



QAF MANUAL FOR NEW INSTITUTIONS ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ACRONYMS.....	3
1. INTRODUCTION	4
2. PURPOSE OF THE PROCESS FOR NEW INSTITUTIONS AS AN EQA ACTIVITY	4
3. THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICE STANDARD (HEPS) FOR NEW INSTITUTIONS	6
4. OUTCOMES OF THE PROCESS FOR NEW INSITUTIONS.....	8
5. THE PROCESS FOR NEW INSITUTIONS ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION	9
6. THE TEMPLATE FOR THE READINESS REPORT FOR NEW INSITUTIONS ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION	11
Annexure A: HEQC Online Application Form.....	25

LIST OF ACRONYMS

CHE	Council on Higher Education, the Council
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
EQA	External Quality Assurance
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
HEPS	Higher Education Practice Standard
IQA	Internal Quality Assurance
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PHEI	Private Higher Education Institution
QAF	Quality Assurance Framework
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority

1. INTRODUCTION

This *Manual for New Institutions entering Higher Education 2024* (henceforth the *New Institutions Manual 2024*) must be read as a complementary document to the *Quality Assurance Framework (2020)* (henceforth the *QAF*). The *New Institutions Manual* provides details of an operational nature for planning, capacity development and the development of a Readiness Report for new institutions to enter into higher education and offer qualifications on the HEQSF.

The QAF provides the legislative and educational context for the CHE's EQA functions. It describes the quality-related context within which new institutions wishing to enter higher education and offer qualifications on the HEQSF find themselves. The nature of the process for new institutions to enter higher education is further detailed in the *Implementation Protocols for the external quality assurance functions of the QAF (2024)*.

The purpose of this *New Institutions Manual* is to provide procedural clarity on the process for new institutions to be approved for entry into higher education.

The process described in this *Manual* is intended as a compulsory activity for:

- Wholly new training and education institutions that have never existed and offered programmes on the HEQSF before
- Training and education institutions that have existed before but have not offered programmes on the HEQSF and are therefore entering the oversight of the CHE as a quality council
- Training and education institutions that have existed before and have offered programmes on the HEQSF and are entering the oversight of the CHE as a quality council, such as the public colleges.

This process for new institutions is a new process introduced by the CHE and this *Manual* therefore does not replace any previous frameworks or manuals.

2. PURPOSE OF THE PROCESS FOR NEW INSTITUTIONS AS AN EQA ACTIVITY

The CHE performs its quality assurance and quality promotion functions in terms of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997), and in its capacity as the sole Quality Council (QC) for higher education, in terms of Section 25 of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008, as amended), (hereafter the NQF Act). The Higher Education Act, (Act No. 101 of 1997), (hereafter, the HE Act),¹ requires that all PHEIs be registered with the DHET to operate legally, over and above the

¹ Regulations for The Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions, 2016. A Guide for Completing the Application for Registration as a Private Higher Education Institution. (Guide APX-01). Department of Higher Education and Training.

requirements that their programmes be accredited by the CHE and their qualifications registered on the NQF by SAQA. As contemplated in the HE Act, the act of registration means that the DHET (as Registrar) grants an institution the legal authority to offer higher education programmes and to award higher education qualifications². The purpose of registering PHEIs offering higher education is to ensure that:

- a. PHEIs offer an acceptable quality of education in accredited programmes;
- b. Students receive exposure to higher education from PHEIs that have the resources, capacity and expertise to deliver quality programmes;
- c. Students enrolled with PHEIs obtain qualifications that are registered on the NQF; and
- d. The education system of all PHEIs continues on a path of transformation in accordance with government policy and regulation.³

For an institution to be registered, the DHET must also be satisfied that it is:

- a. Financially capable of fulfilling its obligations to prospective students;
- b. Able to provide quality higher education that will –
 - o maintain acceptable standards; and
 - o comply with the requirements of the CHE.

Institutional registration by the DHET is currently for a period of five years.

The requirements for PHEIs to be registered with the DHET are explicated in the:

Regulations for The Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions, 2016. A Guide for Completing the Application for Registration as a Private Higher Education Institution. (Guide APX-01). Department of Higher Education and Training, and in the Government Gazette, 31 March 2016, Department of Higher Education and Training. R. 383, Higher Education Act (101/1997): Regulations for The Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions, 2016 39880.

This *New Institutions Manual* will only focus on the role of the CHE in ensuring that PHEIs offer higher education of acceptable standards and that they comply with the CHE's requirements.

The CHE will implement this process for new institutions that will build understanding of the requirements to offer quality HE programmes before they submit new programmes for accreditation on the HEQSF.

The process does not seek to place undue barriers for new institutions seeking to enter the sector. Rather, in line with the development focus of the QAF, and in recognition

² Government Gazette, 31 March 2016, Department of Higher Education and Training. R. 383, Higher Education Act (101/1997): Regulations for The Registration of Private Higher Education Institutions, 2016 39880.

that many new institutions struggle to enter the sector due to a lack of understanding of the expectations and the minimum requirements that must be in place to meet minimum standards for quality provisioning of higher education, the CHE will engage and orientate these institutions to the expectations.

3. THE ROLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION PRACTICE STANDARD (HEPS) FOR NEW INSTITUTIONS

The Higher Education Practice Standards (HEPS) are currently in draft form and will be made available to new institutions. The **Standards** are developed and accepted by consensus by a Community of Practice representing stakeholders in the higher education sector as Codes of Practice for quality assurance in higher education and should, therefore, be taken into account of and adhered to by all those concerned, in all types of higher education provision.

The **Guidelines** in the HEPS in the Annexure are intended for developmental purposes and to assist institutions in following a reflexive-generative approach in the continuous improvement in their practice in the longer term with a future view. The Guidelines are therefore not intended for use in this *New Institutions Manual*, except as guidelines to clarify and assist institutions. The Guidelines explain why the Standard is important and describe how Standards 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 reflexive questions and support innovation.

The **Criteria** are derived from one or more of the following Standards and Guidelines. They are developed for a specific purpose, i.e. in this *New Institutions Manual* the Criteria are developed specifically for the development of a Readiness Report as an EQA activity to enable peer evaluators to make quality judgements. Even though Criteria may be based on the same HEPS, we will distinguish between *Distinguish between criteria for minimum entry-level criteria for new programmes, qualifications, sites and institutions, and criteria for the external quality reviews of existing programmes, qualifications, sites and institutions.*

It should be noted that, in principle, all the Higher Education Practice Standards are applicable to new institutions entering higher education. The new institution will be required to demonstrate that they meet the relevant HEPS and the Criteria related to them, through participation in a capacity development exercise as well as possible site visits.

The Criteria developed for the new institutions wishing to enter higher education prior to their submission of programmes for accreditation are derived from the HEPS and are as follows:

1. **Institutional identity and agency:** The new institution has a clear identity in terms of underlying philosophy (meta-framework), mission, vision, purpose (*raison d'etre*), strategy, leadership, management and governance structures (including its internal quality management system and policy framework), in line with local, regional, and global imperatives and commitments.
2. **Programme processes:** The new institution has clear policies and procedures in place for the intentional design of appropriate and relevant programmes and qualifications on the HEQSF in the intended mode of provision of learning and teaching, including graduate attributes and preparation for lifelong learning. The intentional design process should enable student success by attending to the interrelated dimensions of time-pace-space, preparedness, responsiveness, integrity and institutional support. The institution's planning in terms of the number and range of its intended programmes are supported by adequate resources and capacity.
3. **Learning, teaching and assessment:** The new institution has clear policies and procedures in place for the programme management and assessment in the intended mode of provision of learning and teaching.
4. **Physical and digital learning environments:** The planned learning environments of the new institution (whether physical or virtual) are appropriate, safe and reliable for the intended purposes, focusing particularly on the needs of first-time entering students and inclusivity. The new institution has a primary site of administration that is appropriate for higher education and plans learning sites that are appropriate for its identity, enrolment strategy and mode of provision for learning and teaching. Should the institution plan to offer programmes that fall under the purview of a statutory professional body, the initial approval and site visit report from the professional body should be available.
5. **Transitions into higher education:** The new institution has admissions and recruitment policies and strategies in place to advance social equity and broaden opportunities for more people to transition into higher education.
6. **Transitions through higher education:** The new institution has in place policies and plans for augmented and personalised learning, inclusive of articulation options and alternative pathways, as well as holistic student support with appropriate monitoring and evaluation.
7. **The data value chain:** The new institution has planned for the capacity to collect and utilize data that is of the highest quality, adheres to ethical principles, is secure and confidential, serves its intended purpose and leads to informed decision-making, as well as for submission to the CHE, and continuous tracking post-completion.
8. **Modes of learning and teaching provision:** The new institution has in place a staffing policy, plans and appropriate resources to ensure that the programmes that they wish to submit for accreditation are appropriately taught and supported for the intended mode of learning and teaching provision.
9. **Experiential learning:** The new institution includes experiential learning in the design of its programmes in a manner that will enhance the learning

experiences of the students and will connect them to relevant social and industry partners for enhanced employability.

10. **Student administration:** The new institution has planned for effective, efficient, and ethical student administrative structures, processes, and systems, supporting the management and development of a holistic student life cycle.

The HEPS for *Transitions from higher education, Continuous professional learning, Research and innovation, Engaged institutions and Postgraduate supervision and assessment* are not included in the Criteria, but new institutions should note these standards and be aware that they will come into play as soon as an institution has a graduated cohort of students, as well as employed staff.

The Readiness Report of a new institution will be structured according to the Criteria listed above.

4. OUTCOMES OF THE PROCESS FOR NEW INSTITUTIONS

The outcome of the process for new institutions entering higher education is a Readiness Report that has to be approved before the new institution may submit programmes for accreditation.

4.1 Assessment per Criterion

Each Criterion will be assessed as ready or not ready for higher education, and then the CoP will come to an overall judgement on whether the new institution may or may not submit programmes for accreditation.

- I. Ready for higher education in terms of a Criterion:
The institution fulfills all the requirements for this Criterion and may submit programmes for accreditation.
- II. Not ready for higher education in terms of a Criterion:
Serious questions arise about the institution's ability to offer quality programmes in higher education at all. The new institution may not submit programmes for accreditation and has to re-do the capacity development programme and the Readiness Report as a new process.

4.2 Overall assessment

Based on the overall performance of the new institution in their Readiness Report and the peer judgements by the Community of Practice, the overall outcome for the new institution is:

- I. Ready for higher education:

The new institution may proceed with submitting programmes for accreditation.

II. Not ready for higher education:

The new institution has to fulfill the requirements as stipulated by the CHE and must re-submit their Readiness Report.

Institutions which are deemed ready must submit programmes for accreditation within two years of the approval of the Readiness Report. In other words, the Readiness Report is only valid for two years. If the institution does not submit their programmes for accreditation within two years, they have to re-do the process for new institutions.

The guidance and capacity development provided by the CHE during this process is offered solely from a developmental perspective. It is intended to assist Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in supporting the accreditation process and to improve the accreditation success of first-time applications, as well as the new institution's long-term success and IQA functionality. However, it is important to understand that receiving this guidance and capacity development does not guarantee a satisfactory outcome for the institution's application for programme accreditation. The accreditation application is evaluated by the subject expert CoP in terms of the programme design and curriculum of the specific programme, as well as other relevant Criteria for programme accreditation. The final accreditation outcome decision rests with the HEQC.

5. THE PROCESS FOR NEW INSTITUTIONS ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION

New institutions wishing to enter higher education will follow the following process:

Preparation in Phase 1:

1. **Application by an institution to enter higher education:** The new institution applies to the CHE as a new institution on the HEQC Online system^{3 4} and provides the CHE with a letter from DHET and the CIPC. The institution is not given access to the CHE system until the Readiness Report is approved but is routed to the capacity development process.
2. Compulsory and focused **capacity development** to enable institutions to prepare for submitting their Readiness Report, based on the HEPS and Criteria. The capacity development will not only focus directly on the programme accreditation process and requirements but will also span all of the QAF and its processes so that the institution is well placed to gain IQA functionality from the outset.

³ The HEQC Online system will be changed to the CHE-MIS system in due course.

⁴ The current HEQC Online application form is attached as Appendix A.

3. The institution will only be invited to the capacity development as per the CHE's schedule for capacity development once it has paid the requisite invoice for the capacity development in full. The rates payable will be approved by the CHE for each financial year.

Readiness Report in Phase 2:

4. Submission of the institutional **Readiness Report** to the CHE (by an agreed-on date). Institutions need to ensure that all the institutional information on the Institutional Profile is correct and updated.
5. An **evaluation** by the Community of Practice (CoP) of the institutional Readiness Report.
The CoP through the CHE may request any **follow-up activities** with the institution which may include additional documentation or evidence.
6. The CoP submits a **draft report** which is considered by the HEQC subcommittee. This may be an iterative process.
7. The draft report is sent to **the institution for a response** with factual corrections and possible representations on the outcomes.
8. The CoP considers the response from the institution and **submits a revised draft report** to the HEQC subcommittee. This may be an iterative process.
9. The draft report is submitted to the CEO for **final approval** and sign-off.

Follow-up actions in Phase 3:

10. Once the CHE has approved the Readiness Report, it is final and is sent to the institution, after which the **follow-up actions** in the report have to be carried out (for example, more targeted and focused capacity development and / or the submission of programmes for accreditation within two years). Institutions that have approved Readiness Reports will only now be given access to the CHE online system to enable them to submit their programme accreditation applications.
11. Final reports are communicated to DHET for their information, pending the accreditation of the programmes of new institutions that are deemed to be ready.

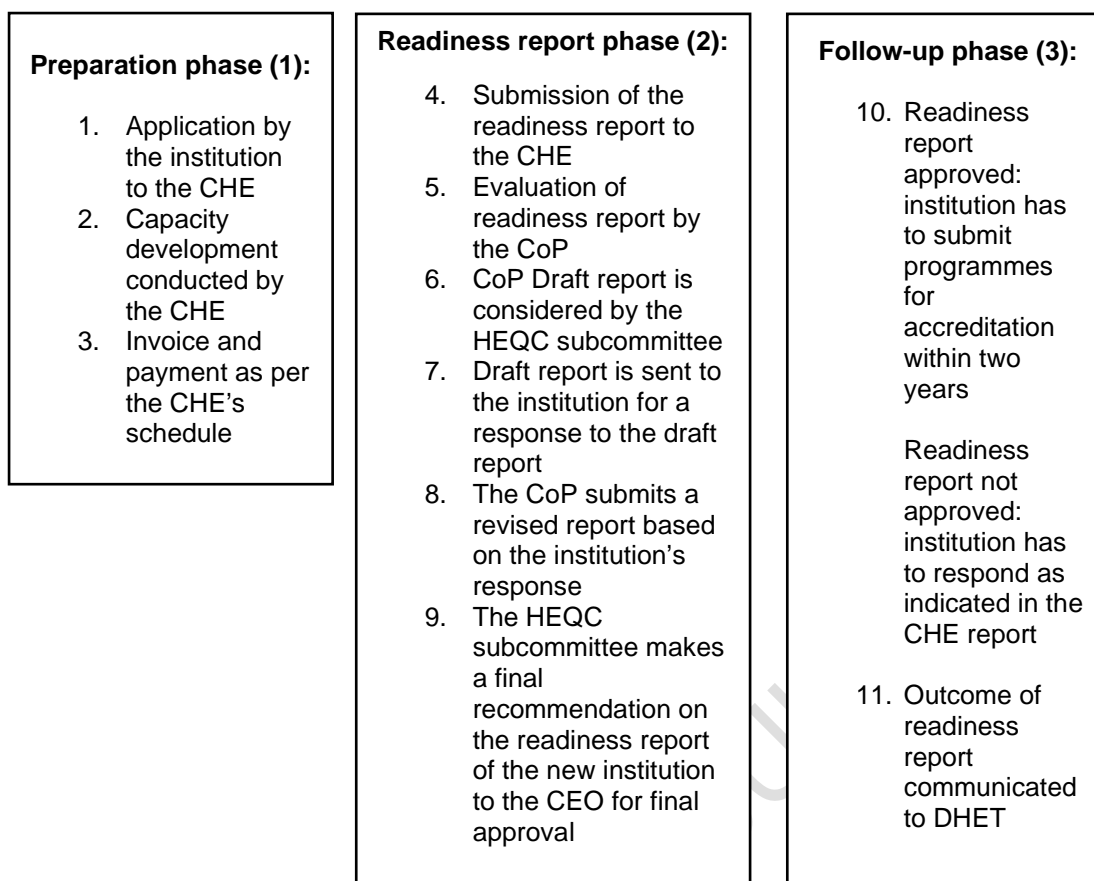


Figure 1: Process flow for new institutions entering higher education

6. THE TEMPLATE FOR THE READINESS REPORT FOR NEW INSTITUTIONS ENTERING HIGHER EDUCATION

Introduction

A brief description of the institution, specifically its identity, vision, mission and proposed modes of provision, as well as the subject areas and programmes it wishes to submit for accreditation.

Criterion 1: Institutional identity and agency

Description how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for description

Institutional self-reflection how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfill and / or improve on this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 1	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		

CoP's assessment of Criterion 1	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment on Criterion 1	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Criterion 2: Programme processes

Description how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for description

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u> how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfill and / or improve on this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 2	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		

CoP's assessment of Criterion 2	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment on Criterion 2	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Criterion 3: Learning, teaching and assessment

Description how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for description

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u> how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfill and / or improve on this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 3	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		

CoP's assessment of Criterion 3	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment on Criterion 3	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Criterion 4: Physical and digital learning environments

Description how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for description

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u> how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfill and / or improve on this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 4	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		

CoP's assessment of Criterion 4	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment on Criterion 4	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Criterion 5: Transitions into higher education

Description how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for description

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u> how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfill and / or improve on this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 5	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		

CoP's assessment of Criterion 5	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment on Criterion 5	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Criterion 6: Transitions through higher education

Description how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for description

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u> how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfill and / or improve on this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 6	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		

CoP's assessment of Criterion 6	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment on Criterion 6	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Criterion 7: The data value chain

Description how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for description

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u> how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfill and / or improve on this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 7	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		

CoP's assessment of Criterion 7	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment on Criterion 7	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Criterion 8: Modes of learning and teaching provision

Description how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for description

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u> how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfill and / or improve on this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 8	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		

CoP's assessment of Criterion 8	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment on Criterion 8	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Criterion 9: Experiential learning

Description how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for description

Institutional <u>self-reflection</u> how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfill and / or improve on this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 9	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		

CoP's assessment of Criterion 9	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment on Criterion 9	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Criterion 10: Student administration

Description how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for description

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Institutional <u>self-reflection</u> how the institution fulfills this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence for self-reflection

Future plans on how the institution plans to fulfill and / or improve on this criterion	Portfolio of Evidence of future plans
	Planning documents with resource allocation for the plans

Institution's own assessment of Criterion 10	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		

CoP's assessment of Criterion 10	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

HEQC Subcommittee's assessment on Criterion 10	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

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Overall assessment:

CoP's overall institutional assessment	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Subcommittee's overall institutional assessment	Ready	Not ready as yet
Narrative, observations and motivation:		
Follow-up actions required:		

Executive Summary

A brief background of the institution with a narrative of the process for the institution. The overall outcome for the institution in terms of which it may (or may not submit programmes for accreditation). A brief narrative summary outlining the follow-up activities for the institution in relation to the Readiness Report of the new institution.

Annexure A: HEQC Online Application Form

HEQC Online User Institutional Application

Please supply the following information when applying for a password to access the Online application form

Name of Institution	
Date of Establishment	
Contact Personnel	
Name of Head of Institution	
Designation	
Name of Institutional Administrator	
Designation	
Contact Details	
Institution Postal Address	
Institution Physical Address	
Telephone number	
Fax number	
Cell number	
E-mail address	
Website address	
Registration and Accreditation History	
Have you applied for registration with the Department of Higher Education and Training?	
If yes, supply registration number / proof of registration	
Please provide details (where relevant) of accreditation / registration with any other bodies, e.g. Umalusi, SETA or professional councils	
Provide a list of ALL present offerings including short courses, learning and skills programmes and FET qualifications.	
What is your institution's intended CESM focus?	E.g. Education

What are your institution's intended academic levels?	E.g. Bachelor's degree
Application	
Provide a 500 word Statement of Intention motivating for application as a Private Higher Education Provider.	
Institutional capacity	
What is the current total student enrolment of the institution?	
How many additional students would be enrolled for your intended Higher Education qualification(s)?	
What physical resources exist to accommodate the teaching needs of the intended HE qualification(s)?	
Are the physical resources listed above owned by the institution?	
If they are not owned by the institution, what are the terms of use by the institution?	
Security Measures	
Username (insert e-mail address)	
Proposed Password	
Confirm Password	