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**A GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR  
THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT  
OF SHORT COURSES OFFERED  
OUTSIDE OF THE HIGHER  
EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS  
SUB-FRAMEWORK**

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COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION





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September 2016



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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The need to develop the good practice guide was informed by the findings of a study that was commissioned by the CHE and undertaken by Dr Kirti Menon in 2014. The study looked at quality assurance mechanisms for short courses in public universities and in a sample of private higher education institutions.

The guide is based on research on global trends in the quality management of short courses. The research was conducted within the Quality Promotion and Capacity Development programme under the leadership of Dr Amani Saidi. The process of packaging and translating the findings of the research into a good practice guide benefitted from the guidance and oversight provided by a reference group that comprised the following experts on short courses:

- Prof Johannes Themane (University of Limpopo);
- Dr Saretha Brussow (University of the Free State);
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- Ms Freda Daniels (University of the Western Cape);
- Ms Yolande August (Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University); and
- Prof Kethamonie Naidoo (Council on Higher Education).

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- Dr Elizabeth Walton (University of the Witwatersrand);
- Prof Peter Mulaudzi (University of Venda);
- Dr Esther Njiro (University of South Africa); and
- Dr Jody Cedras (South African Qualifications Authority).

The penultimate draft served at a full meeting of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) where it also received further constructive inputs.

The contribution made by all the above individuals, group and committee, is greatly appreciated.

## FOREWORD

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) was established under the provisions of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 (as amended). The Act stipulates that part of the mandate of the CHE is to (i) promote quality assurance in higher education; (ii) audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions; and (iii) accredit programmes of higher education. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), the permanent committee of the CHE, interpreted the first element of this part of the mandate as constituting the promotion of quality among providers of higher education in order to catalyse the development of quality awareness and quality responsiveness at the institutional level (HEQC Founding Document, 2001). The development of good practice guides is one practical and effective way to fulfil this quality promotion mandate, and it is within this context that the CHE has developed this specific good practice guide.

Universities and private higher education institutions are engaged in offering short courses that do not lead to qualifications or part qualifications on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). These courses serve different developmental purposes to the participants. To the institutions themselves, the offering of such short courses provides an avenue for community or societal engagement and income generation. The income generation imperative, it would appear, is in ascendancy, given the resource constrained environment in which institutions have to operate.

As institutions are being called upon to meet the rapidly increasing demand for short courses, this has impelled the need for a guide that sets and defines minimum quality requirements for short courses. This guide is intended to assist institutions to put the necessary quality management mechanisms in place in order to ensure that the short courses they develop and offer are of value to the participants, their sponsors and other relevant stakeholders. In addition to setting minimum quality requirements, the guide also presents the key principles and good practices associated with each minimum requirement; and these articulate what needs to be done at institutional level in order to ensure that the minimum requirements are met. The principles and practices in the guide provide a basis for some degree of standardisation across the sector. This, in turn, could lead institutions to recognise each other's short courses when considering applications for access or advanced standing through the route of recognition of prior learning (RPL). This clearly would be a positive development which will serve to reinforce the aspiration towards an integrated higher education system.

The development and release of this good practice guide is timely because the CHE's own study in 2014 found that while universities and private higher education institutions were very active in offering short courses, not all of them had put in place mechanisms for the quality assurance of their short course offerings. The study further revealed that, among those institutions that had mechanisms in place, the nature of such mechanisms as well as the intensity and rigour with which they were implemented, varied considerably. This state of affairs often gave rise to stakeholder complaints about the quality, and therefore value, of the short courses offered by some higher education institutions. It is of utmost importance that each institution makes use of this good practice guide to put in place and implement a sound quality management regimen for its short course offerings in the interests of accountability, in fulfilment of its *raison d'être*, and the pursuit of its strategic objectives. It is also our view that the reputation of an institution will either rise or decline in relation to its short course offerings. To neglect this will no doubt come at a heavy cost.

Good practice guides are normally 'living documents' that get adapted as the higher education landscape changes, particularly in response to concomitant changes in policy, legislation and technology. This specific good practice guide is no exception to this phenomenon. It should therefore be considered as a 'living document' which will be updated as and when necessary. To this end, users are encouraged to provide feedback to the CHE on their experiences in translating the guide into practice at the institutional level.

Prof Narend Baijnath  
Chief Executive Officer  
01 September 2016



## ACRONYMS

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| <b>BAC:</b>   | British Accreditation Council                 |
| <b>CHE:</b>   | Council on Higher Education                   |
| <b>ETQA:</b>  | Education and Training Quality Assurer        |
| <b>HEQC:</b>  | Higher Education Quality Committee            |
| <b>HEQSF:</b> | Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework |
| <b>ICT:</b>   | Information and Communication Technology      |
| <b>NQF:</b>   | National Qualifications Framework             |
| <b>NLRD:</b>  | National Learners' Records Database           |
| <b>SAQA:</b>  | South African Qualifications Authority        |
| <b>SETA:</b>  | Sector Education and Training Authority       |
| <b>SOP:</b>   | Standard Operating Procedure                  |
| <b>QC:</b>    | Quality Council                               |
| <b>RPL:</b>   | Recognition of Prior Learning                 |

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**Access** refers to eligibility for admission to or entry into an educational programme.

**Advanced standing** is the status granted to a student for admission to studies at a higher level than the student's prior formal studies would have allowed. A common example of advanced standing is 'exemption' that a student is granted from modules at a particular level of a programme.

**Benchmarking** is a process of comparing programmes or courses in an institution against similar ones in other institutions, to assess their parity in terms of quality, standards, levels and other specified features.

**Good practices** are approaches, methods, techniques or ways of doing things that are generally accepted as being correct or more effective in delivering desired results or outcomes in a particular industry or profession.

**Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework** is the sub-framework of the National Qualification Framework which is focused on higher education qualifications. It is developed and managed by the Council on Higher Education under the aegis of the South African Qualifications Authority.

**Learning outcomes** are contextually demonstrated results of specific learning processes. They include knowledge, skills, values and attitudes.

**Life-long learning** is learning that is flexible, diverse and available to individuals at different stages of their lives, in different places and within different contexts. It empowers individuals with learning tools, general and work-related knowledge and skills, inter-cultural and multi-cultural competencies, a sense of personal development, and self-actualisation.

**Quality** embodies meeting the minimum standards of education; fitness for purpose in the context of mission differentiation of institutions within a national framework; value for money; and transformation in the sense of developing the personal capabilities of individuals, as well as advancing the agenda for social change.

**Quality assurance** refers to the processes of ensuring that specified standards or minimum requirements of quality in education are met.

**Quality management** is the sum of institutional arrangements for assuring, supporting, developing and enhancing, as well as monitoring the quality of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.

**Recognition of prior learning** refers to the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of an individual are made visible, mediated and assessed for the purposes of alternative access and admission to educational programmes, recognition and certification, or further learning and development.

**Short courses** are short learning programmes offered by higher education institutions outside their formal structured undergraduate and postgraduate programmes and they, therefore, do not lead to qualifications on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF). They serve a range of social and educational purposes, including improving or refreshing participants' knowledge and skills in a particular field, improving participants' readiness for specific formal higher education programmes, continuing professional development, learning to use technology, personal fulfilment, social development and good citizenship, to mention a few.

**Short course participants** (or 'participants') refer to individuals or groups of individuals who register for, and attend short courses to learn and acquire knowledge, skills, competencies and the desired attitudes or behaviour.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 A study commissioned by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) in 2014<sup>1</sup> found that universities and private higher education institutions are actively involved in providing a wide range of short courses which do not lead to qualifications on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub Framework (HEQSF).
- 1.2 The study found that not all higher education institutions had put in place mechanisms for the quality assurance of their short course offerings. It also found that there were substantive differences in the actual practices among those institutions that had some quality assurance mechanisms in place. The intensity and rigour with which the quality assurance mechanisms were being implemented also varied significantly among the institutions.
- 1.3 The study therefore recommended that the CHE develops a good practice guide for the quality management of short courses which could be used by all providers across the higher education sector. This recommendation, together with the increasing stakeholder concerns regarding the quality of short courses offered by higher education institutions, provided the motivation for the development of this good practice guide.

## 2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The CHE is a statutory body established under the provisions of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997, as amended. The core functions of the CHE include advising the Minister of Higher Education and Training on higher education matters; monitoring the state of higher education and publishing information of developments in this regard; arranging and coordinating conferences on higher education themes; and promoting quality and quality assurance in higher education. The latter function is discharged through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), a permanent committee of the CHE.
- 2.2 The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008 designated the CHE as the Quality Council (QC) for higher education with an expanded quality assurance and promotion mandate that includes developing and managing the HEQSF; conducting and publishing results of research that seeks to facilitate further development, refinement and implementation of the HEQSF; developing and implementing policies on the HEQSF; maintaining a database of learners' achievements in higher education; and submitting the data to the national learners' records database (NLRD), which is maintained by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).
- 2.3 The South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act 58 of 1995 (since repealed) recognised the CHE's permanent committee, the HEQC, as the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) for higher education and training. One of the responsibilities of the HEQC, as the then ETQA for higher education, was to report formally to SAQA on the quality management arrangements of higher education providers in respect of a number of areas that included short courses.

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<sup>1</sup> Council on Higher Education (2014): *Provisioning and Management of Short Courses by Institutions of Higher Education*. Unpublished survey report.

- 2.4 The HEQC, acting in accordance with Section 9(2) of the SAQA ETQA Regulations, delegated the responsibility for assuring the quality of short courses to the higher education institutions. It produced a framework<sup>2</sup> which outlined the minimum requirements and criteria for developing and implementing sound quality assurance mechanisms for the delegated functions. Institutions were expected to use the framework to ensure the proper quality assurance of all delegated functions. They were also required to report on, and show evidence of, their quality assurance mechanisms in this regard.
- 2.5 The repeal of the SAQA Act 58 of 1995, and the associated amendments of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 in 2008 and 2010, removed the legal basis for the delegation of functions by the HEQC to higher education institutions in terms of the ETQA Regulations. Accordingly, in 2012 the HEQC sent out a communiqué to institutions confirming that the delegation of the functions under the ETQA Regulations was no longer valid. The communiqué, however, indicated that institutions were to continue taking full responsibility for the quality assurance of short courses and other hitherto delegated functions.
- 2.6 The HEQC holds a principled position that the primary responsibility for the quality of learning and teaching, and for the implementation of the necessary quality assurance mechanisms, rests with the higher education providers. It sees its role as that of providing a comparative framework for facilitating quality judgements across the system<sup>3</sup>. It is this approach to quality assurance that has informed the development of this guide to provide a framework for the quality management of short courses which will facilitate comparability at national level.
- 2.7 This guide expands on the minimum requirements for the quality management of short courses outlined in the 2008 framework<sup>4</sup> by including key principles and good practices which seek to clearly demonstrate what needs to be done at the level of an institution in order to ensure that the minimum requirements are met at all times.

### 3. PURPOSE

- 3.1 This guide has been compiled to provide a system-wide point of reference on which higher education institutions can model their own systems for the quality management of short courses.
- 3.2 The range of principles and practices in the guide provides a basis for some degree of standardisation across the sector, which could lead institutions to recognise each other's short course offerings when considering applications for access and/or advanced standing through the recognition of prior learning (RPL).
- 3.3 The guide also serves as a form of reassurance to potential short course participants, sponsors and other stakeholders, that there is national oversight over the quality of short courses in the higher education sector. Such reassurance is important to address the concerns that stakeholders have been expressing regarding the quality of some short courses offered by higher education institutions in the country.

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<sup>2</sup> Council on Higher Education (2008): *The HEQC Framework for Delegated Functions*. CHE: Pretoria

<sup>3</sup> Council on Higher Education (2001): *Higher Education Quality Committee's Founding Document*. CHE: Pretoria

<sup>4</sup> Council on Higher Education (2008): *The HEQC Framework for Delegated Functions*. CHE: Pretoria

## 4. SCOPE

- 4.1 This guide applies to short courses that are offered outside the realms of the HEQSF. These courses provide flexible, 'just-in-time' and 'just-enough' learning to meet specific needs such as to improve or up-date participants' knowledge and skills in a particular field; impart new knowledge and competencies; facilitate adoption of innovation and change; and provide for personal or professional development<sup>5</sup>.
- 4.2 In terms of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008, the CHE as the Quality Council (QC) for higher education is required to ensure the integrity and credibility of the HEQSF. At a fundamental level, this entails diligently guarding against the practice of ascribing attributes and other distinctive properties of the HEQSF, such as NQF levels and credits, to learning programmes that institutions offer outside the realms of the HEQSF. It is within this context that institutions are expected not to assign NQF levels and/or allocate credits to this type of short courses. This guide is specifically for these non-credit bearing short courses.
- 4.3 Although people who attend and complete short courses offered outside the realms of the HEQSF may not be awarded credits on any level of the HEQSF (NQF levels 5 to 10), the information about the short courses attended may be included in the individuals' portfolios of evidence that can then be presented in support of applications for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) for access and/or advanced standing. This means that these short courses may also be used, through RPL, to improve participants' eligibility for admission to formal qualification programmes.
- 4.4 The good practice guide covers the entire value chain of the non-credit bearing short courses offered outside the HEQSF: from the design and development to their delivery, and post-delivery processes. This is a holistic perspective based on the understanding that what happens at any particular segment in the value chain has potential to influence the quality of the final product.

## 5. POLICY CONTEXT

- 5.1 By and large, the post-1994 policies on higher education, economic development, innovation and technology in South Africa advocate a paradigm shift in terms of the way in which higher education institutions function. These policies require that higher education institutions move from the traditional focus on the dual missions of teaching and research, to embrace a more expanded mandate that includes being active role players towards economic growth and social development.
- 5.2 The paradigm shift alluded to in 5.1 above has seen higher education institutions becoming increasingly involved in 'third mission' activities, including technology transfer and innovation, community engagement and offering of short courses. The 2014 CHE study referred to earlier<sup>6</sup>, for instance, found that the offering of short courses is increasingly becoming a major thrust among the day-to-day activities of both private and public higher education institutions in the country, such that some institutions have set up 'subsidiaries' or fully-fledged divisions, to run short courses.

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<sup>5</sup> South African Qualifications Authority (2015): *Guidelines for Good Practice for Learning that Does not Lead to a Qualification or Part-Qualification (LNQ): Draft for Public Comment*. Government Gazette No. 38672

<sup>6</sup> Council on Higher Education (2014): *Provisioning and Management of Short Courses by Institutions of Higher Education*. Unpublished survey report.

- 5.3 The principle of life-long learning is an integral part of the transformation agenda that seeks to address the inequalities of the past through increased capacitating and up-skilling of predominantly unskilled and/or semi-skilled individuals, most of whom are from disadvantaged backgrounds. The offering of short courses is seen as an important mechanism for contributing towards meeting the objectives of life-long learning and opening up opportunities for previously disadvantaged population groups to become active role players in the economy and society at large.
- 5.4 Policies such as the National Development Plan<sup>7</sup>, the Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa: 2010-2030<sup>8</sup>, and the National Skills Development Strategy III<sup>9</sup> have all had some influence on the rapid proliferation of different types of short courses offered by higher education institutions. Amongst other pronouncements, these policies promote short courses as means to: meet specific knowledge and skills needs for the workplace; empower individuals with the ability to adapt to innovation and change; and improve chances of access to higher education programmes for those who do not meet the normal formal requirements. As stated earlier (see 4.3), information about short courses attended can be presented as part of the portfolio of evidence when applying for RPL for access or advanced standing.
- 5.5 The policy-inspired 'short course revolution' in higher education has taken place, and continues to take place, in the context of almost non-existent national norms and standards of quality as systems for quality assuring such courses have not developed at the same pace, and with the same enthusiasm, as that for programmes for formal qualifications. This is the challenge which this guideline document seeks to address by coming up with a set of minimum requirements, as well as the concomitant principles and good practices that can facilitate meeting the stipulated minimum requirements.

## 6. INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

- 6.1 By and large, countries whose education systems bear some similarities to that of South Africa, including Australia<sup>10</sup>, the United Kingdom<sup>11</sup> and Belgium<sup>12</sup>, follow a dual approach to the quality assurance of short courses. This dual approach is summarised below:
- 6.1.1 On one hand, these countries have bodies that regulate the offering of short courses by training providers that are not higher education institutions. These bodies accredit the training institutions to develop and offer short courses for a specified period, after which the institutions may seek re-accreditation. In South Africa, the role of these bodies is currently fulfilled by the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).
- 6.1.2 On the other hand, universities and independent higher education institutions have internal mechanisms for the quality assurance of the development and delivery of short courses. In this case, external bodies have no direct influence on the quality assurance mechanisms that institutions put in place and follow. They, however, develop frameworks and/or guideline documents that provide guidance to the institutions. It is this approach that the HEQC, as the 'external' quality assurance body, has adopted by developing this guideline document to provide guidance to higher education institutions on the quality management of short courses.

<sup>7</sup> National Planning Commission (2012): *National Development Plan 2030. The Presidency*: Pretoria

<sup>8</sup> Department of Education (2009): *Human Resource Development Strategy for South Africa (HRD-SA) 2010 – 2030. Department of Education*: Pretoria

<sup>9</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training (2013): *National Skills Development Strategy III. DHET*: Pretoria

<sup>10</sup> Shah, M., Wilson, M., and Nair, C. S. (2010): *The Australian Higher Education Quality Assurance Framework: Its Success, Deficiencies and Way Forward*. Proceedings of the Australian Association for Institutional Conference, Melbourne

<sup>11</sup> BAC (2012): *Short Course Provider Scheme Document BAC*: London

<sup>12</sup> Baert, H., and Cockx, F. (1997): *University Continuing Education in Belgium Thematic Network on University Continuing Education*: Brussels

## 7. MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS

- 7.1 The higher education institutions that offer short courses have the responsibility to develop and implement mechanisms for ensuring that quality and integrity are maintained throughout the short course value chain, from the design to the delivery, and beyond.
- 7.2 As a minimum, institutions offering short courses should see to it that the following requirements are in place:
- Institutional policy framework;
  - Effective short course coordination and governance structures;
  - Processes and procedures for course design and development;
  - Systems for course approval and registration;
  - Rules and regulations pertaining to course marketing, recruitment and registration of participants;
  - Adequate teaching and learning resources, and appropriate processes;
  - Assessment strategy and procedures;
  - Certification arrangements;
  - A system of records management; and
  - A system for monitoring and review as a basis for continuous improvement.
- 7.3 Each of the above requirements has guiding principles and associated good practices, which are presented in the subsequent sections.

## 8. INSTITUTIONAL POLICY FRAMEWORK

### 8.1 Principle

- 8.1.1 The offering of short courses should be governed by a written institutional policy approved by the highest academic decision-making structure in an institution.

### 8.2 Good practices

- 8.2.1 The institutional policy on short courses is used as a framework to regulate the development and delivery of short courses in order to protect the institution's integrity and reputation; and to ensure that participants and/or their sponsors get value for their money.
- 8.2.2 Such a policy stipulates or articulates the following, *inter alia*:
- The position and roles of short courses within the context of the mission, vision and goals of the institution;
  - The definition of short courses (which should be in line with the definition provided in this guide), including the features that distinguish them from other programmes offered by the institution;
  - The value proposition for the institution's short course offerings, including the local, regional and national priorities that such offerings seek to address;
  - Designation of institutional structures responsible for the governance and coordination of short courses;
  - The processes and procedures that the designated structures should follow in the course of discharging their respective responsibilities;

- A clear framework on personnel requirements for running short courses, including procedures for appointing and remunerating facilitators and other role players;
- A clear framework on the financial aspects of running short courses, including procedures for determining course fees, management of revenue, and arrangements on cost cross-subsidisation with formal programmes;
- A system for approving and registering short courses, which includes the criteria that any proposed course has to satisfy to earn approval and registration; and
- Measures to be undertaken against, and sanctions to be imposed on, those who may be found to be responsible for running unapproved and unregistered short courses.

8.2.3 The policy is accorded the same status, and enforced in the same ways, as the institutional policies that govern teaching and learning, research and community engagement functions of the institution.

8.2.4 The policy is reviewed and up-dated regularly in response to internal and external developments, including changes in the national legislative and policy environment.

8.2.5 The central structure that is designated to be responsible for the governance and coordination of short courses in an institution acts as the custodian of the short course policy. It monitors compliance with the policy across the institution and recommends disciplinary procedures to the relevant authorities in cases where it finds that the policy is not being complied with.

8.2.6 Compliance with the institutional policy on short courses is assessed on an annual basis as part of the scope of work for internal auditors.

## 9. GOVERNANCE AND COORDINATION

### 9.1 Principles

9.1.1 Proper governance and coordination at the level of an institution is essential to ensure that there is adequate accountability in the offering of short courses and to prevent 'mission drift'. It is also essential to provide internal oversight on the quality management of short courses.

9.1.2 The cooperation and support of faculties and other structures that develop and deliver short courses, is essential in ensuring the integrity of the processes and activities across the short course value chain in an institution.

9.1.3 Adherence to the maxims of due diligence, transparency, fairness and risk management, is essential in ensuring sound governance of the offering of short courses in an institution.

### 9.2 Good practices

9.2.1 A division or similar other central structure is established and vested with the authority to govern and coordinate all short course offering activities in an institution. This central structure is accountable to University Senate (or equivalent structure in a private higher institution) through one of the members of executive management at an institution (for



example, through the portfolio of Deputy Vice Chancellor responsible for community engagement, partnerships and advisory services).

- 9.2.2 The personnel employed in the central short course governance and coordination structure is suitably qualified and experienced so that it is able to provide quality coordination services to short course participants, instructors or facilitators and other interested parties within and outside the institution.
- 9.2.3 The staff in the central short course governance and coordination structure works closely with the relevant staff members in the faculties and other structures that are responsible for developing and delivering the short courses.
- 9.2.4 The central short course governance and coordination structure liaises with staff in student support and advisory services such as library, accommodation, cafeteria and ICT, to ensure that short course participants have access to the relevant services.
- 9.2.5 The central short course governance and coordination structure draws up standard operating procedures (SOPs) and develops templates. It also enforces adherence to the SOPs, and the consistent use of the templates across the institution.
- 9.2.6 The central short course governance and coordination structure produces a report on all aspects of short course offering (including financial information) on an annual basis. Such a report is included in the institution's overall annual report for the sake of transparency.

## 10. COURSE DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

### 10.1 Principles

- 10.1.1 Short courses should be designed and developed to meet the needs and expectations of participants, employers, sponsors and professional associations, where applicable.
- 10.1.2 Short courses should be designed and developed in the context of an institution's vision, mission, goals, core competencies and resources.
- 10.1.3 A clearly articulated philosophy of teaching and learning should inform the design and development of short courses.
- 10.1.4 The course design and development process should result in clear and concise written statements of intended learning outcomes, as well as the possible impacts of the respective courses.

### 10.2 Good practices

- 10.2.1 The design and development of short courses is preceded by needs analysis so as to ensure that each short course has a clearly defined need to satisfy.

- 10.2.2 The needs analysis is complemented with market analysis to identify the potential target groups for each short course. The size of the potential demand is one of the major considerations in deciding on whether or not to develop a short course. Similarly, the educational background of the target group influences the choice of the content of a short course, as well as the choice of the course delivery methods.
- 10.2.3 The alignment of the proposed courses to an institution's vision, mission and goals is assessed. Similarly, the availability of requisite competencies, infrastructure and other resources within the institution is also assessed.
- 10.2.4 Statements of intended learning outcomes, clearly describing the knowledge, skills and competencies that participants should expect to acquire from a short course, are formulated and written down. Such statements provide the focal points for instruction and learning.
- 10.2.5 The learning outcomes are arranged in a recognisable and logical sequence from entry level to exit levels, so that participants would be able to gauge their progress towards achieving them in the process of learning.
- 10.2.6 The possible impacts of the courses are determined. An impact is how the learning outcomes can be utilised and applied by the participants in settings other than the learning environment; for example, in a work environment. Learning outcomes and impacts are the cornerstones on which sound short courses are premised<sup>13</sup>.
- 10.2.7 An 'educational concept' is developed detailing the level at which a short course is to be pitched (for example: cognitive level, affection level and psycho-motor level as in the Bloom's Taxonomy<sup>14</sup>), admission requirements, possible course content, course duration, learning activities, course material, teaching methods, division of course into theory and practical components, and assessment criteria as well as methods.
- 10.2.8 An effective mechanism for obtaining, recording and analysing feedback from students, employers, sponsors and other stakeholders on all aspects of a short course, is developed and articulated. Such feedback plays a critical role in the review and evaluation of the short courses for the purpose of continuous improvement.
- 10.2.9 A degree of flexibility is built in the design and development of short courses to allow for their customisation to particular client organisations or government departments that might require the courses to be delivered 'in-house'. Due care is exercised to ensure that the 'customised' short courses retain all of the conceptual and theoretical components of the original courses.
- 10.2.10 Newly-developed short courses are benchmarked against similar ones that are already on offer at other higher education institutions, either locally or internationally.

<sup>13</sup> Frey, H (2011): *Fostering Quality in Continuing Education*. Online [www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz](http://www.ethz.ch/content/dam/ethz) (Accessed 20 May 2015)

<sup>14</sup> Atherton J S (2013): *Learning and Teaching; Bloom's Taxonomy*. Online [www.learningandteaching.info/learning/bloomtax.htm](http://www.learningandteaching.info/learning/bloomtax.htm) (Accessed 27 August 2015)

- 10.2.11 Budget plans are prepared detailing anticipated costs of offering each short course; the revenue that the course is expected to generate; and contingency plans on how to meet possible short-falls, or how to handle possible surplus.
- 10.2.12 Standardised course design templates are developed by the central structure responsible for the governance and coordination of short courses in an institution, and such templates are used consistently across the institution.

## 11. COURSE APPROVAL AND REGISTRATION

### 11.1 Principles

- 11.1.1 Approval and registration of short courses at the level of an institution are the formal mechanisms by which institutions internally vet short courses and recognise those that meet the minimum requirements.
- 11.1.2 Faculties and departments (or equivalent structures) in an institution offer only those short courses that are approved and registered at the level of an institution.

### 11.2 Good practices

- 11.2.1 The Faculty Academic Board (or equivalent structure) assesses proposals for the introduction of new short courses, and draws up recommendations in this regard, for submission to the central structure responsible for the governance and coordination of short courses in the institution.
- 11.2.2 The central structure responsible for the governance and coordination of short courses in an institution considers the recommendations received from the relevant Faculty Academic Board (or equivalent structure), and grants approval to those proposed short courses that meet the requirements, as stipulated in the institution's policy.
- 11.2.3 The Dean/Executive Dean of a Faculty (or the head of an equivalent structure), in his or her capacity as the chairperson of a Faculty Academic Board (or equivalent structure), may grant 'provisional approval' to the introduction of a new short course in cases where there is reasonable justification for the course to start running before the next scheduled meeting of the institutional central structure responsible for the governance and coordination of short courses. Such 'provisional approval' is subject to ratification by the central structure at its next meeting.
- 11.2.4 Where short courses are developed jointly by two or more higher education institutions, approval is sought from each of the partnering institutions. The partnering institutions also sign a memorandum of agreement that clearly reflects the respective responsibilities of each, in the delivery of the courses.

- 11.2.5 An approval to introduce and offer a short course is valid for a period of five (5) years at a time; after which a fresh approval is sought. This is intended to encourage a process of continuous improvement.
- 11.2.6 The Dean/Executive Dean of a Faculty (or the head of an equivalent structure) is delegated the authority to grant re-approval of a short course if up to 50% of the original course content remains in place after the five (5) year period. In cases where the course might have changed substantially, such that less than 50% of the original course content remains in place, then the application process for the re-approval is the same as for the application process for the initial approval.
- 11.2.7 A register of approved short courses is maintained. Such a register reflects the identity number of each short course, date on which the course was approved, and date on which the validity of approval lapses. It also reflects, for each short course, the name of the responsible faculty (or equivalent structure) as well the name of the course leader.
- 11.2.8 The short course register is accorded appropriate security measures to prevent unauthorised access and possible tampering with the data there-in.
- 11.2.9 The short course register is up-dated on a continuous basis as newly approved courses are added to it and discontinued ones are taken off.
- 11.2.10 A system for monitoring compliance with approval and registration requirements is put in place to assist with ensuring that Faculties (or equivalent structures) offer only those short courses that are approved and registered.

## 12. COURSE MARKETING, RECRUITMENT AND REGISTRATION OF PARTICIPANTS

### 12.1 Principles

- 12.1.1 Marketing material for short courses should provide all necessary information accurately to enable potential participants, sponsors and other stakeholders to make informed decisions about enrolling, or sponsoring participants to enrol, for the courses.
- 12.1.2 Short course admission criteria should be appropriate, relevant, fair and non-discriminatory; and they should be applied consistently in a transparent manner.

### 12.2 Good practices

- 12.2.1 The marketing of short courses to potential participants and/or sponsors is undertaken only after the institution has granted formal approval to the introduction of the short courses in question.
- 12.2.2 Short courses that are due to undergo the process of re-approval are marketed only after the re-approvals have been granted.
- 12.2.3 The marketing material, including brochures and electronic or print media advertisements, provides comprehensive, up-to-date and accurate description of the short courses as approved. Information on course fees and, where applicable, costs of accommodation and meals, is also provided.

- 12.2.4 The marketing material further provides accurate depiction of the provider's location, premises, facilities, resources and support services that are made available to participants of the short courses.
- 12.2.5 The requirements for admission to short courses are different from those for admission to programmes that lead to qualifications on the HEQSF. The former are focused more on determining the applicants' ability to successfully complete the respective short courses. Language ability and recognition of prior learning form part of the requirements for admission to short courses.
- 12.2.6 Potential participants submit formal applications for admission to a particular short course, and they provide all testimonials as well as other supporting documentation, as required.
- 12.2.7 The completed application packs are retained on file (digital or hard copy) for a period in line with the institution's record and document management policy.
- 12.2.8 The applications are evaluated against the stipulated admission criteria in a consistent, fair, transparent and non-prejudicial manner by an Admissions Committee. Each Faculty (or equivalent structure) has its own Short Course Admissions Committee.
- 12.2.9 Applicants who are accepted into a short course are issued with formal letters of admission which also stipulate contractual obligations of the institution, the participants and, where relevant, the sponsors. The successful applicants are also sent indemnity letters which state that they would indemnify the institution against any loss or harm that they might suffer while attending the short course, if such harm or loss is not as a result of the negligence of the institution or its employees.
- 12.2.10 Applicants who accept to take up their places on a short course sign copies of the offer of admission letters as well as the indemnity letters. Once signed, they are returned to the institution as confirmation of acceptance of the contractual terms.
- 12.2.11 Short course participants are registered by the institution in the same manner and following the same processes as students on programmes that lead to qualifications on the HEQSF.
- 12.2.12 Students on programmes that lead to qualifications on the HEQSF are allowed to register also for relevant short courses; and such is not treated as concurrent registration since the short courses do not lead to formal qualifications.
- 12.2.13 Short course participants who are not South African citizens or permanent residents are advised to comply with the Immigration Act 13 of 2002 (as amended) and its visa regulations, before taking up their places on the short courses that they are admitted to.
- 12.2.14 Induction sessions are organised and held at the beginning of short courses to provide participants with relevant information and advice on the courses, premises, facilities, delivery method(s), resources available and participant support services offered.

## 13. TEACHING AND LEARNING RESOURCES AND PROCESSES

### 13.1 Principles

- 13.1.1 A physical environment that caters for the comfort and other unique needs of the short course participants, and that also complies with relevant health and safety regulations, is critical to stimulate effective learning.
- 13.1.2 Participants' access to library facilities, reference material and additional instructional media, is essential in enhancing effective learning in most short courses.
- 13.1.3 The selection of appropriate course delivery methods is fundamental in ensuring effective results of teaching and learning.
- 13.1.4 The availability of sufficient numbers of course instructors or facilitators who are also properly qualified and/or experienced in the relevant subject areas, is critical for the delivery of quality short courses.

### 13.2 Good practices

- 13.2.1 Adequate physical resources, consistent with the intended learning outcomes of the respective short courses, are made available for the running of the short courses.
- 13.2.2 The physical resources and infrastructure that are provided, adequately address participants' physical comfort and other unique needs. Access arrangements are made for participants with health-related, learning, physical, psychiatric or sensory disabilities.
- 13.2.3 Short course delivery venues outside the normal premises of an institution (off-site or off-campus venues) are sourced when necessary, and such off-campus venues meet all legal requirements including those associated with health and safety.
- 13.2.4 Short course participants are advised of the availability of library facilities, multimedia material, ICT facilities, studios, tutorial rooms and additional relevant teaching and learning media; and their access to such facilities is arranged.
- 13.2.5 Sufficient numbers of suitably qualified and/or experienced course instructors or facilitators are mobilised or sourced to teach participants who are registered for the short courses. The short course instructors or facilitators are selected from internal faculty and also, where necessary, from external professionals with relevant expertise. The qualifications and experience of the external course instructors are verified before being hired.
- 13.2.6 The institution has a system in place to ensure that the use of internal faculty to teach short courses does not compromise their availability to teach in formal programmes that lead to qualifications on the HEQSF.
- 13.2.7 Contracts of short course instructors or facilitators are processed through the institutional Human Resource Management Office on recommendations of the Dean/

Executive Dean of a Faculty (or the head of an equivalent structure) concerned. The recommendations are submitted through the central structure responsible for the governance and coordination of short courses in the institution.

- 13.2.8 Timetables for short courses clearly specify the times when each learning outcome will be addressed in order to give assurance to participants and/or their sponsors, that the delivery of the courses is designed to support the achievement of the specified learning outcomes.
- 13.2.9 The short course instructors or facilitators consider, among other factors, the academic background, presumed prior learning and special needs of participants, in deciding on the instructional material, media and other learning technologies to be used in the delivery of any particular short course.
- 13.2.10 The most preferred teaching methods in the delivery of short courses are those that promote active learning; allow for feedback to be provided to participants regarding their progress; facilitate participants' understanding of the relationships between the concepts presented and their application in real life; and speed up participants' progression from simple to more complex levels of development.
- 13.2.11 A mixture of delivery methods is used, where appropriate, to optimise the learning process and experience. Included in such a mixture are traditional face-to-face engagement modes such as lectures and tutorials; online learning resources; and audio-visual learning packages.
- 13.2.12 Practical, field-based or work-based components of relevant short courses are integrated into the main courses, and are linked directly to the learning outcomes of the respective courses.

## 14. ASSESSMENT

### 14.1 Principles

- 14.1.1 Assessment is an integral part of short course delivery as it is the means by which participants' progression in relation to learning outcomes is evaluated. It is also the means by which the participants' overall achievement in a course is evaluated.
- 14.1.2 Adherence to the principles of objectivity, fairness, transparency, validity, reliability, authenticity, practicality and flexibility is essential for the assessment to be credible.
- 14.1.3 A proper balance between instructional time and assessment time is critical, since short courses typically run for limited periods of time.

### 14.2 Good practices

- 14.2.1 Assessment is incorporated into the teaching and learning experience in order to optimise the use of the relatively short time allocated to short courses, and also to assist in identifying areas that require emphasis or more focused attention.

- 14.2.2 The short course instructors or facilitators are trained in the appropriate assessment methods prior to them administering assessment as part of the teaching process.
- 14.2.3 Schedules, methods and processes of assessment are communicated to participants at the beginning of a course.
- 14.2.4 Less structured formative methods of assessment are used at all stages of the delivery of short courses to assess participants' progression in relation to the learning outcomes. Such methods include question and answer sessions, group discussions, self-assessment questionnaires, class quizzes, class presentations, and homework.
- 14.2.5 Subsequent to the formative assessment activities, the participants are provided with timely, constructive and fair feedback on their progress in relation to the learning outcomes of the respective courses.
- 14.2.6 More structured summative assessment methods are employed at the end of short courses to assess participants' overall learning achievement in the specific courses. Such methods include tests, projects and portfolios.
- 14.2.7 Where summative assessment methods are used, special attention is given to the accurate recording of, and fair reporting on, the performance and achievement of short course participants.
- 14.2.8 All short course participants are expected to take part in the less structured formative assessment activities. However, participation in the more structured summative assessment activities is optional. Those who take part and are successful in the summative assessments are eligible to receive certificates of competence.
- 14.2.9 Feedback on the assessment methods, instruments and processes, is obtained from short course participants who have gone through the assessment, as well as from other relevant parties. This feedback is analysed and the results form the basis for further improvement of the assessment system.

## 15. CERTIFICATION

### 15.1 Principles

- 15.1.1 Certification represents an institution's testimony attesting that the participants concerned duly completed certain specified short courses offered by the institution.
- 15.1.2 The integrity of the certification process is critical in ensuring that stakeholders and the broader society attach credibility to, and show confidence in the value of the certificates that are issued by an institution.

### 15.2 Good practices

- 15.2.1 The end product of the certification process is the issuing of certificates to participants who complete short courses offered by an institution. The process is based on participants' records of attendance, or on records of both attendance as well as learning achievement.



- 15.2.2 The integrity of the certification process is guaranteed by having a secure participants' records system that includes a full audit trail of participants' attendance and/or learning achievement; and a proper record of communication from a relevant committee or office that recommends the issuing of certificates to deserving short course participants.
- 15.2.3 The design and format of the certificates, the process of issuing them and the delegation of authority for signing them; are determined at the level of an institution and not at the level of a faculty or a department (or equivalent academic structure).
- 15.2.4 The preparation, ordering and printing of certificates is coordinated and overseen by a central institutional office with clear lines of accountability and responsibility.
- 15.2.5 Certificates of attendance or participation are issued to participants who have attended and/or participated in classes and other learning activities associated with the respective short courses, including formative assessments. These certificates do not denote achievement of the learning outcomes; and thus participants cannot use them as confirmation of their competence in the subject matter of the respective short courses.
- 15.2.6 Certificates of competence are issued on the basis of the outcome of formal structured summative assessments. These certificates signify that the participants have attained the required learning achievement from the specific short courses, and thus they are taken to denote the bearers' competence in the subject matter of the respective short courses.
- 15.2.7 At the beginning of a short course, participants are provided with information on the requirements for certificates of attendance and competence, respectively. They are also informed about the possibility of making up for missed classes or learning activities (in order to be eligible for a certificate of attendance), and about the possibility of repeating failed summative assessments (in order to qualify for a certificate of competence).
- 15.2.8 Short course certificates have the same design and security features as those for formal qualifications. They, however, bear the following distinct sets of information:
- Name of the issuing institution;
  - Registration number of institution (if it is a private higher education institution);
  - Clear designation of certificate: either 'certificate of attendance' or 'certificate of competence';
  - Names and registration details of the participant who is being certificated;
  - Full title of the short course;
  - Short course identity number from the institution's short course register;
  - Duration of the short course (including an indication of the duration of practical and/or work-based components);
  - Level of achievement (for example, *cum laude*) if it is a certificate of competence;
  - Designations and signatures of duly delegated officials; and
  - Date of issue of the certificate.
- 15.2.9 Certificates of competence are issued together with academic transcripts which provide a descriptive record of the achievement levels attained by the short course participants in the various assessments that are attached to the course outcomes.

## 16. RECORDS MANAGEMENT

### 16.1 Principles

- 16.1.1 Commitment to the maintenance of complete and accurate records of courses and participants is critical in enhancing the credibility, reputation, integrity and value of the short courses offered by an institution.
- 16.1.2 The long term integrity of course and participant records is essential; and is dependent on securing them from the possibility of being tampered with, and being damaged by fire and other disasters.

### 16.2 Good practices

- 16.2.1 Staff members who are involved in the short course value chain keep comprehensive and accurate records on relevant aspects, including registration, attendance, participation and achievement in assessments, and course completion, to mention but a few.
- 16.2.2 All records are integrated into a limited-access database for short courses which is maintained and managed centrally as a subset of the overall information management system of an institution.
- 16.2.3 The short course records and data management system is designed in such a way that reports on participants' attendance and/or achievements in any particular course, can be generated and made available to participants and/or their sponsors, upon request.
- 16.2.4 High level security is accorded to all records at all times to prevent the possibility of having some of the records lost, or being tampered with in one way or another.
- 16.2.5 The Faculty (or equivalent structure) that offers any particular short course also keeps files containing copies of all publicity and advertising material used for the purpose of marketing short courses; course attendance lists; all course information and material used including assessment and outcomes of assessments; copies of completed course evaluation questionnaires; and copies of compliments and/or complaints from participants and/or sponsors.

## 17. MONITORING, REVIEW AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

### 17.1 Principles

- 17.1.1 The quality management of short courses is a cyclic process that continues throughout the duration of any particular course in a formative manner, as well as in a summative manner at the end of a course.
- 17.1.2 The processes of monitoring and review provide data and information that serve as the basis for charting the appropriate pathways for the continuous improvement of the different activities in the short course value chain.

## 17.2 Good practices

- 17.2.1 The central structure responsible for the governance and coordination of short courses in an institution drives and oversees the process of monitoring and review of short courses.
- 17.2.2 Clear monitoring and review processes and procedures are formulated, and are used consistently to ensure that quality is never compromised.
- 17.2.3 Monitoring and review are undertaken in a timely and thorough fashion in order to obtain accurate and sufficient evidence on which to base any improvement plans.
- 17.2.4 Course evaluation questionnaires administered to participants, employers and/or sponsors provide critical information on all aspects of the design and delivery of short courses. They also provide information on overall participants' experience, as well as on the impact of the courses on participants' attitude, behaviour and performance outside the teaching and learning environment.
- 17.2.5 Short courses are formally reviewed periodically, at least every five (5) years, in order to establish the extent to which they meet the intended objectives, and the extent to which they remain relevant to, or in tune with, developments in the micro and macro environments.
- 17.2.6 Better results are obtained when the reviews are undertaken by panels whose composition includes external experts in the relevant fields, as well as representatives of key stakeholders (for example, representatives of employers and key sponsors of participants).
- 17.2.7 The results of monitoring and review processes inform the development of quality improvement plans that cover the entire short course value chain; from course design, through course delivery to course evaluation and assessment of impacts.

## 18. CONCLUSION

- 18.1 The offering of short courses has arguably become the single largest 'third mission' activity of higher education institutions in South Africa. This is so, mostly because the education, social and economic policies of the democratic South Africa have created conducive conditions for a 'short course revolution'.
- 18.2 The 'short course revolution' referred to above has been taking place in the context of almost non-existent national norms and minimum quality standards for this type of learning programmes. The offering of short courses has, in effect, become a *laissez faire* affair for the higher education institutions.
- 18.3 The HEQC of the CHE, as the body responsible for quality assurance in higher education, finds the situation describe above as untenable, and has, therefore, developed this good practice guide to foster the quality management of short courses in higher education. This is essential in order to ensure that short course participants, their sponsors and other relevant stakeholders, get the value they deserve.

- 18.4 The range of principles and good practices in the guide document should provide a basis for some degree of standardisation across the sector. This, in turn, could lead institutions to recognise each other's short courses when considering applications for access or advanced standing through RPL.
- 18.5 The translation of this good practice guide into practice is the responsibility of the institutions themselves. They will do so in the interest of accountability, and also in fulfilment of their *raison d'être*, which is all about creating and delivering value to the stakeholders.
- 18.6 The good practice guide is a 'living document', which will be up-dated when and if necessary. To this end, the HEQC welcomes feedback from institutions on their experience with putting into practice the principles and good practices that have been outlined in this guide.

# NOTES

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