COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Title: Higher Education Practice Standard for
**Transitions from Higher Education**



## 1. Preamble for the HEPS on *Transitions from Higher Education*

The Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS), transitions from higher education, is located within the focus area of "facilitating transitions". The purpose of this HEPS is to articulate acceptable levels of educational provision and experiences for higher education and, in so doing, mediate the expectations of students and the public. It further expresses appropriate support functions that enable successful transitioning from higher education into the domain of lifelong learning and life-wide learning and, therein, employability, entrepreneurship, and continuous professional development (QAF, 2021). Transitions are a key site for transformation, ensuring that structural barriers to access, progression, and employability are dismantled, and that students from historically excluded groups receive targeted support.

Transitioning from higher education is a critical measure of transformation. It relates to the movement or progression of students from higher education into a domain of lifelong as well as life-wide learning that encompasses transformation, wellness, growth, career development, entering the working environment, pursuing entrepreneurship, and furthering studies both vertically, horizontally, or diagonally. It is acknowledged that Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), both public and private, traditional, comprehensive, and universities of technology, are differentiated by their respective mission, vision, strategic goals, and plans bringing to the fore varied sets of higher education transitioning outcomes. Institutions are required to take the higher education practice standard into account in all activities and types of provisioning related to transitioning from higher education. Applying the HEPS requires a reflexive generative approach to drive and nurture continuous quality

improvement through cyclical processes of reflection and generated action to achieve sustained improvement over time (QAF, 2021).

**The Need**

Worldwide, the rapid advances in the field of information and technology, population increase, global connectivity, climate change, arising and unresolved wars, violence, genocide, increased mobility across borders, demographic changes, and urbanisation have impacted and changed the subject knowledge, skills and competencies needed for sustained livelihoods and social justice (Alpaydın and Kültür, 2022). The pressure is immense for qualified, competent, skilled graduates to transition from higher education and contribute positively to realising the global Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015) and our National Development Plan: 2030 (NPC, 2012). In South Africa, despite an average of 220,000 graduates being released annually from 26 public universities, with private higher education institutions releasing about 10,000 graduates annually, the unemployment of graduates remains remarkably high (Vezi-Magigaba and Utete, 2023). The discouraging experiences of unemployed graduates are compounded by their competencies, limited exit-level skill sets, and content knowledge that quickly become outdated in the global economic and social context of rapid development and change (Monteiro, Almeida, and Garc'ia-Aracil, 2021). Poverty and high rates of unemployed youth in South Africa, inclusive of graduates who have transitioned from higher education, require responsibility, accountability, and transparency from the higher education sector regarding the transitioning journey that incorporates recognition of prior learning and articulation, with appropriate and relevant exit level outcomes of learning and teaching and graduate attributes. Hence, there is a need for a higher education practice standard to focus on transitioning from higher education. The role of microcredentials in closing some of the transitioning gaps are significant and should be considered by HEIs.

**The Context**

Graduates in South Africa are not a homogenous group. Rather, they come from diverse backgrounds and socioeconomic environments, with most black graduates (inclusive of coloured and Indian) having fewer opportunities. Experiences of transitioning from higher education into the world of work are, therefore, differentiated, and nuanced. Some graduates find employment soon after graduating, while others enter a world of chronic unemployment (defined as unemployed for longer than 12 months) despite their qualifications. There is sufficient evidence to show that race continues to shape employment outcomes for most graduates. Unemployment rates among black graduates remain significantly higher than white graduates regardless of the institution they are transitioning from and the nature of their qualifications. Graduates coming from low socio-economic backgrounds, rural areas, and living with unemployed household members are more prone to unemployment. Gender is also differentiated, with female graduates facing higher levels of unemployment. Cumulatively, demographics shape processes of higher education

transitioning in complex, intersectional and heterogeneous ways (Hooley, Hanson, and Clark, 2023; Graham, Williams, and Chisoro, 2019; Chetty, 2012).

Unemployed graduates, in many cases, find that their competencies, skill sets, and content knowledge have become outdated within a brief period in the global economic context of rapid development and change (Monteiro *et al*., 2021). Even more daunting from a graduate perspective is the realisation that technical and subject knowledge, competencies and skills obtained through their qualification mismatch employer expectations about what their qualification should offer in the world of work (Graham *et al*., 2019). The challenge for young graduates in South Africa transitioning from higher education into contemporary professions and the world of work is immense. In most cases, new graduates do not meet employer expectations of having blended skill sets that comprise both technical knowledge and essential soft skills or transferable skills in their respective fields. In addition, the growing prominence placed on soft skills or transferable skills in the new world of work makes the limitation thereof among new graduates a serious impediment to their employability. Higher education institutions are responsible and accountable for ensuring that graduates are adequately equipped with comprehensive skill sets to make a meaningful contribution to society, the economy and to the success of their respective careers (Vezi-Magigaba and Utete, 2023; Alpaydin and Kültür, 2022).

Graduates rely on accumulated work experience to build their soft transferable skill sets and hone their competencies. Often these become unrelated to the field of study they transitioned from higher education with. Knowing an academic subject is no longer sufficient to ensure employability or career development. Soft transferable skills, competencies, and suitable attributes are critical for ways to succeed in the world of work. Key abilities include retrieving and handling information, communication, and presentation, planning and problem-solving, social development and interaction, learning to learn, and continuous learning. Studies related to transitioning from higher education identified a lack of relevant work experience, limited information on efficient and effective job searches, low social capital, and the high costs associated with work-seeking as critical barriers to securing work. Improved work-integrated learning of qualifications, practical work experience and accessible work-seeker support could mitigate some of the barriers to transitioning from higher education (Nimmi, Zakkariya and Rahul, 2021; Graham *et al*., 2019; Chetty, 2012).

Transitioning from higher education into the world of work cannot solely be achieved through employer incentives. Higher education institutions are also responsible and accountable for empowering graduates with related qualifications, soft skills, and competencies as well as attributes that will increase their employability prospects in South Africa (Vezi-Magigaba and Utete, 2023). Commonplace criticisms levelled against the notion of universities merely producing graduates for the workplace while acknowledged are transcended through this HEPS. It is our collective responsibility to address the key transformation, developmental, and social justice challenges facing South Africa. Unemployment, economic inequality, poverty, security, violence, discrimination, social inequality, and human capital disparity are present-day challenges faced by students, graduates, and higher education institutions, both public

and private. The responsibility to produce quality graduates with appropriate attributes, skill sets and competencies who are empowered in pathways of transitioning from higher education is immense (Chetty, 2012). This responsibility should not be lost in ideological differences and irreconcilable debates "on notions of a university." Institutions should rather acknowledge the growing global awareness of the importance of higher education in the development and growth of a knowledge-based post-industrial economy, as well as the significant role and contribution the higher education sector makes in the human capital development of youth (Chetty, 2012). Increased responsibility and accountability accompany this recognition, to produce highly mobile graduates who are enabled to successfully transition from higher education into the domain of lifelong as well as life-wide learning and therein the world of work, varied career pathways and professional growth as positive contributors to the sustainable development of society at large.

**The Scope**

In defining the scope of the Transitioning from Higher Education Practice Standard, we are foregrounding the call for higher education institutions to reflect more critically on and respond more deliberately to the need for producing graduates with the necessary attributes, skill sets and competencies that would enable them to function effectively in a radically changing society, operate professionally, successfully perform in the world of work, with a toolset to expand learning and career pathways foregrounding the call for higher education institutions to reflect more critically on and respond more deliberately to the need for producing graduates with the necessary attributes, skill sets and competencies that would enable them to function effectively in a radically changing society, operate professionally, successfully perform in the world of work, with a toolset to expand learning and career pathways. While we acknowledge that the Higher Education sector is differentiated, we collectively aim to achieve coherence and integration with transitioning into, through and ultimately from higher education (QAF, 2021). We place the transitioning in, through and from higher education within the arena of lifelong and life-wide learning. The flow of these transitions is not linear but rather cyclical when rooted within the domain of lifelong and life-wide learning. Transitioning into and through higher education may result in students exiting higher education without having completed their qualifications. Much later, through experience and life-wide learning, some students may choose to journey back, transitioning in, and through higher education, completing their qualifications and transitioning from higher education into the world of work and the larger all-encompassing domain of lifelong as well as life-wide learning.

Students are agents in their education, learning, continuous learning, and engagement with employability. Their transitioning journey is filled with a range of life experiences and may well include paid and voluntary work as well as community, sports, and cultural participation. They make education choices, can and do influence lifelong learning options and selections, and impact career prospects and life-wide learning. Understanding students' insight into their graduate attributes; their skills knowledge and understanding, or graduateness; as well as their views and perceptions of life-wide learning, the world of work

and its environment, and how they fit into this, employability, and their views on their career trajectories can enrich discussions that strive to maintain a student-centred focus (Chetty, 2012).

As the world anticipates further industrial development and change, it is crucial to transform outcomes-based education. Qualifications should have clearly defined exit-level outcomes that encompass practical knowledge, theoretical knowledge, competencies, skill sets, level descriptors, and attributes that students possess upon completing their qualification and transitioning from higher education. It has become increasingly imperative that what students are supposed to know and be capable of when graduating from the educational system is aligned with industry, the professional environment, our changing society's needs, sustainable development plans and goals, and the continuously changing world of work. Employability is a set of achievements that constitute a necessary but not sufficient condition for gaining employment. Employability should not be limited to factors of skills and competency only, since social inequalities, economic disparity, as well as factors like social class, race, ethnicity, age, gender, and disability all influence opportunities for employment (Nimmi *et al*., 2021; Chetty, 2012;). The HEPS Transitioning from Higher Education is grounded in lifelong as well as life-wide learning and incorporates human development, graduate attributes, and employability.

Developing an attitude towards lifelong learning and life-wide learning during the higher education transitioning process can help students catch up with labour market demands and enhance their employability perceptions. The development of lifelong learning and life-wide learning will benefit students' human development fostered over their transitioning years of higher education. Graduates acquired level of skills and knowledge (human development resources) can be consolidated and expanded through lifelong as well as life-wide learning. In this HEPS, human development is conceptualised as consisting of the following key components: social development, cultural development, psychological development, inner value development, professional and career development, and scholastic development. The overall accumulation of these factors impacts students' employability chances either positively or negatively. Developing a positive attitude towards lifelong learning and life-wide learning will increase students' human development and augment employability perceptions and outcomes. A variety of online courses like massive open online courses (MOOCs), open educational resources (OERs), and non-credit bearing short courses linked to microcredentials provide students with infinite learning opportunities both nationally and globally (Nimmi *et al*., 2021), with the domain of lifelong learning and life-wide learning coupled with transitioning from higher education. The sector is tasked with reflecting on the programme design of qualifications so that the nurture and empowerment of students to take responsibility for their learning and continuous learning is incorporated throughout students' higher education transitioning journey. The transitioning cycle propels students into a lifelong and wide learning continuum that could stimulate and prod the lifelong learner back into the higher education transitioning cycle, with a return to either complete a qualification or start a new qualification. The transitioning continuum

encompasses transformation, lifelong learning, life-wide learning, programme design, graduate attributes, work-integrated learning, microcredentialing, employability, the future of work, work-life balance, relationships with stakeholders, globalisation, and global citizenship.

**The Purpose**

Unemployed graduates are often not even partially integrated into the broad domain of lifelong learning. As a result, the subject knowledge of their qualification, competencies, and skill sets, in many instances, become outdated very soon in our rapidly changing social, economic, political, and technological environment. Thus, compromising employability in the related field of study of their qualification. To enable a successful transition from higher education, the student experience ought to be embedded in the larger domain of lifelong learning aligned with life-wide learning, human development, and employability. To facilitate a successful transition from higher education, a shift of focus in the very design of the qualification and student experience is needed that incorporates lifelong learning, a holistic engagement with life-wide learning, human development, graduate attributes, changes in the world of work and society at large, and employability.

The purpose of this HEPS is to facilitate an integrated approach aimed at enhancing higher education transitioning by bringing together stakeholders from industry, higher education institutions, government, the non-government sector, and the student body (Vezi-Magigaba and Utete, 2023; Debra Myhill, 2020). It is also aimed at understanding the graduates' experiences in how they have engaged with their transitioning from higher education by navigating barriers limiting employability, taking responsibility to facilitate enablers into the domain of lifelong learning, mapping their career pathways, developing human development resources for entry into the world of work, and securing professional and career success.

## 2. Rationale for the HEPS on *Transitions from Higher Education*

In the past ten years, graduate unemployment increased from 5,5% in 2013 to 10,6% in 2023. Furthermore, approximately 3,7 million (36,1%) young people aged 15-24 years were not in employment, education, or training (NEET) (Stats SA, 2023). Therefore, it is paramount that HEIs, both public and private traditional, comprehensive, and universities of technology, focus on students transitioning from higher education. This transition from higher education to the world of work represents a critical phase in the student's educational journey, marking the culmination of academic achievements and the entrance into the dynamic realm of professional life. Recognising this transition's profound impact on students' lifelong career development, establishing a dedicated HEPS becomes imperative to ensure their holistic development and sustained success in an ever-evolving global landscape.

The HEPS will result in a framework for evaluating and enhancing higher education practices. By establishing clear metrics for assessing transitioning success and fostering a culture of continuous improvement, institutions can adapt to changing circumstances and consistently deliver value to students and employers. The HEPS on Transitioning from Higher Education seeks to advance employability, entrepreneurship, human development within lifelong- and life-wide learning.

**Human Development**

Human development is a broad concept that focuses on change, progression, and advancement in education and wellness to increase the general well-being, standard and quality of living. It includes the range of resources individuals gather through various means, not solely for immediate achievement and recognition, but rather for future benefit, reward, and growth. It is aligned to two critical components, namely employability and lifelong as well as life-wide learning. The overarching concept of human development encompasses the following key components: social development, cultural development, psychological development, inner value development, professional and career development, and scholastic development. The overall accumulation of these factors impacts students' employability chances either positively or negatively. Developing a positive attitude towards lifelong learning and life-wide learning will increase students' human development and augment employability perceptions and outcomes. (Nimmi *et al*., 2021). The Transitioning from Higher Education HEPS encourages HEIs to focus on these key factors when planning and designing the students' transitioning experience.

**Employability**

Employability refers to the skills, competencies, and attributes (also referred to as graduate attributes) as well as the knowledge students possess that makes them suitable for employment. It is not just about getting a job but also about keeping a job and being able to adapt, learn, and contribute effectively to the world of work and society at large. Due to a lack of essential graduate attributes, South African graduates face the challenge of unemployability more than unemployment. This is due to several reasons, which include, among others (Vezi-Magigaba, and Utete, 2023; Graham *et al*., 2019):

*Skills:* There is often a mismatch between the skills and competencies graduates possess and those demanded by industry. This discrepancy leads to systemic unemployment despite numerous available opportunities and the need to reskill graduate recruits.

*Education disparities*: Inequality in the South African higher education system contributes to a lack of essential soft and transferable skills and competencies among graduates. The quality of education and students' access to resources vary significantly, leaving many without the necessary comprehensive skill sets and social capital to ensure employment.

*Lack of experience*: Graduates often lack experience and face tough competition in the job market, making it harder for them to secure employment.

To ensure employability, discipline-specific knowledge is insufficient; graduates must possess skills that can improve their chances of either being employed or being successful entrepreneurs. This includes skills needed to become lifelong learners and life-wide learners that enable them to "upskill" and "reskill" in an ever-changing world of work and professional development while transitioning from HE and building on various aspects of human development.

**Lifelong and life-wide learning**

As a result of the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), especially SDG 4, which states the importance of 'ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all', lifelong learning has become the overarching concept and vision for education globally (UN, 2015). Lifelong learning refers to the continuous process of gaining knowledge, skills, and competencies throughout one's life, well beyond formal education. It involves self-motivated learning through formal education, informal learning experiences, or self-directed learning initiatives. Lifelong learning generates and motivates a positive attitude toward learning (Nimmi *et al*., 2021). Lifelong learning is essential to stay professionally current and employable in today's rapidly changing world. However, life-wide learning, described as learning that can take place in all fields of life such as work, family, travelling, volunteering, etc (Soylu & Yelken, 2014) must also be considered when preparing students for the world of work. Focusing on relating learning more closely to life, more authentic learning experiences as these experiences are directly related to the personal development of individuals (Soylu & Yelken, 2014).

HEIs should focus on instilling a graduate mindset that values continuous learning throughout the transitioning cycle that leads students to engage with the world of work and society at large. For these transitions to be successful, students should first learn how to learn and develop a deep positive attitude towards learning (Nimmi *et al*., 2021). By cultivating a passion for lifelong learning, and creating opportunities for life-wide learning, HEIs not only enhance the employability of their graduates but also improve their ability to adapt and innovate throughout their professional careers and enhance human development. This HEPS recognises that knowledge acquisition is not limited to formal academic settings and emphasises the need to promote a mindset and infrastructure that facilitates lifelong learning and life-wide learning. Students must engage in lifelong and life-wide learning to thrive in an ever-changing global landscape. HEIs should encourage students to adapt to technological advancements, societal shifts, and evolving professional demands by fostering a commitment to continuous learning.

In the 21st century, lifelong learning involves leveraging artificial intelligence (AI) technology for accessible and efficient learning experiences. HEIs should embrace technology to deliver flexible, online, asynchronous, and blended or hybrid learning opportunities, ensuring that students can continuously learn regardless of location, life stage, or time zone. Lifelong learning extends beyond formal education settings. Institutions should foster a culture of collaboration and community engagement, encouraging individuals to participate in

workshops, seminars, and collaborative projects that facilitate learning from diverse perspectives and experiences. This HEPS acknowledges and values informal learning experiences. It empowers individuals to draw on various resources, including self-directed study, online platforms, and work-integrated learning, to enhance their knowledge and skills.

**Inner-value and psychological development**

This HEPS emphasises the importance of developing inner-value and psychological attributes in higher education practices. Inner value is a keen sense of self-awareness, self-esteem, self-efficacy, and confidence, which is crucial in guiding career decisions. It also contributes to the development of a strong moral compass. A positive psychological state comprises self-efficacy, optimism, hope, and resilience (Nimmi *et al*., 2021). By nurturing these values and resources, graduates are better prepared to navigate diverse and dynamic work environments, fostering collaboration and innovation. This HEPS ensures that graduates are well-equipped to navigate the complexities of the modern world and make meaningful contributions to their communities and professions.

**Development of graduate attributes**

The concept of graduate attributes is crucial for a HEPS, ensuring that students effectively transition from HEIs into the world of work and lifelong learning as well as life-wide learning. Graduate attributes encompass the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values students are expected to acquire during their transition (Barrie, 2006). Taking a holistic approach to education, HEIs are encouraged to ensure that students develop subject-specific knowledge, critical thinking, communication skills, ethical awareness, and a global perspective. Each attribute is essential for success in the professional world, and institutions are encouraged to incorporate them as standard practice. Graduates who possess these attributes contribute positively to their workplaces and society at large. Incorporating graduate attributes as a standard practice allows institutions to assess and refine their educational programmes continuously.

**Social and cultural relations development**

Social relations encompass connections, family, school networks, affiliations, and memberships in social groups like LinkedIn. At the same time, cultural development involves traditional factors such as university reputation, extracurricular engagement, reading habits, attire, cultural exposure, multilingualism, networking, and volunteering. It significantly influences social mobility and employability (Nimmi *et al*., 2021). HEIs are encouraged to build social and cultural relationships through various collaborations with industry, government agencies, non-government agencies and alumni, using community engagement and a focus on globalisation.

**Collaboration with Industry**

Collaboration between higher education institutions and industry stakeholders plays a vital role in ensuring that educational practices remain responsive to the world of work demands.

To achieve this, a HEPS should encourage partnerships that provide insights into current industry needs, facilitate mentorship programmes, and offer experiential and work-integrated learning opportunities that include internships, apprenticeships, and residencies. The world of work is constantly changing, with technological advancements, industry disruptions, and shifting global dynamics influencing the skills and competencies employers seek in candidates. A dedicated HEPS acknowledges the necessity of aligning higher education formal curricula with these emerging trends, ensuring that graduates possess the relevant knowledge, comprehensive skills, and competencies sought after in the contemporary job market and professional sphere. The potential of microcredentials to close the gaps of these and future emerging trends should be considered by HEIs.

Theoretical knowledge alone is inadequate for success in the professional arena. The HEPS advocates for integrating practical experiences, internships, apprenticeships, residencies, and real-world projects into the curriculum to enhance the applicability of academic concepts and facilitate a smoother transition to the practical demands of the workplace, encompassing life-wide learning. Employers increasingly value graduate attributes, and therefore, the HEPS should underscore the importance of embedding these throughout the educational transitioning journey, ensuring that graduates possess versatile and comprehensive skill sets that transcend specific disciplines, and position them as valuable contributors to any professional context.

There is a responsibility not only with HEIs but also with industry to take responsibility for skills development, thereby ensuring that graduates have the appropriate skills and competencies to enter the world of work successfully. This mutual responsibility forms the basis for forming collaborations and agreements between HEIs and industry partners. These collaborations will help with the mismatch between the skills and competencies required and those offered by HEIs. This HEPS is important for incorporating industry feedback into higher education outcomes. This is essential to producing well-prepared graduates for the world of work and society at large. It ensures that graduates possess relevant, up-to-date knowledge and skills that meet their specific professional and work-related needs, enhancing their employability. By establishing a standard for industry feedback, HEIs can stay abreast of changes and ensure that curricula are flexible and responsive to emerging trends, preparing students for the forefront of their respective fields. Formalising industry feedback as a standard practice also ensures compliance with accreditation requirements, enhancing higher education programmes' overall quality and reputation.

**Collaboration with Alumni**

Alumni involvement is crucial for HEIs to assist students in transitioning from their academic life to the professional world of work. The insights provided by alumni into the challenges, opportunities, and industry expectations can provide invaluable guidance to institutions (McAlexander and Koenig, 2001). By sharing their experiences, alumni contribute practical knowledge that complements academic learning, which can help students make informed decisions about their career pathways. Furthermore, alumni often maintain strong

professional networks within their respective industries, providing students access to a broader network of professionals, potential mentors, and job opportunities. Networking facilitated by alumni involvement can open doors for internships, job placements, and career advancement, providing students with a competitive edge in the job market. Alumni can also serve as mentors, offering guidance on career development, industry trends, and personal growth. Alumni often hold key positions in various industries, so their involvement can lead to beneficial partnerships between the institution and employers. Alumni can also identify gaps in current curricula that institutions can address, or they can suggest areas for micro-learning and credentialing. By doing so, alumni can contribute to ongoing learning and professional development initiatives. Workshops, webinars, guest lecturing, and seminars organised by alumni can provide current students with insights into emerging trends, new technologies, and evolving industry demands, ensuring that graduates remain competitive and adaptable in their careers. Alumni involvement also fosters community and belonging among current students and graduates.

**Collaboration through Community Engagement**

This HEPS aims to highlight the importance of community engagement in facilitating a smooth transition from higher education to the world of work and life-wide learning. By recognising the value of joint initiatives between educational institutions and the wider community, this standard seeks to improve students' employability, encourage real-world connections, and contribute to the overall societal impact of higher education. Community engagement, as it relates to HEIs, is seen as the initiatives and processes through which universities' expertise in teaching and research are applied to address issues relevant to their communities (CHE, 2004). The aim is to connect the university with the communities and facilitate their challenges. Community engagement enables students to apply theoretical knowledge in practical settings. Higher education institutions should promote partnerships with local businesses, non-profit organisations, and community organisations to create experiential learning opportunities that bridge the gap between academic learning and its practical application.

Engagement with the community exposes students to a diverse network of professionals, mentors, and potential employers. Institutions should establish and promote networking events, industry visits, and mentorship programmes that connect students with community leaders, fostering meaningful relationships beyond the classroom. Community engagement activities often require developing soft skills such as communication, teamwork, and adaptability. Higher education institutions should design and integrate community-based projects and service-learning opportunities into the curriculum to cultivate these essential skills, enhancing students' readiness to transition from higher education into the world of work, life-wide learning, and lifelong learning.

This HEPS also addresses cultural competence by exposing students to diverse perspectives and experiences. Institutions should actively seek partnerships with organisations representing various demographics, encouraging students to develop a global mindset and

the ability to navigate diverse work environments. Higher education institutions should align their curricula with the needs and priorities of the local community. By integrating community-driven projects and research initiatives into the academic experience, institutions ensure that students graduate with skills and knowledge directly relevant to the community's social and economic needs and requirements.

**Globalisation**

Globalisation has become increasingly widespread in the 21st century, affecting economies, cultures, and societies worldwide. This is why it is crucial for HEIs to integrate standards that focus on globalisation. This HEPS will equip students with cross-cultural competencies, international perspectives, and intercultural communication skills necessary for success in diverse professional environments. By integrating standards that focus on globalisation into higher education practices, institutions contribute to the employability of their graduates. The HEPS is also aimed at encouraging students to engage in international collaborative projects, exposing them to diverse research methodologies and perspectives and the opportunity to contribute to solutions for global challenges. Globalisation intersects with various global challenges that the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) address. Standards on globalisation can guide students to understand and contribute to achieving these goals, fostering a sense of responsibility towards creating a sustainable and equitable world.

**Microcredentialing as a Pathway for Continuous Learning**

In today's ever-changing world of education and work, transitioning from higher education to the world of work and the lifelong learning domain is a crucial step in students' journey. To guide students towards meaningful and sustainable career pathways, it is important to recognise the complex and diverse routes they may encounter during their transitioning journeys as well as the life-wide learning taking place. Creating a diversity of pathways is a strategic manner to navigate the dynamic intersection of academia and the professional world, ensuring that students have the resources, skills, and the mindset necessary to not only succeed in their initial career steps but also to embrace lifelong learning and personal growth. One such pathway is through microcredentialing.

Microcredentialing is defined by UNESCO as "a small volume of certified competencies acquired through life experience, work, or study. Microcredentials can be awarded to learners after taking a short course or through recognition of prior learning" (Van der Hijden and Martin, 2023). Microcredentialing as HEPS for transitioning from higher education into the world of work and lifelong learning will provide students with specialised, competency-based certifications for specific skills or knowledge areas. It is valuable for students transitioning from academia to the professional sphere and world of work and enables higher education institutions to respond quickly to changing professional landscapes. Microcredentials allow for continuous skill development, making graduates more attractive to employers, and opening avenues for career advancement and diversification. They promote a culture of lifelong learning and can recognise learning acquired through non-traditional means.

Microcredentialing enables HEIs to collaborate closely with various industries, tailoring programmes to meet specific demands. Finally, microcredentials are often issued in a digital format, making them easily shareable, accessible, and verifiable. HEIs should consider the work done by the PoMiSA project which is available at https://pomisa.hec.mu/.

This HEPS should be read alongside the HEPS on *Transitions Through Higher Education, Transitions Into Higher Education, Learning Environments, Programme Processes, Student Administration, Learning, Teaching and Assessment, and Engaged Institutions*, as these collectively ensure that student transitions are supported through inclusive practices, transformative pedagogy, and coherent institutional systems.

## 3. The HEPS Statement for *Transitions from Higher Education*

The HEPS Statement is an overall statement or set of statements that explicitly describe the codes of practice and agreed-on norms that describe threshold levels or minimum expectations for practice in that area. More than one set of statements is possible when there are sub-sets of practice in the area. The statement(s) describe requirements in the area of practice to ensure acceptable levels of higher education provision, experiences and operations for the students, staff and the public.

The dynamic transitioning process necessitates Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to prioritise graduate employability by adapting to emerging challenges and consistently and comprehensively enhancing skills, competencies, and human development. Reflection on students' transitioning pathways from higher education to lifelong learning and the workforce underscores the continuous and cyclical nature of this journey. Emphasising students' experience and agency in this process is crucial. HEIs can mitigate the risk of curriculum misalignment by establishing partnerships with industry and professional sectors. This reflective and generative approach involves regular curriculum review and development, ensuring the incorporation of current and relevant content knowledge, skill sets, and competencies, developing offerings that cultivate well-rounded candidates. Successful transitioning from higher education equips graduates with sought-after outcomes in the workforce and enriches their career pathways in lifelong learning.

## 4. Guidelines for the HEPS on *Institutional Identity and Agency*

Guidelines describe how HEPS might be interpreted and implemented. They set out good practice in the relevant area for consideration by the actors involved and provide the basis for differentiation between institutions, e.g. differentiation in terms of size, niche area and

NQF level. The Guidelines are open-ended to allow for innovation and provide the basis for differentiation.

The Guidelines are posed as questions that enable institutions to engage with them in generative, reflexive and contextually responsive ways to constantly improve practice in the area. They are also used evaluatively in internal and external quality assurance processes to form the basis for the Criteria that will be developed for future external quality assurance (EQA) functions as described in the QAF such as accreditation and quality reviews.

**Dimension 1: Employability**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Data and information management**<br><br>Tracking:<br>● Alumni<br>● Employability<br>● Transitioning and the domain of lifelong learning | a) How do legislation, policies and ethical practices govern data and information management on the institution's alumni, and how is compliance assured?<br>b) How is the institution's alumni data managed (stored, secured, accessed, and updated)?<br>c) Why is alumni data analysed?<br>d) How does the institution keep track of its alumni's career paths and employment status and for what purpose?<br>e) How often does the institution survey the employability of their alumni, what methods are used, and how is the data analysed and used to inform transitioning from higher education into the world of work and lifelong learning domain?<br>f) What has the institution done to monitor and evaluate graduateness through tracer and impact studies? |
| **Skills**<br><br>● Alignment with industry and the world of work | a) How does the institution monitor and analyse social, economic, political, and environmental change and the changing world of work?<br>b) How do these findings impact decision-making on narrowing the skills and competency mismatch that hinders graduate employability?<br>c) What mechanisms, procedures, policies, and practices are in place to align programmes and curricula so that these keep abreast with change?<br>d) How has the institution sought to resolve misalignment between skills, competencies, and subject content knowledge acquired through formal education with skills, |

| | |
|---|---|
| | competencies, attributes, and knowledge needed in the job and professional market?<br><br>e) How does the institution involve stakeholders from the professional environment, industry, and community in its curricula evaluation processes to assess programme relevance for the world of work in terms of skills, competencies, and subject content knowledge?<br><br>f) How does the institution ensure that its curricula are current and relevant and that emerging technologies are considered and reflected in the student's learning experiences and the lecturers' teaching approach, methods to develop skills, competencies and attributes, and forms of assessment?<br><br>g) What processes and practices are in place that cultivates a learning environment for academics to ensure up-to-date and aligned programme outcomes with industry trends and practices?<br><br>h) What institution-wide, faculty, department, and programme-specific partnerships and collaborations does the institution have with industry, the professional environment, and communities of practice focus on resolving the skills and competency mismatch with the world of work? What are the practical expressions of these partnerships and collaborations in the institution that enhance the curricula and the student's overall learning experiences of transitioning from higher education?<br><br>i) What authentic learning experiences do institutions provide to anchor learning and teaching in real-world scenarios? What learning experiences do institutions provide that foster practical and meaningful educational engagements related to the world of work and the current professional environment?<br><br>j) What mechanisms and pathways does the institution have in place to empower graduates to contribute directly to the economy by acquiring entrepreneurial skills and cultivating entrepreneurial attitudes? |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Curriculum** | a) What employability services does the institution offer, and how are these integrated across the institution? What kinds of initiatives, collaboration, and coordination on promoting employability exist among different faculties and/or departments? How effective are these initiatives?<br>b) How has the institution transcended the entrenched historical culture of offering programmes for their own sake? What guidelines, strategies, processes, and procedures have the institution implemented to ensure that students transition from the institution with competencies aligned with workplace needs?<br>c) How has the institution transformed its assessment methods to align more with industry requirements? |
| **WIL and Experiential Learning** | a) How has the institution designed its programmes and curricula to seamlessly integrate work-integrated learning components and ensure a balance between theoretical and practical learning?<br>b) What assessment methods have the institution implemented that evaluate the academic knowledge and skills acquired through the practical aspects of students' performance?<br>c) What is the institution's reflexive praxis when engaging students to reflect on the learning gained? What approaches and methods are used when incorporating students in the monitoring and evaluation of their work-integrated learning experiences? How are the data and analysis used to improve and streamline the transition from higher education? |



**Dimension 2: Lifelong learning**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Mindset** | a) How does the institution's curricula and graduate attributes entrench iterative growth, reflective generative practices, cultural awareness, and diversity? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | b) How does the institution cultivate and nurture a lifelong learning mindset design for students through their formal curricula and wider higher education transitioning journey?<br><br>c) What mechanisms are put in place to prepare graduates to have an attitude of learning and continuous learning, skills development, and personal and professional growth?<br><br>d) How does the institution survey its alumni's attitude and mindset about lifelong learning? What methods are used, and how is the data analysed to become usable information that informs decision-making and transitioning praxis?<br><br>e) How does the institution promote lifelong learning in its core curriculum?<br><br>f) How does the institution build transitioning from higher education into the core curriculum to guide students and foreground their human capital development by focussing on diversity and transformation and integrating e-portfolios, CV writing, job-search strategies, and toolkits, building and utilising social networks, and job interview preparation? How can the institution incorporate e-portfolios, CV writing, job-search strategies, and toolkits, building and utilising social networks, and job interview preparation into assessments within the learning and teaching process?<br><br>g) What is the monitoring and evaluation mechanism, the data collection method, how is the data analysed and used, and what are the decision-making outcomes of the core curriculum transitioning from the higher education component?<br><br>h) Why is life-wide learning important for the institution? Or: What does the institution do to promote life-wide learning? |
| **Resources** | **Technology:**<br><br>a) How is technology used within the institution to promote lifelong learning? |

| | |
|---|---|
| | b) How is artificial intelligence (AI) used within the institution to enhance lifelong learning regarding information, access, participation in global learning communities, skills development, and certification?<br><br>**Human:**<br><br>a) How does the institution empower academic staff to promote, and how do they promote, lifelong learning among students?<br><br>b) How does the institution motivate students to participate in lifelong learning throughout their higher education transitioning journey? |
| **Learning provision** | **Short courses and Microcredentialing:**<br><br>a) What is the institution's policy on short courses and microcredentialing, and how does it encourage lifelong learning?<br><br>b) How does the institution encourage short courses and microcredentialing and facilitate ongoing and continuous learning?<br><br>c) How are short courses and microcredentials designed, developed and quality-assured in the institution? |

**Dimension 3: Inner-value and psychological development**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Moral/ethical qualities** | a) How does the institution embed essential ethical qualities in its students?<br><br>b) What moral and ethical qualities has the institution included in its differentiated graduate attributes? How are these attributes assessed as contributing to students' social awareness, integrity, and a world of work-aligned skill sets?<br><br>c) How has the institution integrated contemporary and current moral and ethical dilemmas into the learning environment to prepare students for the ethical |

| | |
|---|---|
| | challenges they may encounter in the professional world and social and working environment?<br><br>d) What strategies has the institution used to emphasise the importance of producing graduates with integrity transitioning from higher education? |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Graduate attributes** | **Determining:**<br><br>a) How does the institution determine what graduate attributes are essential for their student body and context?<br><br>b) What role-players (alumni, professionals, industry, students) are included in the process of determining these graduate attributes and why are these included?<br><br>c) How often does the institution reflect on and revise its graduate attributes and why?<br><br>**Assessment:**<br><br>a) How does the institution measure if, and to what extent, graduate attributes have been achieved? What measurement methods are used? How is the data analysed? How is the data used to improve decision-making on human development and transitioning from higher education?<br><br>b) What processes are in place within the institution to ensure that its differentiated graduate attributes are achieved when students complete their qualifications, graduate, and transition from higher education?<br><br>**Acknowledgement:**<br><br>a) What proof, like badges, is provided to students for achieved graduate attributes when successfully transitioning from higher education into the domain of lifelong learning and the world of work? |

**Dimension 4: Social and cultural development**

| | |
|---|---|
| **Collaboration with industry** | **Alignment:**<br>a) How are the institution's curricula aligned with the industry's expectations of graduates and HEIs?<br>b) What mechanisms does the institution have in place, and what mechanisms have been built into curricula to ensure alignment with the needs and trends of the social and professional environment and world of work? How does the institution achieve these alignments?<br>**Types of collaboration:**<br>a) What types of partnerships does the institution have that support and promote mentorship and work-integrated learning?<br>b) What Advisory Boards does the institution have in place to provide critical reviews on programmes and curricula?<br>c) What networking events, like career indabas, does the institution partner with, participate in, and include students as a pathway for enhancing higher education transition?<br>d) What other relationships have the institution built aimed at narrowing the skills gap with mitigating strategies (like change of curricula, new programme accreditation applications, community engagement, internships, modalities of work-integrated learning)? |
| **Collaboration with alumni** | a) How is the institution collaborating with alumni and why?<br>b) What are the chosen communication methods to communicate with alumni, and why has these methods been chosen? |
| **Collaboration through community engagement** | a) How has the institution developed social and cultural relations through community engagement? What strategies were used to develop these relationships and build networks? How do these relationships |

| | |
|---|---|
| | impact the students' transitioning experience in building their social and cultural relationships? |
| **Globalisation** | a) What strategies and mechanisms has the institution used to create greater awareness amongst students of global opportunities and how to access these opportunities?<br>b) How has the institution enhanced students' transitioning journey with support to experience globalisation through these opportunities? Why are these used? |

## 5. Criteria

Criteria are the instruments to determine whether the standard is being met or not. They are benchmarks for evaluation and for making quality judgements about higher education activities based on the standards and guidelines agreed upon by the Higher Education (HE) sector. The Criteria depend closely on the purpose of the quality judgement that it is meant to be used for.

Criteria are not included in the standard description. This is because the criteria will be developed to be relevant to the specific quality assurance exercise that is being conducted. This could be an internal quality assurance exercise conducted by an institution, or a specific external quality assurance activity to be conducted by the CHE. Criteria are therefore activity, time and context specific. Some criteria, for example the criteria for accreditation, will be in place for a longer period.

Whenever an External Quality Assurance (EQA) activity is to be undertaken, the CHE will re-convene the Community of Practice to develop the relevant criteria for the exercise.

## 6. Review of the HEPS

It is understood that the HEPS will be regularly reviewed and revised in an iterative way to account for change. The HEPS on *Institutional Identity and Agency* will be in place for the first iteration of the QAF, for 7 years.

## 7. References


Alharbi. J.S. 2015. Standards of the Instructional Performances in Higher-education Institutions: Conformity to Quality Requirements: Ar-Rass College of Science and Arts – Model. *Universal Journal of Educational Research*, 3(7): 427-434.

Alpaydın, Y. and Kültür, K. 2022. Improving the Transition from Higher Education to Employment: A Review of Current Policies. in Akgün, B. and Alpaydin, Y. (eds.), *Education Policies in the 21st Century: Comparative Perspectives*. Pallgrave Macmillan Springer Nature: Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-1604-5_5.

Barrie, S. C. 2006. Understanding What We Mean by the Generic Attributes of Graduates. Higher Education. *The International Journal of Higher Education and Educational Planning*, 51(2), 215–241.

Chetty, Y. 2012. Graduateness and Employability within the Higher Education

Council on Higher Education. 2004. *Criteria for Institutional Audits*. CHE: Pretoria.

Council on Higher Education. 2011. *Directorate: Standards Development. A Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education*. CHE: Pretoria.

Council on Higher Education. 2021. *A Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education in South Africa, Council on Higher Education*. CHE: Pretoria.

Environment: A Focused Review of the Literature. In: Coetzee, M. Botha, J. Eccles, N. Nienaber H. and Holtzhausen, N. (eds.), *Developing Student Graduateness and Employability*. Knowres Publishing: Randburg.

Graham, L. Williams, L. and Chisoro, C. 2019. Barriers to the labour market for unemployed graduates in South Africa. *Journal of Education and Work*, 32(4): 360-376.

Hooley, T. Hanson, J. and Clark, L. 2023. Exploring Students' and Graduates' Attitudes to the Process of Transition to the Labour Market. *Industry and Higher Education*, 37(1) 121-134.

McAlexander, J.H. and Koenig, H.F. 2001. University Experiences, the Student-College Relationship, and Alumni Support. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 10(3): 21-44.

Monteiro S. Almeida L. and Garc'ia-Aracil A. 2021. "It's a Very Different World": Work Transition and Employability of Higher Education Graduates. *Higher Education, Skills and Work-Based Learning.* 11 (1): 164-181.

Myhill. D. 2020. Addressing Barriers to Student Success. *Final Report to the Office for Students*. University of Exeter.

National Planning Commission, 2012. National Development Plan 2030: Our future - make it work (www.gov.za), accessed 4 March 2024.

Nimmi, P.M. Zakkariya, K.A. and Rahul, P.R. 2021. Channelling Employability Perceptions Through Lifelong Learning: An Empirical Investigation. *Education and Training*, 63(5): 763-776.

Shah. M. and Jarzabkowski, L. 2013. The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework. *Perspectives: Policy and Practice in Higher Education*, 17(3): 96-106.

Soylu, B.A. and Yelken, T.Y. 2014. A new and dynamic phenomenon for higher education: Life-wide learning. Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences, 116: 2702-2706.

StatsSA. 2023. Quarterly Labour Force Survey (QLFS) Q1:2023. https://www.statssa.gov.za/publications/P0211/Presentation%20QLFS%20Q1%202023.pdf. Accessed 12 December 2023.

United Nations (UN). 2015. Transforming Our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/21252030%20Agenda%20for%20Sustainable%20Development%20web.pdf . Accessed 23 November 2023.

Van der Hijden, P. and Martin, M. 2023. Short Courses, Micro-Credentials, and Flexible Learning Pathways: A Blueprint for Policy Development and Action. *Policy paper*.

Vezi-Magigaba, M.F. and Utete, R. 2023. Closing the Competence Gap of Graduates: Looking through Lens of Employability in South Africa. IAHRW *International Journal of Social Sciences Review,* 11(3): 376-382.