

# Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency

## HERQA Institutional Quality Audit

# Areas of Focus for Institutional Quality Audits

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# **Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency**

## **HERQA Institutional Quality Audit**

### **Areas of Focus for Institutional Quality Audits**

#### **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 approach to quality care, its systems of accountability and its internal review mechanisms

An essential contribution to a HERQA institutional quality audit is a Self Evaluation Document prepared by the HEI. An institutional quality audit will seek to verify claims of quality and relevance made in a Self Evaluation Document. An institutional quality audit report prepared by HERQA will provide a description and evaluation of the quality of a HEI's activities and of its mechanisms for assuring quality and relevance. This report will make clear HERQA's confidence in the ability of the HEI to provide appropriate education. A HERQA institutional quality audit report will highlight elements of good practice and make recommendations for improvements. In issuing institutional quality audit reports HERQA aims to support a HEI by recognizing its good practices and by indicating areas where changes in practice can enhance the quality and relevance of its activities. HERQA hopes that through its institutional quality audit reports and the dissemination of good practice that it will help to enhance the provision of higher education in Ethiopia and the confidence of all stakeholders in the quality of that provision. To this end, HERQA has determined ten major areas which will form the focus points of its institutional quality audits.

#### **Purpose of this Document**

The purpose of this document is to provide information and guidance to HEIs on the ten areas that HERQA will focus on in an institutional quality audit and so set a common frame of reference for the review of quality within the Ethiopian higher education system. The document describes the ten focus areas, provides reference points and indicates sources of evidence to which HERQA may refer.

It is important to note that a HERQA institutional audit will consider inputs and processes as well as outcomes. Familiarity with the areas that will be the focus points for HERQA institutional quality audits will help HEIs to evaluate the relevance and quality of their activities and prepare for an institutional quality audit. This document is thus essential reading for a HERQA institutional quality audit.

HERQA is issuing other documents to assist HEIs in their preparations for institutional audits: *HERQA Profile* (HERQA QA01/06/V1); *Institutional Self Evaluation* (HERQA QA03/06/V1); *Preparing a Self Evaluation Document* (HERQA QA04/06/V1); and *HERQA Institutional Audit Procedure* (HERQA QA05/06/V1). It is important that these are read in addition to this document.

## **HERQA Areas of Focus**

HERQA has identified the following ten key aspects of operation which will form the focus points for quality audits in Ethiopian HEIs.

- 1: Vision, Mission and Educational Goals
- 2: Governance and Management System
- 3: Infrastructure and Learning Resources
- 4: Academic and Support Staff
- 5: Student Admission and Support Services
- 6: Program Relevance and Curriculum
- 7: Teaching, Learning and Assessment
- 8: Student Progression and Graduate Outcomes
- 9: Research and Outreach Activities
- 10: Internal Quality Assurance

### **1 Vision, Mission and Educational Goals**

Quality assessment starts by looking at an institution's vision, mission, and educational goals. The institution's mission should define clearly its purpose within the higher education system, state the goals it intends to accomplish and make explicit the stakeholders it intends to serve and why. Every HEI must define clearly its vision, mission and educational goals and make them known to its stakeholders.

#### *Reference Points*

- The clarity of the vision, mission, and goals of the institution and the extent of their communication.
- The relevance of the institutional vision, mission and goals to the needs of the nation and to the stakeholders it sets out to serve.
- The realism of the vision, mission and goals and the strategic plan for their achievement.

### *Indicative Sources of Information*

- Documentation on legislation; vision, mission and goal statements; strategic plan.
- Interviews with senior management, stakeholders, students, academic staff and administration staff.

## **2 Governance and Management System**

Every HEI must have in place strong governance and management systems. The governing body should have sufficient powers to assure institutional autonomy and integrity and the senior management team must have delegated responsibilities to enable actions consistent with the vision, mission and goals of the institution.

### *Reference Points*

- The appropriateness and effectiveness of the governance and organizational structure to facilitate the successful accomplishment of the vision, mission and goals of the institution.
- The clarity of descriptions of responsibilities and duties and the extent of their communication.
- Academic staff and student participation in decision-making; clarity and transparency of the decision making process.

### *Indicative Sources of Information*

- Documentation on legislation; description of organizational structure; institutional policy documents; job descriptions; annual performance reports.
- Interviews with Governors, senior management, Department Heads, Deans, student council members, academic staff and administration staff.

## **3 Infrastructure and Learning Resources**

HEIs should provide clear, accurate and adequate information on the capacity of the institution, its facilities and resources. Every HEI must have sufficient and appropriate physical facilities and learning resources and the financial capacity to ensure effective delivery of its programs.

The facilities in HEIs should be suitable and adequate for the effective teaching and learning of the numbers of students admitted. Institutions should ensure that the resources available to support student learning are adequate and appropriate for each program offered.

### *Reference Points*

- Sufficiency and adequacy of the institution's physical facilities (classrooms; offices; lecture halls; cafeteria; dormitories; clinic; sport fields; etc.).

- Sufficiency and adequacy of the institution's learning resources (library; computer centers with appropriate software and hardware, audio-visual equipment; Internet access; laboratories; workshops; *etc.*).
- Resource utilization and mechanisms for maintenance and updating.
- The financial stability of the institution and the adequacy of its budget to run and sustain its programs.

#### *Indicative Sources of Information*

- Description of facilities and resources; inventories.
- Survey of physical facilities and learning resources.
- Interviews with senior management, Librarian, Deans, Department Heads, Academic Program Officer, Coordinator of the Academic Development and Resource Centre, students, academic staff and administration staff.

## **4 Academic and Support Staff**

The quality of an educational program depends strongly on the quality of the staff who provide teaching and student support. Institutions should ensure that their staff recruitment and appointment procedures include a means of making certain that all new staff have the necessary level of competence. Every HEI must have sufficient and appropriate staff to ensure effective implementation of its programs.

#### *Reference Points*

- Availability of adequate number of qualified academic staff to support programs and an appropriate staff-student ratio for each program.
- The suitability of the teaching staff in terms of the mix of qualifications, experience, full-time/part-time, local/expatriate; *etc.*
- The existence of suitable, clearly stated, well-established and effectively implemented policies for the appointment and promotion of staff.
- The operation of a transparent staff appraisal system that identifies the strengths and weaknesses of staff and which leads to action.
- The provision of pedagogical and other training organized to support staff development.

#### *Indicative Sources of Information*

- Documentation on legislation; faculty manuals; staff development policy; staff workload documents; student /staff ratios; minutes of meetings at departmental, faculty and senate level; *etc.*
- Interviews with senior management, Deans, Department Heads, Academic Program Officer, Coordinator of the Academic Development and Resource Centre, students and academic staff.

## **5 Student Admission and Support Services**

Every HEI must have a transparent admissions policy and adequate student support services to ensure effective implementation of its programs.

### *Reference Points*

- The clarity, transparency and accessibility of admissions policies.
- The appropriateness of mechanism for assessing the abilities of entering students and the provision of appropriate support.
- The suitability and adequacy of student support services and academic counseling.
- The extent of student representation in the affairs of the HEI; the effectiveness of a Students' Council.

### *Indicative Sources of Information*

- Student enrollment data; student handbooks; documents on careers guidance; documents on student counseling; *etc.*
- Interviews with senior management, Dean of Students, Students' Council, students, academic and administration staff.

## **6 Program Relevance and Curriculum**

Every HEI is expected to justify the relevance of its programs and to have robust procedures for curriculum design, approval and review.

### *Reference Points*

- Descriptions of program approval, monitoring and review mechanisms.
- The extent of involvement of external professionals and employers in curriculum design, evaluation and review process.
- The extent to which curricular aims and objectives are made explicit and are known to students; the appropriateness of the balance of subject knowledge and transferable skills.

### *Indicative Sources of Information*

- Description of the curriculum (program and course) approval procedures.
- Minutes of meetings of committees dealing with curriculum approval, monitoring and review at departmental, faculty and senate level; curriculum review reports.
- Course catalogs showing the structure and aims of each program; course aims, descriptions, indicative activities; book lists.
- Interviews with senior management, Deans, Department Heads, academic staff, students, graduates and employers.

## **7 Teaching, Learning and Assessment**

Every HEI must employ appropriate teaching, learning and assessment methods to ensure effective implementation of its programs.

### *Reference Points*

- The appropriateness, variety and level of innovation of teaching methods.

- Practice regarding academic advice and tutorial support.
- The balance of theory and practice.
- The extent of evaluation of approaches to teaching and learning and the consequent action.
- The extent to which the assessment policy and procedures and the criteria for marking ensure that students are graded fairly and that standards are appropriate and applied consistently.
- The extent of communication of the assessment policy and procedures.
- The appropriateness of mechanisms to ensure that assessment methods for each course in each program are balanced (e.g. between continuous and end of course, formative and summative, diagnostic and attainment), are matched to the learning outcomes and are applied appropriately.
- The adequacy of the student appeal procedures.

#### *Indicative Sources of Information*

- Documentation on legislation; policy documents on teaching and assessment; academic calendar; faculty handbooks; student handbooks; examination committee reports; reports of reviews of teaching, learning and assessment; minutes of meetings at departmental, faculty and senate level; *etc.*
- Classroom observation.
- Interviews with senior management, Deans, Department Heads, Academic Program Officer, Assessment Officer, Coordinator of the Academic Development and Resource Centre, students and academic staff.

## **8 Student Progression and Graduate Outcomes**

Every HEI is expected to document student progression and graduate outcomes and to seek to improve student retention and achievement.

#### *Reference Points*

- The level of student attrition, the reasons for student drop out and the actions taken to minimize this.
- The graduation rate, the employment of graduates in appropriate graduate level posts and the actions taken to maximize such employment.
- The extent of links between the institution and potential employers that facilitate graduate employment.
- The extent of contacts with graduates, the existence of an association of graduates and how these are used.
- The extent of contacts with employers to collect feedback on graduates and the actions taken on the information.

#### *Indicative Sources of Information*

- Registrar's Office reports; data on student attrition and completion rates; graduate newsletters; tracer studies of graduates, lists of employer contacts; employer feed-back reports; *etc.*
- Interviews with senior management, Registrar, Coordinator of Employment Guidance, academic staff, students, graduates, employers.

## 9 Research and Outreach Activities

Every HEI is expected to undertake research activities, conduct consultancy and engage in community service.

### *Reference Points*

- The proportion of staff in each faculty and department actively engaged in appropriate research and consultancy.
- The number and nature of research projects and consultancies undertaken.
- The number of research reports produced and research articles published.
- The number and nature of organizations benefiting from consultancy and community services.
- The number and nature of national and international links with academics and industrialists.

### *Indicative Sources of Information*

- Research and publication office reports; collections of recent publications; minutes of meetings at departmental, faculty and senate level; summary of links; *etc.*
- Interviews with senior management, Coordinator of Research and Publications; Deans; Heads of Department; academic staff.

## 10 Internal Quality Assurance

Internal Quality Assurance is a planned and systematic monitoring and review processes established by a HEI to determine the quality and relevance of its programs and the appropriateness of its infrastructure. A robust and transparent quality assurance system conveys confidence in the quality of the provision of a HEI to its staff, to students, to employers and to other stakeholders. HEIs should have a policy and associated procedures for the assurance of the quality and relevance of their programs. They should also commit themselves explicitly to the development of a culture which recognizes the importance of relevance, quality and quality assurance in all their work. HEIs should develop and implement a strategy for the continuous enhancement of quality. The ultimate goal of internal quality assurance is to have a culture of quality care which ensures that quality is a focus of all the activities of an institution at all levels and is incorporated into the everyday work of the whole institutional community. Every HEI must have an internal quality assurance system that seeks to continuously improve the quality of its provision.

### *Reference Points*

- The quality assurance policy.
- The quality assurance system and mechanisms.
- Actions taken following program evaluations.
- The nature and appropriateness of responsibilities of quality assurance units, committees and individuals and the extent to which these are communicated clearly.

- The appropriateness of the procedures for obtaining comprehensive data on the quality of the institution and the actions taken to enhance quality.
- The extent of procedures to identify good practice and ways in which this is disseminated.

*Indicative Sources of Information*

- Quality Assurance policy; documentation on quality assurance procedures; quality assurance reports; institutional self evaluations; minutes of meetings at departmental, faculty and senate level, *etc.*
- Interviews with senior management, Coordinator of Quality Assurance Unit, Academic Program Officer, Coordinator of the Academic Development and Resource Centre, Deans, Department Heads, academic and administrative staff, students.

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.