

Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency

HERQA Institutional Quality Audit

Preparing a Self Evaluation Document

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Introduction

The Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA) is an autonomous agency established through the Higher Education Proclamation (351/2003) as one of the key agencies responsible for guiding and regulating the higher education sector in Ethiopia. The mission of HERQA is to help ensure a high quality and relevant higher education system in the country. The Agency is mandated to report on the relevance and quality of higher education offered by all higher education institutions (HEIs) in Ethiopia. One of the central roles of HERQA is to encourage and assist the growth of an organizational culture in Ethiopian higher education that values quality and is committed to continuous improvement.

As one of its key activities HERQA will carry out institutional quality audits of all HEIs. An institutional quality audit is an in-depth analysis and assessment of the quality and relevance of programs and of the teaching and learning environment. Equally importantly, an institutional quality audit will assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of a HEI's systems of accountability and its internal review mechanisms. An essential component of a HERQA institutional quality audit is a Self Evaluation Document. This is prepared by the HEI following a self evaluation.

As the name indicates a self evaluation is an assessment carried out by the HEI itself. A HEI's Self Evaluation Document is a product of this self evaluation and is a principal reference source used by the HERQA team undertaking an institutional quality audit. An institutional quality audit will seek to verify claims made in a Self Evaluation Document.

Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to provide guidance on the preparation of the Self Evaluation Document that a HEI should present to HERQA to enable HERQA to plan, carry out and report on an institutional quality audit of the HEI. HEIs are reminded that a Self Evaluation Document is an essential requirement for a HERQA quality audit.

HERQA is issuing other documents to assist HEIs in their preparations for institutional audits: *HERQA Profile* (HERQA QA01/06/V1); *Areas of Focus for Institutional Quality Audits* (HERQA QA02/06/V1); *Institutional Self Evaluation* (HERQA QA03/06/V1); and *HERQA Institutional Audit Procedure* (HERQA QA05/06/V1). It is important that these are read in addition to this document.

The Self Evaluation Document

The Self Evaluation Document is a document that a HEI writes about itself. It should present a balanced mix of description and self-analysis. An institution's Self Evaluation Document is the principal reference document considered by a HERQA external audit team undertaking an institutional quality audit. It is a crucial document that informs the institutional quality audit and arises from a HEI's self evaluation.

The Self Evaluation Document allows an HEI to:

- Set the context for the HERQA institutional quality audit by providing information on such as its size, mission, vision, management, facilities and the nature and extent of its programs;
- Describe and evaluate how it provides programs of study of appropriate quality and relevance;
- Highlight the outcomes of internal or external reviews and evaluations and the responses made;
- Reflect on its strengths and weaknesses and make clear how it is taking steps (or has concrete plans) to build on strengths and remedy weaknesses;
- Indicate any limitations and constraints that restrict the fulfillment of its mission and how it plans to respond;
- Provide information on how the institution assures quality and relevance;
- Indicate the effectiveness of its mechanisms for assuring quality and relevance;
- Describe its good practices and explain how these have arisen and are being disseminated;
- Highlight any recent key changes in practice and why these have been introduced;
- Evidence how it has enhanced quality and relevance and has plans in place to continue to do so;
- Provide evidence to illustrate the claims being made;
- Provide a sound basis for the HERQA audit team to gain a good understanding of the quality and relevance of the educational provision of the HEI and how it assures quality and relevance to enable the team to make a judgment of the confidence that can be placed in the HEI's ability to manage and enhance quality and relevance.

The Content of the Self Evaluation Document

A HEI should structure its Self Evaluation Document under the following main headings:

1. The Institution
2. Institutional processes for the assurance of quality and relevance
3. Institutional self evaluation
4. The evaluation of quality and relevance
5. Good practices
6. Plans for enhancement of processes and practices

1 The Institution

This section should provide a short description of the HEI and its mission and vision. It should make clear how the HEI is governed, led and organized and the structures it has established to plan, organize and administer its affairs. It should also make clear the programs offered and the awards made. The profile of the HEI should be presented briefly. This may include:

- A short history and contextual information;
- A list of programs (including undergraduate, postgraduate, regular, extension, continuing education and distance education), faculties and academic and service departments;
- Statistical data on student enrolment on programs and a profile of the teaching staff in each department;
- Governance, leadership and organizational structure.

2 Institutional Processes for the Assurance of Quality and Relevance

This is key section of the Self Evaluation Document as it must convey to the HERQA quality audit team the detail of the institutional quality assurance systems at various levels of the HEI (e.g. institution, faculty, department and course). HERQA will judge from the evidence collected in the audit visit the extent to which the systems described are functioning effectively in the HEI to assure the quality and relevance of its provision and thus the confidence that can be placed in the HEI's ability to manage quality and relevance. It is important here to indicate how courses and programs are approved, monitored and reviewed and how students are assessed fairly and competently against the aims and objectives of courses and programs and in line with expected standards of achievement.

This section should also provide information on how the HEI assures the quality of its teachers through appointment procedures, the allocation of duties, regular evaluation and the provision of support. Here too, an HEI should report on how it assures the quality of its facilities and support for teaching and learning, including the academic support and welfare of its students.

In making judgments of quality it is important for an HEI to listen to the student voice and to the voices of other appropriate stakeholders. This section should thus make explicit how such voices are heard and how the views expressed are considered and used to improve the educational provision of the HEI.

3 Institutional Self Evaluation

This section should describe how the HEI has engaged in self evaluation. This should outline its history of self evaluation and note any institutional or program reviews, their methodologies and their outcomes. If external reviewers, stakeholder representatives or individuals have contributed to such self evaluations then their role should be explained.

Most of this section should be given over to the strategy used for the institutional self evaluation that has led to the Self Evaluation Document, the procedures used and a reflection on their implementation. Groups contributing data to the self evaluation should be indicated. Instruments used for data collection should be included in an appendix to the Self Evaluation Document as could any other relevant documents or pertinent information.

4 The Evaluation of Quality and Relevance

In this section the HEI should make clear its judgments on the quality and relevance of its educational provision. It should also pass judgment on its systems for assuring quality and relevance and their operation. Judgments should be frank, fair and honest. In all cases judgments should be supported by evidence, ideally from more than one source and which could be verified by the HERQA audit team. Every attempt should be made to give a balanced picture and HEIs should avoid presenting an over positive or over negative evaluation. One of the purposes of the HERQA institutional audit is to establish a level of confidence of a HEI's ability to judge the quality of its educational provision. Overstating or understating quality both lead to a lack of confidence in the HEI.

This section should describe the HEI's self evaluation of the following focus areas.

- Vision, Mission and Educational Goals
- Governance and Management System
- Infrastructure and Learning Resources
- Academic and Support Staff
- Student Admission and Support Services
- Program Relevance and Curriculum
- Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- Student Progression and Graduate Outcomes
- Research and Outreach Activities
- Internal Quality Assurance

Each area should be presented clearly and with evidence cited to support the judgements made. The discussion of each focus area should end with a summary of strengths and weaknesses.

5 Good Practices

Under this heading a HEI should highlight what it considers to be its good practices and the evidence for the claims made.

It should indicate how the good practices arose and how the HEI disseminated these (or plans` to do so) and the results. Evidence of impact should be cited.

6 Plans for Enhancement of Processes and Practices

In this final section of the Self Evaluation Document a HEI should reflect on its strengths and weaknesses and make clear how it is taking steps (or has concrete plans) to build on its strengths and remedy weaknesses.

Writing the Self Evaluation Document

Keeping in mind the level of importance of the Self Evaluation Document to a HERQA quality audit, HEIs are advised to note when it has to be submitted to HERQA and to plan for its preparation to ensure that there is sufficient time for the task. They are encouraged to establish a writing team and to appoint a team leader to manage the process. The involvement of students and other stakeholders in the development of the Self Evaluation Document could be beneficial.

(i) The Style of the Self Evaluation Document

The Self Evaluation Document should be a concise document that is sufficiently descriptive and evaluative to allow the HERQA institutional audit team to gain a clear picture of the HEI and its own appraisal of its strengths and weaknesses. The Self Evaluation Document must also allow the audit team to gain a good understanding of the key features of the HEI's approach to assuring quality and relevance. It should also make explicit the HEI's view of the effectiveness of the approach it has taken to quality assurance and relevance and, importantly, the evidence for the judgments made. The Self Evaluation Document must thus be an honest appraisal that is both accurate and verifiable by the HERQA audit team.

(ii) The Length of the Self Evaluation Document

The Self Evaluation Document may typically be 30 to 40 pages in length but slightly shorter or longer documents will not be viewed unfavorably if they provide necessary information. A Self Evaluation Document may include appendices of relevant information and also be cross referenced to other documents made available to the HERQA audit team. The Self Evaluation Document (excluding appendices) should be no more than 50 A4 pages in length. It should be typed with ample margins using a font size of 12pt.

(iii) Additional Documentation

A HEI should, as far as is possible, prepare a Self Evaluation Document that is a free standing document. It should not need to be supplemented by additional papers. However, if a HEI so wishes, it may submit additional documents if it considers that these will assist the audit team to reach a fuller understanding of the HEI.

Submission of the Self Evaluation Document to HERQA

A HEI is asked to submit 6 copies of its Self Evaluation Document to HERQA. In addition to these paper copies, the HEI should also provide HERQA with 2 copies of an electronic version on separate CDs, preferably in Microsoft Office Word.

Confidentiality of the Self Evaluation Document

Following a HERQA institutional audit visit, HERQA will write a Quality Audit Report. This will become a public document and will refer to the Self Evaluation Document and may include quotations from it but the Self Evaluation Document itself will not be made public by HERQA. The Self Evaluation Document will remain confidential to HERQA, to the HERQA audit team and to those commissioned by or approved by HERQA to carry out studies on quality assurance. Should a HEI wish to make its Self Evaluation Document public then HERQA would be prepared to assist with this.

In keeping with HERQA's commitment to continuous improvement, it is intended that this document will be reviewed regularly and updated as required. Users of this document are invited to contribute to this review at any time by alerting HERQA to any perceived errors and providing constructive written feedback on its utility.

New versions of this document will be indicated by a new issue date and a change in the last character of the reference number.