



Quality Assurance Policy

Approved at Council 26 November 2021

POLICY STATEMENT	
1. Preamble/ background	<p>The Quality Assurance Policy considers the</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1.1 External context within which the UFS operates namely international, national, statutory and national higher education policy environments. 1.2 Internal context of the UFS and is founded on the vision, and goals of the UFS. 1.3 Historical context and development of the UFS, and acknowledges the quality assurance practices institutionalised over time, e.g., admission requirements, external examination, moderation, module evaluations, peer evaluation, external reviews of departments, etc. 1.4 Context and insights into the existing situation captured in the UFS Strategic Plan the Integrated Transformation Plan (ITP), and the Integrated Quality Management Framework (IQMF).
2. Purpose	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.1 The purpose of the UFS Quality Assurance Policy is to ensure high quality learning and teaching, research and engaged scholarship, supported by high quality staff, high quality service delivery by academic and administrative support services with quality infrastructure and physical facilities to ensure the realisation of the vision, and strategic priorities the UFS commits itself to. 2.2 More specifically the UFS Quality Assurance Policy aims to provide a framework for an efficient quality management system steering quality enhancement with enforceable requirements and norms: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2.2.1 Establishment and development of a quality assurance culture. 2.2.2 Establishment and development of a functional institutional quality assurance and management system for the UFS. 2.2.3 Promotion of quality assurance and improvement actions at institutional level. 2.2.4 Empowerment of staff in the execution and implementation of quality assurance systems, processes and mechanisms. 2.2.5 Co-ordination and monitoring of the quality assurance actions within functional units of the UFS (faculties, schools, departments, divisions, directorates, and support services). 2.2.6 Co-ordination of feedback received from the different role players and stakeholders regarding academic, social, service and quality experiences at the UFS. 2.2.7 Institutional quality assurance accountability required of the UFS on a national and statutory level. 2.2.8 Integration of quality assurance in all operational processes, including but not limited to governance, strategic planning, and resource allocation. 2.3 The UFS Quality Assurance Policy overarching purpose is to enhance student success through quality assured learning, teaching and research, as well as integrated community engagement within the framework of the institution's Vision,

	Strategic Goals, Strategic Plan and Integrated Transformation Plan (ITP).
<p>3. Scope</p>	<p>The Scope of the Quality Assurance Policy includes all the functional units of the UFS and the activities they perform, namely the three core academic activities: learning and teaching, research, and integrated community engagement (engaged scholarship). Quality assurance processes will contain both External Quality Assurance (EQA) and Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) mechanisms to quality assure Core and Support Functions and Functional Units of the UFS.</p> <p>3.1 Learning and Teaching</p> <p>3.1.1 The learning and teaching focus include quality assurance matters relating to curriculum development and delivery (post-programme-accreditation) and learning and teaching material development benchmarking and peer review.</p> <p>3.1.2 In additions, informs the quality framework for face-to-face, blended- and distance learning in view of the global mode of delivery shift, as the institution migrates to digitally enhanced curriculums.</p> <p>3.1.3 External approval, accreditation, registration, recording and termination of formal programmes of the UFS take place in accordance with the national policy requirements.</p> <p>3.1.4 The internal development, approval and modification/ termination of formal and non-formal academic programmes occur according to the prescribed guidelines. The above mentioned are described in the Guidelines for the Approval, Registration, Accreditation, and Recording of Academic Programmes.</p> <p>3.1.5 Continuous assurance and enhancement and/or improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in and of programmes and modules at the UFS take place on a cyclic basis through conducting student surveys (e.g. module evaluation, exit surveys) and the application of self- evaluation mechanisms and procedures on macro-, meso- and micro levels, in the following ways:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Existing non-professional undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, and modules are evaluated based on the UFS programme self-evaluation guide, according to the following evaluation schedule: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1) Undergraduate programmes of 3 years or less, every 5 years. 2) Undergraduate programmes of 4 years and more, every 5 years. 3) Honours programmes every 5 years. 4) Structured master’s programme every 5 years. b. All new undergraduate and postgraduate programmes are handled according to the cycle for programme accreditation as prescribed by the HEQC of the Council on Higher Education. c. Professional programmes (undergraduate and postgraduate programmes) are evaluated by the external professional board or body according to the time schedule, criteria, standards and procedures of the professional board body.

- d. In case where a specific programme has been evaluated already by the professional board or body during the general programme evaluation cycle, the Programme Director of Co-ordinator may apply for exemption from the specific UFS evaluation cycle.
- e. In a case where there has been a professional body review, a submission of a report should be submitted to DIRAP.

3.1.6 Critical reflection internal self-evaluation of academic departments, followed by an external expert panel, takes place every five years. This is followed by an improvement and development plan with monitoring actions to address recommendations identified during the evaluation process to ensure follow through.

3.2 Assessment

3.2.1 Student evaluation and assessment procedures must be explicitly stated in the Student Assessment Policies and Procedures in accordance with Criterion 6, which states that “External moderation of students’ learning achievements by appropriately qualified personnel. Moderators are appointed in terms of clear criteria and procedures and conduct their responsibilities in terms of clear guidelines.” In addition, Criterion 13 (CHE, 2004: 19-20) states that “The programme has effective assessment practices which include internal (or external) assessment, as well as internal and external moderation.”

3.2.2 Internal moderation of all final assessment tasks takes place during each round of examination and is the responsibility of each faculty.

3.2.3 External moderation the learning achievements of students on the exit level of a qualification are externally moderated by appropriately qualified people, who have been appointed according to clear criteria and procedures and who conduct their responsibilities in terms of clear guidelines.

3.2.4 External moderators mark fully at the exit level of the programme at least 10 percent of the examination scripts for each paper written and all scripts if the total is less than 10 and do random checks of at least 20 percent of examination scripts for each paper.

3.2.5 All examination papers of non-exit-level modules must be moderated externally, if required by the professional board.

3.2.6 Where continuous assessment is used in exit-level modules a representative sample should be drawn and moderated.

3.2.7 All logistic arrangements for external moderation will be the responsibility of the faculties and may in consideration of the resource and administrative limitations, e.g., the examination system, be phased in.

3.2.8 Master’s and Doctoral Degree assessment

3.2.9 External assessment of all scripts, Master’s Degree mini-dissertations and dissertations and Doctor’s Degree theses, including the articles in the article options are assessed by an

assessment panel. The assessment panel must be appointed by departments before the student gives notice of submission of his/her work for assessment. The assessment panel of Master's Degree by research and Doctor's Degree theses should consist of three members. External assessors must always form the majority of the assessment panel. External assessors must be recognised experts in their fields and must not have any association with the UFS.

3.3 Research

3.3.1 Criteria for the quality assurance and evaluation of research development, research activities and research planning at the UFS are developed and implemented in cooperation with the Directorate Research Development, as described in the Research Policy of the UFS.

3.3.2 The assurance of the quality of postgraduate research (mini-dissertations, dissertations and theses) is the responsibility of the faculties as stipulated in the institutional guidelines for: postgraduate education and supervision, assessment, as well as the General Rules for Undergraduate Qualifications, Postgraduate Diplomas, Bachelor Honours Degrees, Master's Degrees, Doctoral Degrees, Higher Doctorates, Honorary Degrees and the Convocation.

3.3.3 Research outputs are, according to existing practice formally or non-formally, subjected to external and/or peer evaluation.

3.4 Engaged scholarship

3.4.1 Criteria for the quality assurance and evaluation of engaged scholarship on institutional level is developed and implemented as described in the Engaged Scholarship Policy.

3.4.2 The assurance of the quality and improvement of the teaching and learning component of engaged scholarship (community service and community engagement) forms part of the procedures stipulated in paragraph 5.1 and the Council on Higher Education document: *A good practice guide and self-evaluation instruments for management of the quality of service learning*.

3.5 Support services

3.5.1 Institutional functions and services rendered by support services must pass through a critical reflective self-evaluation process based on acceptable relevant criteria at least every five years, followed by external peer review. This is followed by an improvement and development plan with actions to address the recommendations identified during the evaluation process.

3.5.2 Support services are externally reviewed, activities, systems, projects and service levels are done from time to time at the request of, and in cooperation with line managers.

3.5.3 Support services are required to develop and maintain a portfolio of standard operating procedures (SOPs) to enhance quality of service, and to support quality monitoring.

	<p>3.5.4 Information and data with regard to finances, human resources and students is audited externally on an annual basis for quality and reported to the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) according to the requirements contained in “Regulations for Annual Reporting by Higher Education Institutions”, Government Gazette, No. 25407 of 29 August 2003 and the Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS).</p> <p>3.6 Staff</p> <p>3.6.1 Recruiting and employment of quality staff are governed by the Employment Policy and Procedures and take equity, as described in the Employment Equity Policy and the Employment Equity Plan of the UFS, into account.</p> <p>3.6.2 It is the responsibility of each staff member of the UFS to evaluate his/her performance continuously by means of self-reflection and to take the necessary steps to improvement linked to the annual, compulsory performance management system.</p> <p>3.6.3 The development and implementation of staff orientation sessions for new staff members and staff development sessions for staff according to identified needs take place in accordance with the Staff Development Policy and Plan of the UFS.</p> <p>3.6.4 Continuous development of staff takes place in terms of the Staff Development Policy and Plan of the UFS.</p> <p>3.6.5 Criteria for the quality assurance and evaluation of staff input and output are developed and implemented by means of the performance management process.</p>
<p>4. Definitions and abbreviations</p>	<p>External Quality Assurance (EQA) is the means by which an external quality agency ensures that institutions have Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems in place to manage the quality of their activities and educational provision. It also ensures that the qualifications and programmes that they offer have been peer-reviewed to ensure that the provisioning meets the quality standards and criteria of the Council on Higher Education (CHE).</p> <p>Effective refers, in the context of a quality management system, to a system that accomplishes its intended purpose.</p> <p>Efficient refers, in the context of a quality management system, to a system that accomplishes its intended purpose while using time, effort and resources well; that is, the QMS provides value for money to the institution.</p> <p>Framework refers, in the context of a quality management system, to the information that form the structure to simplify quality assurance practices and principles to attain sustainable improvement.</p> <p>Guidelines refer to why a particular standard is important, describe its salient features and indicates how standards could reasonably be interpreted and implemented in different contexts.</p>

Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) refers to the integrated institutional system, policies and process used by an institution to manage the quality of its core and associated functions of learning and teaching, research and community engagement, determined by the outcomes of that institution.

Procedures refer to the operational processes required to implement the QA policy. Operating practices can be formal or informal, specific to a department, school, centre, unit or directorate or applicable across the entire university (how the process needs to be done).

Policy refers to the aligning of activities to achieve the UFS' vision and the formal guidance to coordinate and execute quality assurance activities throughout the institution. Policy provides the operational framework within which the university functions and acts as a guide to decision making.

Process refers to a series of actions or steps taken in order to achieve an end, thus the established way of doing something (what needs to be done and why).

Programme (the formal and non-formal) refers to a purposeful and structured set of learning activities designed to enable a student to meet the outcomes necessary for the award of a qualification.

Qualification refers to the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by a higher education institution and that is registered on the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Quality is understood to encompass *fitness of purpose, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation* as set out in the HEQC Founding Document (HEQC 2001:9).

Quality Assurance (QA) in higher education in South Africa involves evaluating and providing evidence of the extent to which institutions have put in place the measures needed to achieve i) the goals and purposes they have identified for themselves and ii) programmes that are able to deliver a set of learning experiences which will support students in attaining the qualifications to which they lead.

Quality Enhancement is the development and implementation of initiatives by an institution to raise its standards and the quality of its provisioning beyond threshold standards and benchmarks.

Quality Culture refers to a set of interrelated and enacted assumptions, values, attitudes, activities and behaviours, shared by most academic and support employees at an institution that, together, function to deliver the desired quality of learning and teaching, research and community engagement determined by the vision, mission and strategic goals of that institution.

Quality Improvement is the development by an institution of a planned programme of activities to institutionalise a quality culture and to provide for better quality than existed previously. This may be as a direct

response to an internal institutional review or an external peer review, e.g., by the CHE or a professional body.

Quality Management System (QMS) refers to the institutional arrangements for assuring, supporting, developing and enhancing, as well as monitoring the quality of learning and teaching, assessment, research, and community engagement.

Quality Promotion is the development of a programme of activities to institutionalise a quality culture in higher education in addition to the institution's commitment to continuous quality improvement.

Rules refer to a set of regulations and instructions for standard behaviour.

Standards refer to codes of practice for quality assurance used in higher education, which HEIs must consider and adhere to in all aspects of their activities and all types of higher education provision.

Strategy refers to a long-range plan to fulfil the university's vision and reach its goals.

Student experience is regarded as students' comprehensive and holistic engagement with a particular institution, their own efforts and experience of various modes of learning and teaching, curricular design within programmes, assessment practices, access to and use of appropriate learning resources, the management of student enrolment as well as academic and non-academic student support and development.

Student success is defined, for the individual student, as the attainment of graduate attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable; for the institution, it refers to students' academic persistence in completing their studies, academic results that reflect equity of success in terms of race, gender, and disability, as well as their achieving credible results within a minimum time to completion; successful entry into employment or some other form of economic activity and/or successfully progressing to postgraduate studies.

Abbreviations

CHE

Council on Higher education

DHET

Department of Higher Education and Training

DIRAP

Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning

HEMIS

Higher Education Management Information System

HEQC

Higher Education Quality Committee

	<p>HEQSF Higher Education Qualification Sub-Framework</p> <p>ITP Integrated Transformation Plan</p> <p>IQMF Integrated Quality Management Framework</p> <p>IQA Internal Quality Assurance</p> <p>NQF National Qualifications Framework</p> <p>QMS Quality Management System</p> <p>QA Quality Assurance</p> <p>SOP Standard Operating Procedures</p>
<p>5. Guiding principles</p>	<p>5.1 The UFS Quality Assurance Policy is to ensure that the vision, strategic goals, governance, policies, frameworks, and structures, in the delivery of academic programmes ensure student success taking cognisance of what quality assurance entails, namely*:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. <i>Fitness of purpose</i> of the UFS based on national goals, priorities and targets, and our understanding of and engagement with these; b. <i>Fitness for purpose</i> in relation to the UFS specified vision, mission and strategic and academic planning in relation to diversity and differentiation in the South African HE sector; c. <i>Value for money</i> in relation to effectiveness and efficiency in relation to a range of parameters; and d. <i>Transformation</i> as it refers to social equity, quality and fundamental institutional cultural and academic change. <p>5.2 Quality assurance is not seen as an objective in itself but is aimed at the identification and addressing of quality gaps to assure a continuous cycle of planning, action, evaluation and improvement.</p> <p>5.3 Self-evaluation is accepted as the primary mechanism for quality assurance. It is the responsibility of each functional unit at the UFS to establish and apply effective procedures for regular reflective self-evaluation and improvement.</p> <p>5.4 Self-evaluation is complemented and validated by external peer evaluation. External evaluation takes place according to</p>

	<p>a specific cycle for the academic and support functions at the UFS.</p> <p>5.5 The responsibility for establishing and applying effective procedures for regular critical self-evaluation and for performing external evaluation for the academic and support service according to a specific cycle, rests with the deans, directors, heads of departments and heads of divisions.</p> <p>5.6 Quality assurance comprises the policies, procedures and mechanisms according to which the UFS, or a specific unit or function, ensures that specified quality specifications and standards are maintained. These policies, procedures and mechanisms include continuous revision and monitoring activities to evaluate aspects such as suitability, efficiency, applicability and efficacy of all activities with a view to improvement.</p> <p>5.7 Quality improvement takes place through processes of continuous improvement of academic and support-service functions and activities aimed at promoting excellence at the UFS.</p> <p>5.8 The IQA mechanisms will serve as an enabling framework for the provision of high-quality programmes, effective student support, flexible learning modes and innovative pedagogies in order to improve access, retention and success (CHE 2021).</p> <p>*Founding Document (HEQC 2001:9)</p>
<p>6. Policy/procedure</p>	<p>The UFS Quality Assurance Policy must conform to the guiding principles as set out in clause 5 above. The following aspects are taken into consideration:</p> <p>a UFS Quality Assurance Policy separate policy from procedure where it is captured in the Integrated Quality Management Framework (IQMF), process- and guidelines documents.</p> <p>b. The implementation, and the enforcement of the Policy resides with the AC of Senate while the administration of the Policy will be managed by DIRAP.</p> <p>c. Regulations and General Rules adopted by the University that address matters of quality assurance compliance are relevant.</p> <p>d. Quality standards required from the HEQC apply.</p>
<p>7. Responsibility</p>	<p>7.1 The main drivers of this Quality Assurance Policy are staff and students. Responsibility for quality assurance lies with all academic and support staff members where the entirety of the UFS is expected to contribute to the quality of academic provision.</p>

	7.2	The institutional responsibility for the management of the Quality Assurance Policy resides in the line function of the Vice-Rector: Academic.
	7.3	The Academic Planning Unit of the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP) quality assurance office is responsible for the overall co-ordination of quality assurance at the UFS, directed by the Academic Committee (AC) of Senate for the implementation of this policy.
	7.4	The AC Remit refers to the university's approach to quality assurance as a driver and planning instrument requires Senate to take strategic responsibility for the quality of the university academic offerings and the development of a culture of quality at the institution.

8. Accountability and Authority:	
8.1 Implementation:	The Academic Committee is accountability for and has the authority to advise Senate on quality assurance and promotion matters. As a strategic function it provides oversight to the university's internal quality assurance mechanisms for the development and approval of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes. Regarding policy development it approves quality assurance framework and guidelines.
8.2 Compliance:	<p>8.2.1 The functioning of the different institutional management and governance bodies (Council, Senate, Executive Management, Executive Committee of the Senate, Faculty Boards, Student Representative Council) and the institutional advisory body (Institutional Forum) is subject to the same quality assurance principles and points of departure that apply to the academic and support service environments of the UFS.</p> <p>8.2.2 These bodies must therefore also perform self-evaluation (based on agreed-upon relevant criteria) at least once every six years, followed by an external peer review process and, if necessary, the implementation of improvement actions in respect of the results and shortcomings identified during the evaluation.</p> <p>8.2.3 The aforementioned is also subject to annual reporting according to the directives contained in "Regulations for Annual Reporting by Higher Education Institutions", <i>Government Gazette</i>, No. 25407 of 29 August 2003" referred to above.</p>
8.3 Monitoring and evaluation:	DIRAP is responsible for the evaluation and monitoring of the policy reporting to the Academic Committee of Senate.
8.4 Development/review:	DIRAP reporting to the Academic Committee of Senate is responsible for development and review of the policy.
8.5 Approval authority:	Council
8.6 Interpretation and advice:	The Academic Committee of Senate is responsible for the interpretation and advice on the policy.

9. Who should know this policy?

All academic and support staff members

10. Policy/procedure implementation plan

Approval by the AC of Senate. Dissemination to all academic and support staff members.

11. Resources required**12. Answers to FAQs****EFFECTIVENESS OF THE POLICY****Performance Indicator(s):**

Institutional Audit Outcome