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

## **DRAFT**

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## 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 and management of available 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 education provision in the phase of mushrooming of academic programs for income generation and churning of graduates with degrees that do not meet the needs of the employers. Furthermore, this development should take place in the context of African continental and national needs - rather than of the needs of the western world. 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; open and distance learning (ODL); and e-learning and other forms of technology-enhanced delivery.

The challenges associated with the provision of quality higher education are attributed to globalisation and internationalisation, a shift towards market and consumer demands and hence the introduction of courses specific to these requirements; as well as increased competition due to these developments.

It is unquestionable that education plays a fundamental role in the development of nations. While much of the focus on educational development over several decades has been on basic education, it is now 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 and macroeconomic changes. Equally, to take advantage of the developments in technology, sophisticated research knowledge and insights are required, which mostly derive from higher education. Most importantly, from a developmental perspective, to promote and preserve democratic institutions and

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governance, and promote new collaborative cultures, diverse and complex capabilities are required - the sources of which are again found in the higher education sector.

In order to liberate its full potential and work cooperatively in the continental interests, 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.

Harmonised quality higher education systems are imperative for Africa to realise the potential of higher education and research in achieving its vision of an integrated, prosperous peaceful continent. The African Union (AU) has, at the highest level, called for harmonisation and strengthening of the quality of higher education in Africa to make it locally relevant and globally competitive. This is in line with the AU's vision articulated in Agenda 2063 "The Africa We Want". There is also growing realisation globally on the need to establish harmonised higher education systems for facilitating the mobility of trained people with accredited qualifications. Similarly, increased attention is given to quality and quality assurance in higher education. The rapid growth in the number of students and higher education institutions (HEIs), and the increased focus on employability, have made quality and quality assurance central topics in the global higher education community. This is necessary in order to make education and training count when investing in Africa's population in order to reap demographic dividends.

Efforts toward the harmonisation of higher education in Africa are increasing since the diverse systems of higher education have resulted in the lack of recognition of university degrees constraining academic integration and the mobility of students across the continent. The AU's vision of building an integrated Africa requires a harmonised education system, where intra-Africa mobility and skills portability are necessary for integration. The Continental Education Strategy for Africa (CESA) recognises that *'Harmonized education and training systems are essential for the realization of intra-Africa mobility and academic integration through regional cooperation'* as articulated in its Guiding Principles.

Heads of African states and governments have expressed their commitment to setting up mechanisms for harmonisation and quality assurance processes to ensure comparable higher education in Africa. The First Ten-Year Implementation Plan of Agenda 2063 seeks to establish an African Accreditation Agency to develop and monitor educational quality standards across the continent.

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Harmonisation of quality assurance and accreditation, with strong continental cooperation, is instrumental in promoting internationalisation of higher education and facilitating student and staff mobility. The African Union Commission (AUC) is promoting harmonisation of quality assurance in higher education in Africa, in collaboration with the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the European Union (EU).

Harmonisation seeks a shared view on quality criteria and standards, and an equivalent way of assessing the quality. It is crucial to harmonise the standards and criteria so that all universities will be regulated according to comparable standards. Indeed, harmonisation does not mean that every institution or each country is forced into a uniform system. It rather means that the basic framework for quality assessment is equivalent. A key milestone for fostering harmony within the diverse African higher education system is the establishment of a continental quality assurance framework.

The AUC has therefore initiated the development of a Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF) to provide a continental platform for enhancing the provision of higher education quality, and promoting compatible methodologies.

One of the necessary instruments for the appropriate functioning of PAQAF is the development of the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA). Proper implementation of the ASG-QA can contribute to the provision of quality higher education, and ensure that the qualifications obtained by students and their experience of higher education remain consonant with the programme requirements, institutional vision and mission, and the objectives of higher education. In order to achieve these optimally, a fundamental prerequisite is that HEIs inculcate a culture of evidence-based quality in all their activities.

The role of quality assurance is, therefore, crucial in supporting African higher education systems and institutions in responding to challenges related to legal frameworks, governance, funding, qualifications of teaching staff, and research capacity. To address some of these challenges and ensure quality, there is need for collaboration and sharing of resources between institutions both locally and internationally; and through student exchange and international cooperation to allow for greater mobility of both staff and students.

## Purpose

The ASG-QA will support HEIs and quality assurance agencies (QAAs) in Africa in implementing good quality assurance practices; applying the standards and guidelines in higher education; developing adequate internal quality assurance mechanisms that fit international best practices; and assisting them in assessing their own quality through self-assessment. National QAAs should function as the national contacts for the ASG-QA.

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The ASG-QA can serve as the guiding framework in facilitating the establishment of QAAs in countries where they do not yet exist.

The specific purpose of the ASG-QA is, therefore, to support HEIs and QAAs 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 facilitating recognition and mobility of students and human resources within and across national borders of the continent;
- (c) ensure quality improvement/enhancement in higher education on 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 HEIs to develop a sustainable quality culture;
- (f) promote international competitiveness of Africa's higher education system; and
- (g) support the production of relevant teaching and learning resources as well as students' assessment instruments.

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 rather provide a mechanism for quality attainment in African HEIs and QAAs. They are developed to eventually add value to institutions and QAAs by providing a unified framework applicable to all quality assurance processes, allowing an enhancement-led approach for the escalation of institutional and educational quality.

## 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 HEIs and QAAs can add additional standards that will reflect their own traditions and contexts. The guidelines describe how the standards might be achieved and allow for provision of evidence to support the status of quality at HEIs and QAAs. They provide examples of good practice and the list is not exhaustive.

## Principles

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

HEIs and QAAs can adapt the standards and guidelines to fit their own systems and contexts based on evidence that they work.

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## Scope

The ASG-QA apply to all types of HEIs 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 postgraduate students, unless otherwise stated. Moreover, when addressing the staff of universities, all staff, from academic, 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 HEIs; Part B describes the methodologies (or standards) used for external quality assurance (EQA); and Part C focuses on the internal quality assurance of QAAs. The quality provision of open and distance learning (ODL) by HEIs is incorporated into the IQA implemented by institutions.

QAAs use the principles, practices and methodologies, and standards and guidelines for EQA when conducting programme/institutional accreditation or programme/institutional quality audits at HEIs but the agencies also appreciate the internal quality assurance standards and guidelines used by the 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 EQA 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/institutional accreditation or programme/institutional quality audits 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 interlinkage of the three parts.

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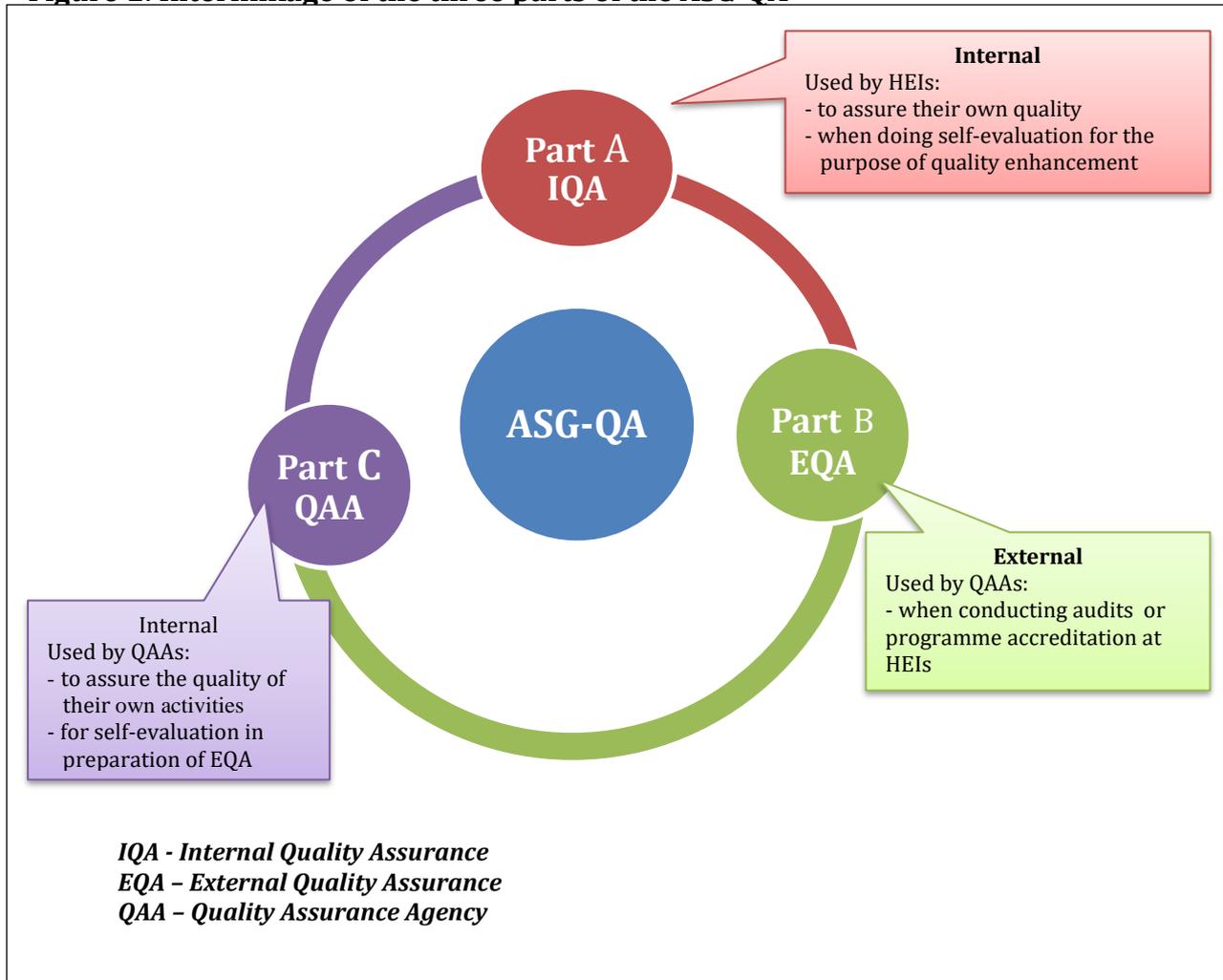
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Figure 1: Interlinkage of the three parts of the ASG-QA



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

### Introduction

In line with the principle that HEIs have the primary responsibility for the quality of their provision and assurance thereof, Part A presents standards and guidelines for IQA at the level of the 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 higher education; teaching and learning environment; research and innovation; collaboration; and community engagement.

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## Standard 1. Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives

### Standard

**The institution shall have published vision and mission statements that reflect its commitment to continuous quality enhancement; strategic objectives; and clear policies and procedures that are consistent with its vision and mission.**

### 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 activities (academic, research and community engagement), and that facilitates the coordination of the approval of policies, procedures and mechanisms. The institution, therefore, ensures that:

- a) The vision and mission statements and objectives reflect commitment to quality enhancement;
- b) Various forms of planning (for example, strategic, institutional, academic, and financial) are coordinated to ensure the quality of academic outcomes;
- c) Medium- and long-term plans reflect the programmes being offered as well as its research focus to ensure sustainability and continuous improvement;
- d) The formulation of the plans is collegial, promote a high degree of institutional integrity and responsiveness to change, and they are known to stakeholders; and
- e) 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.

## Standard 2. Governance and Management

### Standard

**The institution shall have clearly articulated governance and management structures. This will ensure sound and ethical governance and management, including robust quality assurance practices that support the achievement of its mission and legal mandate.**

### Guidelines

The institution:

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- a) Has qualified, competent and experienced leadership to oversee the development and management of a quality culture in 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; and these organs are properly coordinated to ensure efficiency, effectiveness and quality;
- c) Has a QA policy and structure, which are cascaded through all levels;
- d) Has clear communication systems and networks for the promotion of internal and external information dissemination for public accountability;
- e) Makes use of its autonomy responsibly; has policies and procedures for the delegation of authority for financial and management decisions, whenever needed;
- f) Enables students to participate in decision-making;
- g) Ensures regular consultations with stakeholders, reports and follows up actions on key issues of policy and operations to promote quality, cohesion, harmony and identity within the institution;
- h) Emphasises ethics, transparency, and academic integrity throughout its teaching, learning and research activities;
- i) 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;
- j) Publishes and disseminates on a regular basis, impartial and objective qualitative and quantitative information about courses offered, research undertaken and community services;
- k) Has developed and implemented effective processes for deterring, detecting and dealing with misconduct by students or staff;
- l) Has policies and activated procedures to manage conflict of interest; and
- m) Has effective, systematic, timely and fair processes for the investigation of complaints, grievances and appeals by students, staff and other stakeholders.

### Standard 3. Human Resources

#### Standard

**The institution shall have inclusive 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.**

#### Guidelines

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

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- a) Has clear policies and procedures that ensure equal opportunities and actual gender equality in human resources for recruitment, retention, and promotion of staff that is based on qualification, competence and skills;
- b) Has a core of full-time staff and keeps up-to-date records of staff numbers, qualifications and employment turnover rates;
- c) Has clear policies and procedures for staff development and continuing development;
- d) Has clear contractual agreements with staff that outline the conditions of employment and are aligned with any legislative requirements of the country of the institution;
- e) Provides adequate staff support facilities and services;
- 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.

## Standard 4. Financial Resource Management

### Standard

**The institution shall have adequate financial resources and prudent financial management that are aligned to its mission, objectives and mandate to ensure quality education.**

### Guidelines

Financial sustainability is the backbone of any institution, and adequate financial resources and prudent 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) Adequate financial resources to carry out its mandate and objectives effectively and efficiently;
- b) A prudent financial management system, which include strategies, policies and procedures for budgeting, resource allocation, repairs and maintenance of infrastructure, asset management, debt management and financial reporting;
- c) 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;
- d) Monitoring, evaluation (through financial audits) and benchmarking processes for the financial management system using international best practices or some other basis of accounting appropriate for the institution; and
- e) A system to address the risks, gaps and challenges identified for continuous improvement.

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## Standard 5. 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.

Infrastructure and facilities are in line with the goals and aims of the HEI, the programmes on offer, the teaching and learning strategy, as well as research.

The institution has:

- a) Adequate academic, administrative and recreational facilities (lecture theatres, seminar rooms, staff offices, laboratories, studios, workshops, etc.);
- b) A properly organised library equipped with facilities and resources for the number of students and staff (physical and/or electronic);
- c) Adequate ICT infrastructure;
- d) Facilities that conform to appropriate health and safety provisions; and
- e) Facilities accessible for persons with disabilities.

In the case of E-learning, the institution shall ensure:

- a) Sufficient infrastructure to address technical support in terms of:
  - i. Server space,
  - ii. Redundancy or load balancing,
  - iii. Technical help desk,
  - iv. Internet access, among others, and
  - v. Reliable technical services in terms of back-up and remote services.
- b) The institution shall have an IT plan for purposes of:
  - i. Maintenance and upgrading of technologies; and
  - ii. Ensuring reliability, privacy, safety and security.
- c) There is consistency and coherency of the technical framework for students and academic staff, which ensure that any change in technology is introduced in a way that minimises its impact on students and academic staff. Therefore, the institution has:
  - i. A clear structure of communicating changes in software programme, hardware or technical system / procedure when a student or staff proceeds from one course to another,
  - ii. A training programme / process for both staff and students when new software or a system is adopted,
  - iii. Access to training by off-campus or virtual students, and
  - iv. Learning policy on new software when a student or tutor proceeds from one course to another.

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- d) Hardware, software and technical support are an important element of e-learning and, therefore, the institution has the following in place:
- i. A help desk that is functioning 24 hours and 7 days a week,
  - ii. A system for monitoring and supporting a range of hardware / software,
  - iii. Clearly stated technical expectations,
  - iv. A system for Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs), which should be assessed and feedback given to students.

## Standard 6. 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 through all phases of the student's life cycle, and in issues concerning students' future employability.**

**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:

- 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 and persons with disabilities, where applicable;
- 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;
- e) There is continual collection and compilation of data on students' admission, progress and performance, and graduation rates;
- f) For the continual collection and compilation of data on students' admission, progress and performance, and graduation rates;
- g) That promote student retention and progression, and address issues concerning drop-out rates;
- h) That ensure rigorous processes for issuance and storage of certificates; and

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- i) That ensure storage of detailed records and transcripts, indicating the list of courses, units and grades.

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-centered learning and flexible modes of learning and teaching, are taken into account when allocating, planning and providing 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) Advising them on academic issues;
- b) Advising them on financial matters;
- c) Providing health and personal counselling services; and
- d) Providing career guidance.

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

## Standard 7. Design, Approval and Monitoring of Study Programmes

### Standard

**The institution shall have policies and systems that ensure the design and development of quality, relevant study programmes that are learning outcomes-based and aligned with the needs of stakeholders; and 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, procedures and processes for introducing new programmes with learning outcomes and that are competence-based, and amending or phasing out standing programmes and programmes are subject to continuous monitoring

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- (including periodic external review) and development to ensure currency, quality and relevance;
- b) Has academic programmes that are in line with its mission and objectives and address the expectations and needs of stakeholders; therefore, the programmes show range, depth, coherence, quality and relevance; are up-to-date and adequate in content and scope, promoting core content, ideas, values and the acquisition of employability skills, such as work-related learning/attachment/internship/traineeship;
  - c) Ensures that programmes' structure and credit hours/units are in accord with international norms for the amount of study required for each qualification it offers (or for the level of the awarded qualifications); and that programmes are approved by the relevant national QAA and professional bodies, where applicable;
  - d) Has effective mechanisms for stakeholders' participation in curriculum design, review and validation, including feedback from students, alumni and employers;
  - 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 structures and procedures for approval of programmes by relevant organs such as Senate, and authorities such as professional bodies, if applicable;
  - g) Has programmes that are delivered by adequate, qualified and competent staff with pedagogical skills;
  - h) 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
  - i) Ensures that the formulated learning outcomes are benchmarked against level descriptors of national or regional Qualifications Frameworks, as applicable.

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, 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;
- g) Navigational devices for online materials;
- h) Motivate and sustain learners' interests; and
- i) Use didactic concepts in writing modules.

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## Standard 8. Teaching, 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 learning and acquisition of appropriate knowledge, competencies and skills; and assure fair and transparent assessment based on student-centered 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.

The institution should ensure that:

- a) The teaching and learning strategies are student-centered 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; and
- d) There are mechanisms for students to provide feedback on their learning experience.

In the case of ODL:

- e) The decision on the medium or media of delivery should take into account the following:
  - 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 face-to-face sessions to provide general orientation and introduction to the course materials at the commencement of the course;
- g) There are special face-to-face sessions for difficult aspects of the course during the programme/course; and

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- h) There are face-to-face 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 and procedures are published and consistently applied, and include:
  - i. A range of assessment methods (e.g. coursework, projects, research, dissertation 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, and
  - vii. Rigour and security of assessment system;
- b) Assessment criteria are spelled out for each programme and are competence- or outcomes-based, where applicable;
- c) Assessment is carried out by competent and impartial examiners;
- d) Integrity of examinations and award of degrees are ensured to guard against examination malpractice;
- e) There are regular objective feedback to students on their strengths and weaknesses, and appropriate counselling support for improvement;
- f) There is a disciplinary and appeals process for students who may feel aggrieved, and;
- g) There is a quality assurance handbook, which is known to staff and students.

## Standard 9. Research and Innovation

### Standard

**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.**

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

### Guidelines

Research is one of the core activities of a higher education institution, and the institution thus needs an institution-wide research policy that sets the direction of its research. The

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policy is at both institutional and research-programme level (postgraduate studies) to ensure proper engagement in research. The institution ensures that:

- a) There is a shared understanding of the nature, role and goals of research;
- b) There are criteria, procedures and processes for the approval of research proposals and theses, and the conduct and supervision of research studies;
- c) There are policies, research management systems and strategies, adequate infrastructure and resources that facilitate all staff to undertake innovative research, and publish research results;
- 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 to ensure academic integrity;
- f) The research undertaken is relevant and responsive to the needs for academic advancement and community development expectations; and
- g) There is effective monitoring and evaluation of the research system.

## Standard 10. Community Engagement

### Standard

**The institution shall encourage engagement in community outreach programmes as part of its social responsibility.**

### Guidelines

A higher education institution is not only responsible for teaching, learning and research but also for serving the 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, national, regional, continental and global) for a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources in a context of partnership and reciprocity. For the benefit of the society, community engagement should:

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

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## Standard 10. Information Management

### Standard

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

### Guidelines

Reliable data is crucial for informed decision-making and for understanding what is working and what challenges need 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 teaching provided; 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.

## Standard 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 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:

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- (a) Promotional materials give a clear and accurate view of the programme, 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. Level of the programme on the National Qualifications Framework, where applicable,
  - v. Charges involved,
  - vi. Terms and conditions relevant to the programme,
  - vii. Conditions for withdrawal from the programme,
  - viii. Financial agreements with the provider; and
  - ix. 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 enroll in the programme, in the case of ODL,
  - iv. Time frame in which the programmes 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, and
  - x. Collection of certificates.

## Standard 12. Collaboration, Staff and Student Mobility

### Standard

**The institution shall have mechanisms that promote collaboration with other HEIs, professional bodies, research institutions and relevant social actors at national, regional, continental 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 programme, internationally. The degree awarding institution ensures appropriate and high quality delivery of programmes at the partner institution. 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 as those 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 the collaborating institutions are 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, the provider should clearly define the rights and responsibilities of parties, legal ownership, accreditation status of the programme, and resources available for the programme.

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

### Introduction

It is important that HEIs 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 HEIs. This section takes into account the standards and guidelines in Part A (IQA) for HEIs, ensures that IQA examined is relevant to and efficient for the concerned higher education institution, and that there is consistency between internal quality assurance undertaken 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.

### Standard 1. Objectives of External Quality Assurance and Consideration for Internal Quality Assurance

#### Standard

**External quality assurance 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 HEIs 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

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- h) Be recognised and accepted nationally, regionally, continentally and internationally.

## Standard 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 institutions are 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.

## Standard 3. Implementation Processes of External Quality Assurance

### Standard

**The criteria, processes, and procedures for EQA shall be pre-defined, reliable, published, and consistently implemented for purposes of accountability.**

### 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 self-assessment report (SAR)/Self-evaluation report (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) Oral report to the management of the institution before the review panel leaves the institution;
- d) Preliminary report provided to the institution before the final report is produced;
- e) Final report of the external review; and

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- f) Follow-up activity to ensure that recommendations raised in the final report are addressed.

## Standard 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

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, employers or professional practitioners, and students;
- 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, and
  - 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 to any member of the proposed review panel; and
- d) Involvement of international experts is considered a good practice in EQA.

## Standard 5. Decision and Reporting of External Quality Assurance Outcomes

### Standard

**Reports and decisions made as a result of external quality assurance shall be clear, based on published criteria, processes and procedures, and made accessible, 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) External quality assessment decisions are published 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:

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

## Standard 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; and
- c) Every cyclical review results in a report of general findings of the review.

## Standard 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:

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- 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, appeals processes 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 QAAs 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.

### Standard 1. Legal Status

#### Standard

**The QAA shall be legally established as an autonomous body and recognised by competent public authorities 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.

### Standard 2. 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); and
- 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.

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### Standard 3. Vision and Mission Statement

#### **Standard**

**The QAA shall have written and published vision and mission statements or 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.

### Standard 4. 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. It should involve stakeholders in its governance and activities.**

#### **Guidelines**

It is important that HEIs trust QAAs; the agencies are transparent, and describe and publish their objectives and activities, scope of work, expertise; and interaction with HEIs 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) Oral report before the review panel leaves the institution;
- e) Preliminary report presented to the institution for factual corrections;
- f) Final report of external review to the institution; and
- g) Follow-up activity of recommendations raised in the final report.

## Standard 5. 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, criteria, standards, processes and procedures 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;
- b) Standards, criteria and guidelines for external quality assurance for HEIs are of a general nature, not prescriptive and do not interfere with institutions' 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, continental 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. Timely 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

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- v. Any activity carried out and materials produced by consultants are in line with its standards and guidelines and those of the ASG-QA.

The QAA ensures that the criteria and processes used to ensure quality and relevance of HEIs, 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.

## Standard 6. 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 HEIs, the QAA is adequately funded to:

- a) Recruit adequate and qualified human resources, to carry out its external quality assurance activities; cognisant of gender, disadvantaged groups and persons with disabilities;
- 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.

## Standard 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.**

**It is good practice to encourage collaboration between the QAAs and professional bodies.**

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## Guidelines

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

- a) Collaborates with all competent authorities, such as professional 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;
- c) Contributes to the development and/or updating of the appropriate regional, continental 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, continental and international efforts to improve the accessibility, at the international level, of up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive information on recognised HEIs or providers.

## Standard 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 processes, practices and activities periodically, including data analysis;
- b) Subjects itself to periodic external review on the basis of self-assessment every five years by regional, continental or international quality assurance bodies; and
- c) Ensures that required recommendations are disclosed and implemented for improvement.

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## Annex 1 – Drafting Process of the ASG-QA

### **HAQAA Initiative:**

The ASG-QA was developed in the framework of the Harmonisation of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) Initiative. The Initiative was a service contract between December 2015 and November 2018 to support the development of a harmonised quality assurance and accreditation system at institutional, national, regional and pan-African continental levels, and funded by the European Union “Harmonisation, Quality and Accreditation” initiative (EC EAC/37/2014).

### **Technical Working Group:**

The Technical Working Group (TWG) consisted of experts in the quality assurance of higher education from different regions: Western, Eastern, Southern, Northern and Central Africa. The group included one expert from the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and the work of the group was coordinated by the European Association for quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the Association of African Universities (AAU).

### **Drafting process:**

The draft ASG-QA were based on the existing standards and guidelines of higher education already in use in African countries and by regional quality assurance networks or associations such as the Inter University Council of East Africa (IUCEA), Southern Africa (SADC), North Africa (AARU) and West Africa (CAMES). Additionally, the ASG-QA were benchmarked with the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (ESG 2015) and other international standards and guidelines. The TWG worked on the draft in several face-to-face meetings and a lot of drafting was carried out by the Chair and individual group members in between meetings.

### **Consultation:**

Mainly through the dissemination channels of the AAU, a consultation survey on the draft ASG-QA was disseminated to all major stakeholders: HEIs, QAAs and ministries and governing bodies of higher education in Africa, for their input and comments. Feedback was also received from AAU and the African Union Commission (AUC). The draft and the survey was available in English, French, Arabic and Portuguese. All feedback was considered comprehensively language by language.

Alongside the consultation process, to raise awareness, the draft was presented at several international conferences such as ICQAHEA conferences in 2016 and 2017 and the AAU

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50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary conference in June 2017. The draft was also discussed and feedback gathered at the Training Course module of the HAQAA Initiative that brought together quality assurance experts from across the continent.

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