Mapping Between Africa Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ASG-QA) and African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) for Quality Assurance in Higher Education

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1.   Description of ASG-QA and AQRM

The ASG-QA and AQRM are part of the development of the Pan-African Quality Assurance and Accreditation Framework (PAQAF) which was commissioned and endorsed by the African Union Commission in 2016. The PAQAF is an overriding framework for the harmonization of quality assurance activities in higher education in Africa. The PAQAF consists of several tools and activities that have been developed, or are in the process of being developed, that are intended to ensure quality provision in higher education in Africa. These tools and activities comprise:

1. **African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)** - developed through collaboration between AU and EU between 2017 and 2018 under the HAQAA Initiative. Pending endorsement by the Africa Union.
2. **Continental Qualifications Framework –** Pending development.
3. **African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) –** _its development was spearheaded by the Commission of the African Union, and endorsed by the African Union in 2007. A self-rating exercise was conducted on 32 institutions in 2010, revised and piloted again in 2014 and in 2017._
4. **Addis Convention for Recognition of Qualifications–** _developed, pending legal approval and ratification by many African states._
5. **African Credit Accumulation and Transfer System –** _proposal has been initiated by the TUNING Africa initiative, pending further development._
6. **Continental Register for QA agencies and quality assured higher education institutions** - _pending development._

It is proposed that a **Continental Accreditation Agency** will be established to have the oversight and be responsible for the implementation of the above tools and frameworks; with the general mandate of coordinating, promoting, and facilitating harmonisation of QA and accreditation systems in Africa. Since the Continental Agency is yet to be established, certain tools of the PAQAF are currently being developed, tested and implemented by African stakeholder organisations in the higher education sector, and supported by international partners like the European Union.

1.1   The African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA)

The ASG-QA is an overriding set of standards and guidelines that provide a baseline for the development of good quality assurance systems and practices in higher education in Africa, at both HEI level and Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) level, through self-assessment of their own quality and external review. The ASG-QA have three parts.

Part A - *Internal quality assurance* (in higher education institutions) comprising 13 standards with respective guidelines for self-assessment of quality by higher education institutions. The standards cover the following quality aspects: (a) vision, mission and strategic objectives, (b) governance and management, (c) human resources, (d) financial resource management, (e) infrastructure and facilities, (f) student recruitment, admission, certification and support services, (g) design, approval, monitoring and evaluation of study programmes, (h) teaching and learning and assessment, (i) research and innovation, (j) community engagement, (k) information management system, (l) public communication, and (m) collaboration, staff and student mobility.

Part B - *External quality assurance,* describes the standards used for external quality assurance (as conducted by regulatory bodies and agencies). The standards and guidelines cover the following 7 aspects: (a) objectives of external quality assurance and consideration for internal quality assurance; (b) designing external quality assurance mechanisms fit-for-purpose; (c) implementation process of external quality assurance; (d) independence of evaluation; (e) decision and reporting of external quality assurance outcomes; (f) periodic review of institution's programmes; and (g) complaints and appeals.

Part C - *Internal quality assessment of quality assurance agencies,* focuses on standards and guidelines for internal quality assurance of quality assurance agencies. They cover the following 9 aspects: (a) legal status; (b) vision and mission statements; (c) governance and management; (d) independence of QAAs; (e) policies, processes and activities; (f) internal quality assurance; (g) financial and human resources; (h) benchmarking, networking and collaboration; and (i) periodic review of QAAs.

The ASG-QA aim is to support higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies in Africa by:
a) Promoting good quality assurance practices and developing adequate internal and external quality assurance mechanisms and processes that fit international best practices;
b) Defining and promoting the relationship between internal and external quality assurance;
c) Developing mutual trust between higher education agencies, regulatory bodies and institutions, thus facilitating recognition and mobility of students and human resources within and across national borders of the continent
d) Promoting transparency and accountability by providing appropriate information on quality assurance to the public.

The ASG-QA were developed between 2017 and 2018 under the umbrella of the Harmonization of Africa Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) Initiative, funded by the European Union in the context of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership, and premised on existing standards and guidelines in different African countries and regions and benchmarked globally. The standards are available in the four languages of the African Union: French, English, Arabic and Portuguese.

The ASG-QA invites/allows HEIs and quality assurance regulatory bodies/agencies to reflect on the standards and then to look for data to be given as evidence (the HEI or the regulatory body chooses its own indicators to prove that it meets the standard). The idea is that ASG-QA gives room for *"fitness for purpose"* and for different interpretations on how to measure quality and provide data on the achievement of common standards and guidelines.

The process of the development of ASG-QA included consultations with higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies, as well as the African Union Commission (AUC). The ASG-QA are pending formal political endorsement by the Africa Union, which should be obtained in 2019. It is expected that proper implementation of ASG-QA by higher education institutions and quality assurance agencies will inculcate a culture of quality through self-assessment, thereby contributing to the provision of quality higher education in the African continent for international competitiveness. Consequently, the ASG-QA provide an overarching framework for quality assurance in higher education.

The implementation of the ASG-QA by higher education institutions, specifically, can be strengthened and supported by the African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM) - a self-evaluation tool for higher education institutions (see below) – which can be used as a means for the assessment of the ASG-QA and of their fulfilment.

1.2 The African Quality Rating Mechanism (AQRM)

The AQRM was adopted by the Conference of Ministers of Education of the African Union (COMDAF) in 2007. It is *a quality assessment tool for higher education institutions* in Africa that supports continuous quality improvement.

The AQRM is a self-evaluation/self-rating tool that consists of three parts: the survey questionnaire (section 1), institutional-level quality reference points (section 2), and programme-level quality reference points (section 3).

Section 1 - Survey questionnaire address (a) intuition's general information, (b) institution's profile, (c) students' profile, (d) facilities, (e) faculty/staff profile, (f) governance and management, (g) teaching and learning, (h) linkage with the industry sector, (i) research and community outreach, and (j) internationalization.

Section 2 – Self-rating at institutional level comprising key reference points and standards for quality rating that address (a) governance and management, (b) Infrastructure, (c) Finance, (d) teaching and learning, (e) research, publication and innovation, and (f) community/societal engagement.

Section 3 – Self-rating at programme level comprising of the following key reference points and standards on quality rating of programmes that address (a) programme planning and management, (b) curriculum development, (c) teaching and learning, (d) assessment, and (e) programme results.

With respect to sections 2 and 3, institutions are asked to rate themselves against standards defined under each reference point, on a scale of 0-4. In total there are 49 Institutional level standards and 35 programme level standards. It should be noted that **the AQRM is not a ranking instrument** for comparing institutions and is not used to create league tables.

The AQRM has been developed with the oversight of the African Union Commission (AUC) and in cooperation with higher education stakeholders and experts. The AUC supported a pilot self-rating exercise in 2010 in which 32 Africa higher education institutions participated. Based on the experience and feedback gained from the pilot survey, a revised version of the AQRM questionnaire and rating instrument was developed and is now available in English, French and Portuguese.

As the AQRM should ideally be complemented with a validation visit, in 2014, a pilot cohort of nine universities participated in the self-rating exercise and received validation visits of expert teams. In 2017, the HAQAA Initiative facilitated the selection of an additional 15 universities to conduct the AQRM self-rating survey and receive verification visits by teams of African and European experts.

Currently, the AQRM survey is publicly available for any interested institutions on the website of the Association of African Universities, the implementing body of the African Union Commission for higher education (link).

1.3   Concluding Remarks

The objective of **ASG-QA** is to provide **minimum standards** to ensure quality of provision and quality assurance processes in both higher education institutions (HEIs) and quality assurance agencies (QAAs); while the objective of the **AQRM** is to assess to what **extent HEIs are achieving the standards**. The **AQRM specially supports the implementation of Part A of the ASG-QA** (as opposed to Parts B and C, which apply to quality assurance agencies and regulatory bodies)

The **AQRM,** therefore, provide a means to measure the fulfilment of the standards in Part A of ASG-QA. It is an instrument to be used by HEI to gather evidence and assess themselves in terms of their quality provision.

As the AQRM and the ASG-QA were developed at different points in time, a mapping of the AQRM reference points has been done against Part A of the ASG-QA. This is indicated below in order to help HEIs and their stakeholders to better understand how these two PAQAF tools

relate to each other in ensuring quality of higher education in Africa. It is reiterated that the tools are compatible.

2. Correlation of AQRM to ASG-QA Part A

2.1 Overview

The correlation between AQRM and ASG-QA demonstrates that AQRM is complementary tool to the ASG-QA. The AQRM is a useful tool for verification of achievement of the ASG-QA (Part A) by higher education institutions with respect to ensuring quality.

It should be noted that the AQRM is comprised of three sections: Section 1 - General information on institutions, Section 2- Self rating at institutional level, and Section 3 – Self-Rating at programme level. In particular Parts 2 and 3 are used to create an evidence base for institutional self-rating and verification by external experts.

The AQRM has been mapped against each standard in the ASG-QA Part A, to check how the standard has been addressed by the AQRM. The Table also shows certain standards in the AQRM that pertain to self-rating at programme-level, as they also correlate to the ASG-QA.

The mapping has revealed that the AQRM is closely related to several standards in Part A of ASG-QA (See Table 1).

Table: *Correlation Between ASG-QA and AQRM*

		Quality Aspect Considered	
S/N	Quality Aspect	ASG-QA	AQRM
1	Overview	**Objective** is to ensure that HEIs adopt minimum quality standards to ensure quality of graduates	**Objective** is to assess the quality self-Rating by higher education institutions and by external reviewers.
		The ASG-QA is presented in 3 Parts, addressing both internal and external QA: **Part A** – Addresses minimum standards for HEIs (which correlates to the AQRM). **Part B** – Addresses minimum standards for approaches to external quality assurance. **Part C** – Addresses minimum standards for QAAs	The AQRM is presented in 3 parts, all focused on institutional (internal) assessment: **Section 1**: General information on institutions **Section 2:** Self-Rating at Institutional level. **Section 3:** Self-Rating at programme level
2	**Mapping of Quality Standards as**	**ASG-QA (Part A – Self-Assessment by Higher Education Institutions)**	**AQRM**

S/N	Quality Aspect	Quality Aspect Considered	
		ASG-QA	AQRM
	Listed in the ASG-QA		
2.1	Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives	Standard 1, page 10)	Vision and mission are covered under 2.1 on Governance and Management (page 15)
2.2	Governance and Management	Standard 2 (Page 11)	Covered in Section 2.1 (Page 21)
2.3	Human Resources	Standard 3 (Page 12)	Covered under governance (Section 2.1)
2.4	Financial Resource Management	Standard 4 (page 12)	Covered in Section 2.3 (page 25)
2.5	Infrastructure and Facilities	Standard 5 (page 13)	Covered in Section 2.2 as Infrastructure (page 23)
2.6	Student Recruitment, Admission, Certification and Support Services	Standard 6 (page 14)	Students Support is covered in section 2.4 under Teaching and Learning (page 27) It is also covered in Section 1.3 as part of data collection on Student Profile, Q16 and Q17 (pages 7-8).
2.7	Design, Approval, Monitoring and Evaluation of Study Programs	Standard 7 (page 16) It is covered generally, not on any specific academic programme. Consequently it focusses on the general principles of programme quality.	It is covered in detail under Section 3.1 on Self-Rating at Programme level (page 34). It is also covered in section 1.7 under Teaching and Learning as part of data collection (page 13-15), Q32, Q33, Q34
2.8	Teaching, Learning and Assessment	Standard 8 (page 17)	Covered in Section 2.4 as Teaching and Learning (page 27). It is also covered in section 1.7 under Teaching and Learning (page 13-15).
2.9	Research and Innovation	Standard 9 (page 19)	Covered in Section 2.5 as Research, Publication and Innovation (page 29). It is also covered in section 1.9 as Research and Community

		Quality Aspect Considered	
S/N	**Quality Aspect**	**ASG-QA**	**AQRM**
			Outreach as part of data collection (pages 16-18).
2.10	Community Engagement	Standard 10 (page 20)	Covered in Section 2.6 as Community / Societal Engagement (page 31).
2.11	Information Management System	Standard 11 (page 20)	It is covered in section 1.3 (Student Profile), section 1.4 (Facilities), Section 1.5 (Faculty/Staff Profile) as part of data collection (pages 6-11).
2.12	Public Communication	Standard 12 (page 21)	Not covered
2.13	Collaboration, Staff and Student Mobility	Standard 13 (page 22)	It is covered in Section 1.8 under Linkage with the Industry Sector as part of data collection (pages 15-16)
3	**Programme Level**		
	Reference Points and Standards	**Programme-Level Assessment**	**Programme Level Assessment**
		Not covered by ASG-QA	**Covered under Self-Rating at Programme-level**
3.1	Programme Planning and management	Covered under Standard 7 Design, Approval, Monitoring and Evaluation of Study Programmes	Comprehensively covered under Section 3.1 Programme Planning and management
3.2	Curriculum Development	Covered under Standard 7 – See above	Comprehensively covered under Section 3.2 Curriculum Development
3.3	Teaching and Learning	Covered under Standard 8 Teaching, Learning and Assessment.	Section 3.3 Teaching and Learning
3.4	Assessment	Covered under Standard 8 See above	Section 3.4 Assessment
3.5	Programme Results	Covered under Standard 8 See above	Section 3.5 Programme Results
4	**EQA and QAA**	**ASG-QA Part B** – Standards for External quality assurance	Not addressed by AQRM nor is it the intent of this tool

Quality Aspect Considered		
S/N	**Quality Aspect**	**ASG-QA**	**AQRM**
		ASG-QA Part C – Standards for Quality assurance agencies / bodies	Not addressed by AQRM nor is it the intent of this tool

2.2   ASG-QA Standards Addressed by AQRM- Section 2

The following nine (9) standards of the ASG-QA Part A are addressed directly or indirectly by Section 2 of the AQRM for institutional quality self-assessment of higher education institutions:

a) Standard (1) - Vision, Mission and Strategic Objectives (indirectly covered under Governance and Management);
b) Standard (2) - Governance and Management (direct);
c) Standard (3) - Human Resources (indirectly covered under governance);
d) Standard (4) - Financial Resource Management (direct);
e) Standard (5) - Student Recruitment, Admission, Certification and Support Services (indirectly covered under Teaching and Learning);
f) Standard (6) - Student Recruitment, Admission, Certification and Support Services (indirectly covered under Teaching and Learning;
g) Standard (8) - Teaching, Learning and Assessment (direct);
h) Standard (9) - Research and Innovation (direct; and
i) Standard (10) - Community Engagement (direct).

2.3   ASG-QA Standards Addressed by AQRM Section 1 or 3

The following three (3) standards of the ASG-QA Part A are addressed by Section 1 or 3 of the AQRM:

a) Standard (7) - Design, Approval, Monitoring and Evaluation of Study Programs, is covered in Section 3.1 of AQRM under Self-Rating at programme level;
b) Standard (11) - Information Management System – Some information on this is covered in Section 1.3 on Student Profile, Section 1.4 on Facilities, and Section 1.5 on Faculty/Staff Profile as part of the data collection for the AQRM.
c) Standard (13) - Collaboration, Staff and Student Mobility, included as part of questionnaire in Section 1.8 under Linkage with the Industry Sector as part of data collection for AQRM.

2.4   *ASG-QA Standards Not Addressed by AQRM*

Standard (12) - Public Communication is not addressed by AQRM at all.

3. Conclusions and Recommendations for Strengthening the compatibility of the AQRM with the ASG-QA

3.1 The AQRM is compatible with Part A of the ASG-QA and can be used to verify the achievement of Part A of the ASG-QA in higher education institutions.

3.2 In order to ensure coherency of the PAQAF tools and frameworks that have been developed, the AQRM should be considered, promoted and used as a tool for self-assessment of higher education institutions in complementarity with ASG-QA Part A. It can also be the basis of external review of HEIs, in line with the productive validation and verification visits that have been conducted in the past AQRM evaluation exercises.

All standards in the ASG-QA (except standards 12) are generally covered by AQRM,

3.3 The AQRM could be strengthened to address the following standards in ASG-QA Part A, even if they are covered in the questionnaire section. This could be considered for a future revision of the AQRM.

(a) Standard (7) - ***Design, Approval, Monitoring and Evaluation of Study Programs***. Although this is comprehensively covered under self-rating at programme-level, it should also be comprehensively addressed under self-rating at institutional level, as provided for in ASG-QA Part A.

(b) Standard (11) - ***Information Management***. It is a critical that higher education institutions adopt the culture of collecting and keeping reliable data and analyzing them for decision making on other activities that cut across the institutions (e.g, community engagement, collaboration) and not just for academic programmes; also and for addressing challenges as they arise, bases on their vision and mission and strategic objectives.

(c) Standard (12) - ***Public Communication***. It is important that higher education institutions publish information about their activities in an accurate and objective manner; and to ensure that the information is up-to-date. Such information should include, programmes offered, selection criteria, expected learning outcomes, delivery modes, qualifications awarded, amongst many others.

(d) Standard (13) - ***Collaboration, Staff and Student Mobility***. It is important that self-rating/assessment at institutional-level also address collaboration with other organisations such as other higher education institutions, research institutions, professional bodies, relevant social actors at national, regional, continental and international level.

3.4 In future AQRM evaluations, higher education institutions should also receive the ASG-QA for reference, as a background document for self-evaluation while filling out the AQRM questionnaire.

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