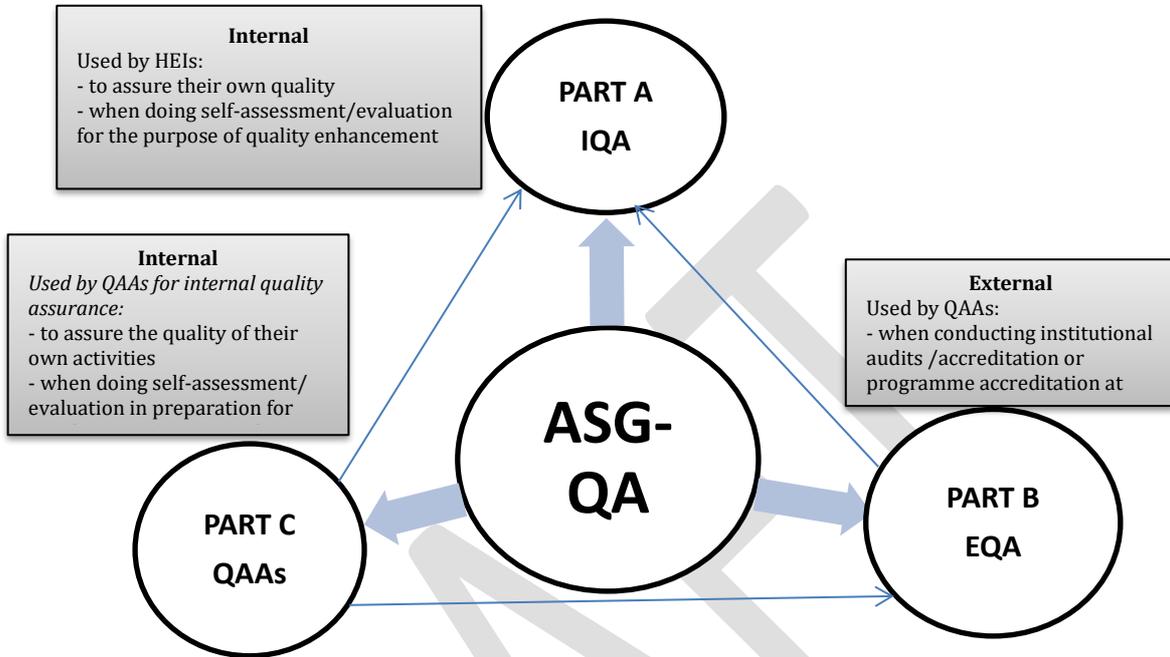
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Fig. 1: *Inter-linkage of four parts of ASG-QA*



**Note:** *IQA - Internal Quality Assurance*  
*EQA – External Quality Assurance*  
*QAA – Quality Assurance Agency*

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## **Part A: Standards and Guidelines for Internal Quality Assurance**

### **Introduction**

In line with the principle that higher education institutions have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and assurance thereof, Part A presents standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance (IQA) at the level of higher education institutions, but also incorporates standards and guidelines for ODL modes. The standards and guidelines cover areas that are considered essential for the attainment of the provision of quality higher education, focusing mainly on: institutional governance, policies and processes that promote quality HE; teaching and learning environment; research and innovation; collaboration; and community engagement.

### **1. Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives**

#### **Standard**

**The institution shall have published vision and mission statements, strategic objectives; and clear policies and procedures that are consistent with the vision and mission statement, which reflect the institution's commitment to continuous quality enhancement.**

#### **Guidelines**

The vision, mission and strategic objectives are publically disclosed; they reflect the aspirations and needs of stakeholders, and indicate strategic development plans and targets.

The institutional vision and mission on quality assurance are translated into clear policies and strategic plans, which are operationalised into achievable goals. The institution ensures that there is a robust and well-functioning quality assurance system for its entire academic and research activities, and to facilitate the coordination of the approval of policies, procedures and mechanisms. The institution, therefore, ensures that:

- a) Various forms of planning (for example, strategic, institutional, academic, and financial) are coordinated to ensure the quality of academic outcomes;
- b) Medium- and long-term plans reflect the programmes being offered as well as its research focus to ensure sustainability and continuous improvement;
- c) The formulation of the plans is collegiate, they promote a high degree of institutional integrity and responsiveness to change, and they are known to stakeholders; and
- d) There is continuous and periodic monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking of processes, including self-assessment of academic programmes and institutional self-assessment for purposes of continual improvement.

### **2. Governance and Administration**

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### **Standard**

**The institution shall have clearly articulated governance and management structures, which ensure sound and ethical governance and management practices, and supports the achievement of its mission and legal mandate.**

### **Guidelines**

The institution:

- a) Has qualified, competent and experienced leadership to oversee all development, management and quality functions of the institution;
- b) Has relevant organs of governance, such as the University Council, Senate, Management Board, Student Body; and various committees, each with a clear mandate, duties, responsibilities, powers, privileges and tenure; these organs are properly coordinated to ensure efficiency;
- c) Has clear communication systems and networks for the promotion of internal and external information circulation and public accountability;
- d) Makes use of its autonomy responsibly; has policies and procedures for the delegation of authority for financial and management decisions, whenever needed;
- e) Enables students to participate in decision-making;
- f) Ensures regular consultations with stakeholders, reports and follows up actions on key issues of policy and operations to promote cohesion, harmony and identity within the institution;
- g) Emphasises ethics, transparency and academic integrity throughout its teaching and research activities;
- h) Promotes a high degree of institutional integrity and responsiveness by advocating and demonstrating honesty and non-discrimination in its treatment of staff, students, members of the public and in the management of institutional affairs;
- i) Publishes on a regular basis, impartial and objective qualitative and quantitative information about courses offered, research undertaken and community services provided;
- j) Has implemented sound processes for deterring, detecting and dealing with academic misconduct by students or staff;
- k) Has policies and activated procedures to manage conflict of interest throughout the institution; and
- l) Have effective, systematic, timely and fair processes for investigation of complaints, grievances and appeals.

### **3. Human Resources**

#### **Standard**

**The institution shall have gender-sensitive policies on human resources that ensure recruitment and retention of adequate numbers of qualified and competent staff to achieve its mission and carry out its legal mandate.**

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## Guidelines

The quality of staff is the key to the quality of the higher education institution and, therefore, the institution:

- a) Has clear policies and procedures for recruitment, retention, and promotion of staff;
- b) Ensures that all staff have the right qualification and competency;
- c) Has a core of full-time academic staff and keeps up-to-date records of staff numbers, qualifications and staff turnover rates;
- d) Has clear policies and procedures for staff development and continuing development;
- e) Provides adequate staff support facilities;
- f) Undertakes periodic monitoring, evaluation, and appraisal of staff; and
- g) Adheres to (local/regional) norms for student-faculty ratios that promote/enhance student-centred learning.

The institution enables female and male faculty and office holders to realise equal outcomes in their academic and professional performance. More specifically, there is:

- a) A gender-balanced staff composition, across campuses and across degree programmes;
- b) Gender balance in management and decision-making; and
- c) Inclusive management and leadership.

## 4 Design, Approval and Monitoring of Programmes Standard

**The institution shall have policies and systems that ensure the design and development of quality, relevant academic programmes that contribute to the achievement of its mission and commensurate with national, regional and international standards.**

**In the case of ODL, the provider shall have in place mechanisms for pre-testing or piloting the learning materials to ensure that they are at the learners' level and that the learners will use them without difficulty.**

## Guidelines

The institution:

- a) Has policies and procedures for introducing new programmes and amending or phasing out standing programmes, and programmes are subject to continuous monitoring (including periodic external review) and development to ensure currency and relevance;
- b) Has academic programmes that are in line with the mission and objectives of the institution and address the expectations and needs of stakeholders; therefore, the programmes show range, depth, coherence and relevance, are up-to-date and adequate in content and scope, promoting core content, ideas, values and the

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- acquisition of employability skills, such as work-related learning/attachment/internship/traineeship
- c) Ensures that programmes' structure and credit hours/points are in accord with international norms for the amount of study required for each degree offered by the institution (or for the level of the awarded qualifications); and that programmes are approved by the relevant in-country (national) QAA and professional bodies, where applicable;
  - d) Has effective mechanisms for industry and other stakeholders' participation in curriculum design and validation;
  - e) Has policies requiring formulated learning outcomes to be defined and documented for all programmes and subjects, and ensures that the programme specifications are accessible to learners (or stakeholders);
  - f) Has programmes that are delivered by adequate, qualified and competent staff with pedagogical skills;
  - g) Has appropriate formal agreements for all programmes offered in partnership with other institutions, specifying in detail the roles and responsibilities of both partners, including teaching commitments and quality assurance arrangements; and

In the case of ODL, the pre-testing of learning materials is essential to ensure that the learners will be able to achieve the objectives or intended learning outcomes. The broad requirement of pretesting shall be made available by providing reaction sheets addressing key aspects or areas of the study materials, for example:

- a) Students' understanding of the objectives;
- b) Language of presentation;
- c) Explanation of concepts, ideas and theories;
- d) Use of examples for illustration;
- e) Activities and practice exercises given, and feedback provided;
- f) Use of symbols or icons; and
- g) Navigational devices for online materials.

## **5 Teaching, Active Learning and Assessment Standard**

**The institution shall put in place, in a way that is consistent with its vision and mission, policies and procedures that promote active student learning and assure fair and transparent assessment.**

**The assessment principles, criteria and procedures are explicit and made publically available to both students and staff.**

### **Guidelines**

Teaching and learning is one of the core activities of a higher education institution, and it is important that the academic staff and facilitators ensure quality student experience, to enable the students to acquire appropriate knowledge, competences and skills.

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To do so:

- a) The teaching and learning strategies are student-centred and flexible; motivate students' self-reflection and engagement in the learning process;
- b) The environment and resources are appropriate and adequate to support each student;
- c) There are systems in place for periodic monitoring and evaluation of the teaching and learning approaches for quality improvement;
- d) There are mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation of the results of postgraduate management systems against international best practices;

In the case of ODL:

- e) The decision on the medium or media of delivery should take into account the following (ACTIONS):
  - i. **Accessibility** to the learners,
  - ii. **Cost** of using it, both by the institution at installation and maintenance as well as learner cost,
  - iii. **Teaching** strengths in relation to specific content,
  - iv. Its capacity in creating **Inter-activity**,
  - v. **Organisational** requirements for development,
  - vi. Its **Novelty**, and
  - vii. **Speed** within which it can be set up.
- f) There are residential sessions to provide general orientation and introduction to the course materials at the commencement of the course;
- g) There are special residential sessions for difficult aspects of the course during the programme/course; and
- h) There are residential sessions to provide some revision work to students before examinations.

Student assessment is one of the most important elements of higher education because the outcomes of such assessment have a profound effect on students' progression and future careers. It is, therefore, important that assessment is carried out professionally at all times. This implies that:

- a) The assessment procedures and instruments are published and consistently applied, and include:
  - i. A range of assessment methods (e.g. coursework, projects, research and examinations to serve formative and summative assessment purposes),
  - ii. Internal and external moderation,
  - iii. Invigilation procedures,
  - iv. Monitoring of student progress,
  - v. Validity and reliability of assessment practices,
  - vi. Recording of assessment results and settling of disputes,
  - vii. Rigour and security of assessment system.

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- b) Assessment is carried out transparently by competent and impartial examiners, and by use of external examiners.
- c) There are regular objective feedback to students on their strengths and weaknesses, and appropriate counselling support for improvement.
- d) There is a disciplinary and appeals process for students who may feel aggrieved.
- e) There is continual collection and compilation of data on students' access and performance.

## **6 Infrastructure and Facilities**

### **Standard**

**The institution shall have adequate and appropriate infrastructure, facilities and resources to support learning and research.**

### **Guidelines**

For a good higher education experience, institutions provide a range of resources to assist students' learning, which vary from physical resources (infrastructure and facilities) to human support (tutors, counsellors and other advisers).

Infrastructure and facilities are in line with the goals and aims of the HEI; the programmes on offer; and the teaching and learning strategy. The institution has:

- a) Adequate academic and administrative facilities (lecture theatres, seminar rooms, academic and administrative staff offices, laboratories, studios, workshops, recreational facilities, etc.);
- b) Adequate, well equipped and a properly organised library and resources for the number of students and staff (physical and online); and
- c) Adequate ICT infrastructure.

## **7. Student Recruitment, Admission, Certification and Support Services**

### **Standard**

**The institution shall have pre-defined, published and consistently applied policies and procedures that ensure fair and equitable recruitment and admission, progression, certification, and support services for the students (all phases of the student's "life cycle").**

**The institution shall have documented policies and strategies that promote students' welfare and guidance in curricular, vocational and personal domains.**

### **Guidelines**

Providing conditions and support that are necessary for students to make progress in their academic career is in the best interest of the individual students, programmes and institutions. It is vital to have fit-for-purpose admission, recognition and completion procedures.

Therefore, the institution has clear guidelines and strategies:

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- a) For marketing/promoting the institution and its programmes, recruitment, admission, selection and registration;
- b) That promote diversity in admission, including gender mainstreaming and consideration of disadvantaged groups ;
- c) That ensure that students admitted meet minimum general and programme-specific entry requirements;
- d) That ensure monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking for improvement of enrolment management; and
- e) That promote student retention and progression.

Students need to receive documentation explaining the qualification gained, including achieved learning outcomes and the context, level, content and status of the studies that were pursued and successfully completed.

The needs of a diverse student population (such as mature, part-time, employed and international students as well as students with disabilities), and the shift towards student-centred learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing the learning resources and student support.

Support services may be organised in a variety of ways depending on the institutional context. However, the internal quality assurance ensures that all resources are fit-for-purpose, accessible, and that students are informed about the services available to them.

Students need guidance, and appropriate provision is made to advise and assist them in curricular, vocational and personal domains. Adequate provision is made for information and advice to potential students during the application and enrollment phases. The institution has guidelines for the promotion of students' learning by:

- a) Promoting affirmative action for gender mainstreaming;
- b) Advising them on academic issues;
- c) Advising them on financial matters;
- d) Providing personal counselling services; and
- e) Providing career guidance.

The institution supports and develops appropriate strategies for the creation and functioning of cultural, artistic and sports structures and associations.

## **8. Research and Innovation Standard**

**The institution shall ensure that the management of postgraduate studies is conducted within an approved framework of institutional policies and plans.**

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**The institution shall encourage, promote, and engage in innovative research consistent with its policies and strategic plans, and address national, regional, continental, and international needs.**

### **Guidelines**

Research is one of the core activities of a university, and the institution needs a university-wide research policy that sets the direction of institutional research. The policy is at both institutional and research-programme level (postgraduate studies) to ensure proper engagement in research. It ensures that:

- a) There are criteria, procedures and processes for the approval of research proposals and theses, and the conduct and supervision of research studies;
- b) There are policies, research management systems and strategies, adequate infrastructure and resources that facilitate all staff to undertake innovative research, and publish research results;
- c) There is a shared understanding of the nature, role and goals of research at the institution;
- d) There are criteria and processes for the approval of research proposals, in line with the research needs of the national or regional context, and capacity building possibilities for researchers, management of research partnerships and research contracts, handling of intellectual property and commercialisation of research, and effective and trustworthy management of research information.
- e) There is adequate academic integrity through the establishment and use of appropriate research committees and boards for the protection of human subjects, and ensured academic integrity;  
The research undertaken is relevant and responsive to the needs for academic advancement and community development expectations; and
- f) There is effective monitoring and evaluation of the research system.

## **9. Community Engagement Standard**

**The institution shall encourage engagement in community outreach programmes that promote cultural and corporate social responsibility.**

### **Guidelines**

A higher education institution is not only responsible for teaching, learning and research, but it is also responsible for serving society. The institution ensures that community engagement activities are conducted within institutional policies and strategies that facilitate collaboration between the institution and its larger communities (local, regional/state, national, global) for a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. Community engagement should:

- a) Enrich scholarship, research, and creative activity;
- b) Enhance curriculum, teaching and learning;

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- c) Facilitate preparation of educated and engaged citizens;
- d) Strengthen democratic values and civic responsibility;
- e) Address critical societal issues and contribute to public good; and
- f) Ensure there are mechanisms for partnering with other stakeholders in the community for sustainable development.

## **10. Information Management**

### **Standard**

**The institution shall ensure that it collects, analyses, and makes use of relevant information for the effective management of their programmes of study and other activities of the institution.**

### **Guidelines**

Reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making and for understanding what is working and what needs to be addressed. Effective processes for collecting and analysing information on academic programmes and other activities of the university feed into the internal quality assurance system.

The information gathered will depend on the vision and mission of the institution. However, the following are important to address:

- a) Key performance indicators;
- b) Profile of student population (including gender);
- c) Learning resources and available student services;
- d) Student progression, drop-out rates, and graduation rates;
- e) Students' satisfaction with programmes; and
- f) Career paths for students.

It is important that both students and staff are involved in analysis and follow-up activities to address the shortcomings.

## **11 Public Communication**

### **Standard**

**The institution shall publish information about its activities, including programmes, in a clear, accurate and objective manner; and ensure that the information is up-to-date and accessible.**

**The institution shall ensure that promotion of its programmes is done in a fair and ethical manner, following acceptable best practices, and comply with all relevant legislation.**

### **Guidelines**

Information on the institution's activities is useful for prospective and current students, alumni and other stakeholders, and the public. The information should include

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programmes offered, selection criteria, expected learning outcomes, qualifications they award, teaching and learning procedures, graduation rates, learning opportunities, and information on employment of its graduates. The institution and departments should ensure that:

- (a) Promotional materials give a clear and accurate view of the programme/course, its provision, objectives and outcomes, including:
  - i. Identification of the programme;
  - ii. The body awarding the qualification and its accreditation status;
  - iii. Mode of delivery;
  - iv. Charges involved;
  - v. Terms and conditions relevant to the programme/course;
  - vi. Conditions for withdrawal from the programme/course;
  - vii. Financial agreements with the provider;
  - viii. Rights, obligations and commitments expected of the student;
- (b) Students are fully informed of the issues that affect them with respect to the management of the programme, such as:
  - i. Language of communication;
  - ii. Required access to technologies, in the case of ODL;
  - iii. Technical competencies of students required to enrol in the programme, in the case of ODL;
  - iv. Time frame in which courses are offered and nature of learning outcomes;
  - v. Required texts and access to reference materials;
  - vi. Understanding of independent learning expectations;
  - vii. Schedule for face-to-face interactions, in the case of ODL;
  - viii. Schedule for examinations;
  - ix. Schedule for submission of assignments;
  - x. Collection of Certificates

## **12 Cooperation, Staff and Student Mobility Standard**

**The institution shall have mechanisms that promote cooperation with other higher education institutions, professional bodies, research institutions and relevant social actors at national, regional and international levels in order to facilitate mobility of students and staff.**

### **Guidelines**

The institution has policies that promote the mobility of academic staff, researchers and students on the courses or programme internationally. The collaborating institutions should:

- a) Ensure that programmes under collaboration are of the required standard and rigour as those of the parent institution;

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- b) Ensure that students benefit from the same standard of resources for the regular students of the awarding institution;
- c) Take the responsibility to assure the quality of the educational provision under collaboration;
- d) Ensure that they are both approved by the relevant QAA/professional body and are subject to periodic quality audits; and
- e) Ensure that students are fully informed of the nature of the collaboration between the institutions concerned.

If the programme is offered via collaborative arrangements, then the provider should clearly define the rights and responsibilities of parties, legal ownership, accreditation status of the programme, and resources available for the programme.

### **13 Financial Resource Management Standard**

**The institution should have financial planning and budgeting processes that are realistic and aligned to its mission, objectives and mandate.**

#### **Guidelines**

Financial sustainability is the backbone of any institution, and financial management should be conducted within an approved framework of institutional strategies, policies and procedures, which enable the institution to meet its financial needs to ensure quality academic outcomes. The institution should have:

- a) Financial management systems, which include strategies, policies and procedures for budgeting, resource allocation, repairs and maintenance of infrastructure, asset management, debt management and financial reporting;
- b) A diversified financial and sustainable resource base, and ensure a balanced allocation of resources to core functions of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement;
- c) Proper financial management and accounting strategies, policies and procedures for capital development, recurrent expenditure, and regular repair and maintenance of infrastructure and facilities;
- d) Monitoring, evaluation and benchmarking processes for the financial management system using international best practices; and
- e) A system to address the risks, gaps and challenges identified for continuous improvement.

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## **Part B: Standards and Guidelines for External Quality Assurance**

### **Introduction**

It is important that higher education institutions subject themselves to periodic external assessment for purposes of accountability and quality enhancement of their provisions. Part B describes the methodologies (or standards) used for external quality assurance (EQA) of higher education institutions. This section takes into account the standards and guidelines in Part A (IQA) for higher education institutions, ensures that IQA examined is relevant to and efficient for the concerned higher education institution, and that there is consistency between internal quality assurance by institutions themselves and external quality assurance. This section covers objectives of EQA, designing mechanisms fit-for-purpose, independence, decisions and reporting, periodic review, and complaints and appeals.

### **1 Objectives of EQA and Consideration for IQA Standard**

**EQA should ensure that the higher education institution has clearly articulated vision and mission statements, and it should help the HEI ensure the effectiveness of its internal quality assurance mechanisms, providing an additional instrument for assessing institutional quality.**

### **Guidelines**

External quality assurance is based on the institution's responsibility for the quality of their academic programmes and other provisions, and therefore it is important that external quality assurance recognises and supports the institutional responsibility for its quality assurance. EQA complements an effective IQA system, and therefore assists the higher education institution to:

- a) Appreciate the link between IQA and EQA;
- b) Adhere to established quality assurance principles, standards and guidelines in the higher education sector;
- c) Develop and entrench an institutional quality culture by establishing mechanisms for continuous quality improvement / enhancement;
- d) Provide a basis to benchmark inputs, processes and outputs with other higher education institutions nationally, regionally and internationally;
- e) Determine the institution's capacity to offer academic programmes;
- f) Assess institutional compliance with legal and other requirements;
- g) Provide independent evidentiary information to its stakeholders, the general public and international community that it is offering quality higher education; and
- h) Be recognised and accepted nationally, regionally, and internationally.

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## **2. Designing External Quality Assurance Mechanisms Fit-for-Purpose Standard**

**Standards, guidelines and processes for external quality assurance shall be designed fit-for-purpose, defined to achieve the intended aims and objectives of EQA, and to strengthen IQA systems at institutions.**

### **Guidelines**

It is necessary that standards, guidelines, and processes developed and implemented by QAAs and the institution is done in consultation with stakeholders in order to address all academic activities of the higher education system and for acceptability. The standards include:

- a) Standards and guidelines for periodic/cyclical programme accreditation/evaluation/ assessment/audit; and
- b) Standards and guidelines for periodic/cyclical institutional accreditation/evaluation/ assessment/audit.

## **3. Implementation Processes of EQA Standard**

**The processes for EQA shall be pre-defined, reliable, published, and consistently implemented.**

### **Guidelines**

External quality assurance is carried out professionally, consistently and transparently to ensure that it is acceptable to the higher education institution. EQA is done on the basis of the self-assessment/self-evaluation prepared by the institution. The processes for EQA include the following activities:

- a) Self-assessment/self-evaluation by the institution and production of the SAR/SER;
- b) External assessment of the institution through the SAR/SER, site visit to the institution and interviews with stakeholders of the institution, and documentary evidence to support institutional claims;
- c) Preliminary (verbal) report to the management of the institution before the review panel leaves the institution;
- d) Pronouncements made by institution before the final report is produced; and
- e) Final published report of external review.

## **4. Independence of Evaluation**

### **Standard**

**EQA shall be carried out by panels of external experts/peer reviewers drawn from a wide range of expertise and experience.**

### **Guidelines**

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The principle of best practices of external quality assurance is based on the consistent use of a wide range of expertise and experiences:

- a) Peer reviewers are drawn from academics, students, employers or professional practitioners;
- b) To ensure professionalism, consistency and transparency of output of experts/peer reviewers, it is necessary that they -
  - i. Are carefully selected,
  - ii. Have appropriate skills and are competent to perform tasks assigned to them,
  - iii. Are adequately inducted on EQA principles and procedures before undertaking the external review,
  - iv. Are independent and have no -conflict-of-interest with the institution or programme and sign a “Declaration of Independence Form”;
- c) In the case of possible conflict of interest, the institution is given the opportunity to object members of the proposed review panel; and
- d) Involvement of international experts is considered a good practice in EQA.

## **5. Decision and Reporting of EQA Outcomes**

### **Standard**

**EQA reports (summary or full reports) shall be published and made accessible to stakeholders.**

**Decisions made as a result of external quality assurance shall be clear and based on published criteria, processes and procedures for purposes of accountability.**

### **Guidelines**

The decisions of external quality assurance have a significant impact on institutions and programmes that are evaluated, assessed or judged. It is critical that:

- a) Publication of external quality assessment decisions are made without undermining the integrity of the review process;
- b) The EQA reports are the basis for follow-up actions, hence they are clear, precise and include:
  - i. Purpose of the review,
  - ii. Context description (of higher education institution),
  - iii. Description of procedures, including experts involved,
  - iv. Evidence, analysis and findings,
  - v. Examples of good practice of the institution,
  - vi. Conclusions,
  - vii. Recommendations for follow-up actions,
- c) The institution is given an opportunity to point out factual errors to ensure accuracy of the report;
- d) The institution is the first to receive the EQA report in the interest of transparency and fairness before distribution to other parties;

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- e) The decisions are not subject to external influences outside the panel of peer reviewers /experts;
- f) The decisions are in a format that has been made known to the institution concerned (for example, commendations, recommendations, and formal decisions);

## **6. Periodic Review of Institutions and Programmes**

### **Standard**

**External quality assurance of institutions and programmes should be undertaken on a cyclical basis.**

### **Guidelines**

The length of the review cycle is clearly defined and published.

- a) For academic programmes, the review cycle is consistent with the duration of the programme;
- b) Depending on the context of the quality assurance system, for institutions, the cyclical institutional review is carried out preferably every five years.
- c) Every cyclical review results in a report of general findings of the review.

## **7. Complaints and Appeals**

### **Standard**

**Processes of lodging complaints and appeals should be clearly defined and communicated to the institution concerned.**

### **Guidelines**

In order to safeguard the rights of the institution and ensure fairness in the decision-making process, it is important that the institution has access to the processes that allow it to raise issues of concern with the agencies if it can demonstrate that the outcome of the external review is not based on sound evidence. It is, therefore, critical that:

- a) There is established an appeals system/committee/board;
- b) The institution is allowed to raise issues of concern consistent with the appeals system;
- c) There are clearly defined complaints and appeals processes and procedures, which are consistently applied; and
- d) Appeals are handled professionally, are consistently applied, and feedback is provided.

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## **Part C Internal Quality Assurance for Quality Assurance Agencies**

### **Introduction**

Part C of the ASG-QA is for the purpose of internal quality assurance of Quality Assurance Agencies through self-assessment/evaluation of its policies, practices, procedures and activities and/or for external assessment/evaluation by another body/peer organisation. This section covers policies, processes and activities of the QAA, legal status, vision and mission, financial and human resources, independence, and criteria and processes used by the QAA.

### **1. Policies, Processes and Activities Standard**

**The QAA shall undertake its external quality assurance activities in accordance with the standards and guidelines articulated in Part B of the ASG-QA.**

**The QAA shall have a clearly published mission statement, indicating its goals and objectives.**

**The mission statement, policies, procedures and activities should be reflected in the daily work of the QAA. It should involve stakeholders in its governance and activities.**

### **Guidelines**

It is important that higher education institutions trust quality assurance agencies; the agencies are transparent, and describe and publish their objectives and activities, scope of work, expertise; and interaction with higher education institutions and other stakeholders.

The external quality assurance criteria, standards and processes are appropriate for the core activities of an institution or programme. These include:

- a) Teaching and learning, research and community work/engagement;
- b) Resources such as finances, staff, and learning resources;
- c) Specific areas such as levels of achievement, relative benchmarking and types of measures, and general guidelines; and
- d) Specific learning outcomes.

In order to carry out its core function of external quality assurance, the QAA conducts institutional audits/accreditation and programme accreditation/reviews on a regular basis, and provides in advance the framework to the concerned institution. To ensure transparency, the QAA's review/assessment processes include:

- a) Validation of the institution's self-assessment/evaluation against the agency's criteria, standards and processes;

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- b) Appointment of an external peer review panel comprising subject matter specialists and experts in higher education quality assurance matters;
- c) Site visit by the review panel and interviews with various staff members and stakeholders of the institution;
- d) Preliminary report before the review panel leaves the QAA;
- e) Final report of external review to the institution; and
- f) Follow-up activity of recommendations raised in the final report.

## **2. Legal Status**

### **Standard**

**The Quality Assurance Agency shall be legally established as an autonomous body and recognised by competent public authority as the quality assurance agency at national/regional level.**

### **Guidelines**

When external quality assurance is carried out for regulatory purposes, institutions have the security that the outcomes of the process are accepted within the higher education system, the stakeholders and the public.

## **3. Vision and Mission Statement**

### **Standard**

***The QAA shall have a written vision and mission statement or set of objectives taking cognisance of the higher education context.***

### **Guidelines**

The vision, mission and objectives show that:

- a) External quality assurance is the major activity of the agency;
- b) There is a systematic approach to achieving the vision, mission and objectives of the QAA;
- c) The objectives are implemented in line with a practical management plan that is linked to the agency's resources; and
- d) The ownership and governance structure is appropriate for the mandate and objectives of the agency.

## **4. Financial and Human Resources**

### **Standard**

**The QAA shall have adequate and appropriate human, financial and material resources to carry out its quality assurance mandate effectively and efficiently.**

### **Guidelines**

Due to the public interest of the QAA and the importance of higher education institutions, the QAA is adequately funded to:

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- a) Recruit adequate and qualified human resources, cognisant of gender balance, to carry out its external quality assurance activities;
- b) Carry out its external quality assurance mandate professionally, effectively and efficiently;
- c) Ensure improvement of its practices and development; and
- d) Inform the public about its activities and results/outcomes.

## 5. Independence of QAA

### Standard

**The QAA shall be independent and autonomous in its operations, outcomes, judgements and decisions.**

### Guidelines

The QAA make independent decisions and judgements that are not subject to change by third parties. Independence of an agency includes the following:

- a) **Organisational independence** - demonstrated by official documentation, such as legislative acts or statutes and instruments of governance, that stipulate the independence of the agency's work from third parties (e.g. HEIs, governments, other stakeholders).
- b) **Operational independence** - the definitions and operations of the agency's procedures and methods, nomination and appointment of qualified external experts (including the provision of no objection).
- c) **Independence of formal outcomes** – the final decision of quality assurance activity remains the responsibility of the QAA, even if experts/peers are involved in the quality assurance activity.

## 6. Internal Quality Assurance Criteria and Processes

### Standard

**The QAA shall have in place policies and processes for its own internal quality assurance related to defining, assuring and enhancing the quality and integrity of its activities.**

**The QAA shall ensure that criteria, standards and processes used for external quality assurance are pre-determined, pre-defined, published and made available to institutions ahead of external quality reviews/visits.**

### Guidelines

The QAA is accountable to its stakeholders and observes high professional standards and integrity by adhering to its guiding and ethical principles, and makes available internal quality assurance policies on its website. The QAA's decisions are impartial, rigorous, thorough, fair, and consistent, even if the judgements are made by different panels. The policies, therefore, ensure:

- a) Objectivity and fairness in all its judgements, decisions and conclusions;

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- b) Guidelines for external quality assurance procedures for higher education institutions are of a general nature, not prescriptive and do not interfere with institution's autonomy but help to guarantee all stakeholders and the international community of overall professionalism, visibility, transparency, credibility, integrity, and public accountability in the higher education sub-sector;
- c) Contribution to established national, regional and international mechanisms for integrity, transparency and public accountability; and
- d) Professionalism and public acceptance -
  - i. All persons involved in its activities are competent and act professionally and ethically,
  - ii. Internal and external feedback mechanisms lead to continuous improvement within the agency,
  - iii. Guards against intolerance of any kind or discrimination,
  - iv. Outlines the appropriate communication with relevant authorities in those jurisdictions in which they operate, and
  - v. Any activity carried out and materials produced by consultants are in line with its standards and guidelines and those of ASG-QA.
  - vi.

The QAA ensures that the criteria and processes used to ensure quality and relevance of higher education institutions, such as institutional or programme self-assessment/evaluation and quality assurance criteria and procedures, have appropriate follow-up mechanisms for recommendations and actions for further improvement.

The QAA ensures that there is comparability of standards of quality for all institutions.

The QAA ensures that there is thematic analysis (production of a summary of reports), carried out from time to time, which describes and analyses the general trends in the findings of external reviews, assessments as well as evaluations of institutions and their programmes for possible policy direction.

## **7. Benchmarking, Networking and Collaboration Standard**

**The QAA shall promote and participate in international initiatives, workshops and conferences on quality assurance to exchange and share experiences and best practices.**

### **Guidelines**

It is important that the QAA remains relevant in its activities. The QAA:

- a) Collaborates with all competent bodies for quality assurance and accreditation;
- b) Shares accurate, reliable and easily accessible information on criteria and standards for registration/licencing, quality assurance and accreditation of all modes of education delivery;

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- c) Contributes to the development of and/or updating of the appropriate regional and other international conventions on the recognition of courses and qualifications and serves as national or regional information centres as appropriate;
- d) Participates in bilateral or multilateral agreements for facilitating the recognition or determination of equivalences of each country's qualifications based on the procedures and criteria included in established international agreements for recognition of courses and qualifications; and
- e) Contributes to regional and international efforts to improve the accessibility, at the international level, of up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive information on recognised higher education institutions or providers.

## **8. Periodic Review of QAAs**

### **Standard**

**The QAA shall undergo periodic internal and external reviews in order to demonstrate its compliance with the ASG-QA.**

### **Guidelines**

The QAA has a system for continuous quality assurance of its own practices and activities that emphasises flexibility in response to the changing nature of higher education, effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives. The QAA, therefore:

- a) Conducts a comprehensive internal self-assessment of its practices and activities periodically, including data analysis;
- b) Subjects itself to periodic external review on the basis of self-assessment; and
- c) Ensures that required recommendations are disclosed and implemented for improvement.

**(NB. Any necessary appendices and references will be added to the final version.)**

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