

Policies on the

Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment

in higher education



COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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The South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) is an independent statutory body established by the Higher Education Act, no. 101 of 1997, and is the Quality Council for Higher Education. It advises the Minister of Higher Education and Training on all higher education issues and is responsible for quality assurance and promotion through the Higher Education Quality Committee.

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Foreword

The Higher Education Act (No. 101 of 1997, as amended) assigns responsibility for quality assurance in higher education to the Council on Higher Education (CHE). The mandate of the CHE includes the development and implementation of a system of quality assurance for all higher education institutions, including private providers of higher education, which focuses on programme accreditation, institutional audits, national reviews, quality promotion and capacity development. This responsibility is discharged through its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). In addition, the National Qualifications Framework Act (No. 67 of 2008) assigns the CHE the role of Quality Council for higher education, which brings with it additional responsibilities.

In terms of the NQF Act, the CHE is responsible for developing and implementing policy and criteria for the development, registration and publication of qualifications. It is also responsible for assessment, the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) in the context of the policy and criteria developed by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Following the finalisation of SAQA's RPL and CAT policies in 2014, and the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) policy on RPL in 2016, through a consultative process, the CHE developed an integrated policy on RPL, CAT and assessment for higher education.

The Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in South Africa is critical to the development of an equitable higher education system that facilitates access to, mobility and progression within the Higher Education Sub-Framework (HEQSF). The HEQSF operates within the context of a single but recognisably diverse and differentiated higher education system. It applies to higher education programmes and qualifications offered in South Africa by both private and public institutions.

The purpose of the CHE policy on RPL is to develop and facilitate the implementation of RPL across the higher education sector and should be based on the principles of equity, access, inclusivity and redress of past unfair discrimination with regard to educational opportunities. The policy provides direction and guidelines for a dynamic and evolving system of RPL that will promote lifelong learning, whilst at the same time protecting the quality and standards of qualifications and higher education institutions.

Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) is critical to ensure that students are able to receive formal recognition and certification of a learning achievement. It allows for articulation across the sub-frameworks of the NQF in order to facilitate lifelong learning and provide for the mobility of students and enhance their chances of successfully completing their qualifications.

Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process and is not used to measure outcomes alone, but is also a means to develop lifelong learning. Assessment procedures and policies should be credible, transparent, reflect academic integrity, and promote equity and fairness to all students in order to foster equality and social justice.

The policies are aligned with the objectives of the HEQSF in developing articulation pathways in order to facilitate access to learning and to avoid duplication of learning already covered. These objectives are echoed in the DHET's White Paper for Post-School Education and Training: A Programme for Transformation (2014) policy that states that "higher education institutions make every effort to avoid unfair and irrational barriers to acceptance and credit transfer" and are committed to providing "equitable and flexible opportunities for students to 'enter and succeed' in higher education".

Against this backdrop, it gives me great pleasure to introduce the CHE policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning, Credit Accumulation and Transfer, and Assessment in higher education. These policies provide higher education institutions with appropriate directives and procedures for the development, application and assessment of the effectiveness of their internal mechanisms in relation to RPL, CAT and Assessment.

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CEO

August 2016

Overview of policies

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

- Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) refers to the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and rigorously assessed and moderated for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition and certification, or further learning and development.
- RPL may be used to grant access to a qualification programme, or advanced standing/exemption from modules or courses constitutive of a particular qualification.
- In higher education, exemption from modules or courses does not translate to credits being awarded for those modules or courses. No credits should therefore be awarded for the modules or courses that a student is exempted from doing on the basis of RPL.
- A student who, on the basis of RPL, is granted exemption from doing some modules or courses in a qualification programme will complete the qualification with a total number of credits that is less than the normally required number of credits for the qualification in question. RPL creates such an exception, and the student concerned should not be compelled to do more modules or courses to make up for the difference in the total number of credits.
- Full qualifications on the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) cannot be awarded solely on the basis of RPL. Similarly, exemption based on RPL should be limited to not more than 50% of the modules or courses of the qualification programme in question. This means that no student should be exempted from more than 50% of the modules or courses required for any particular higher education qualification.
- Not more than 10% of a cohort of students in a higher education programme should be admitted through an RPL process.
- Higher education institutions (HEIs) should ensure that quality assurance processes that address the specificities of the RPL process (including applications, assessment, and reporting and management systems) are implemented; and that administrative and support systems, both prior and subsequent to RPL assessment, are in place.

Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT)

- Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) is a term that refers to the arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulations and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace.

- The recognition of credits for the purposes of transfer from one qualification to another is determined by the nature of the qualifications, the relationship between them, the nature, complexity, and extent of the curricula associated with the specific subjects to be recognised for exemption and/or inclusion, and the nature of the assessment used.
- Any and all credits for an incomplete qualification may be recognised by the same or a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for a different qualification; or may be recognised by a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for the same qualification.
- A maximum of 50% of the credits of a completed qualification may be transferred to another qualification. This practice seeks to protect the integrity of qualifications by ensuring that the exception does not become the norm.
- Credits obtained from studies that do not lead to full qualification (for example, non-degree studies) should count for credit accumulation.
- Institutions should see to it that policies and procedures are put in place to regulate the process of credit accumulation and transfer so as to ensure that the same set of credits cannot be transferred to more than one qualification within an institution; and that credits are not duplicated.

Assessment

- Assessment refers to the systematic evaluation of a student's ability to demonstrate the achievement of the learning goals intended in a curriculum.
- A comprehensive and inclusive assessment policy at the level of an institution should incorporate all institutional policies related to assessment such as the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Work Integrated Learning (WIL), amongst others.
- The different modes of delivery of programmes should have appropriate policies and procedures for internal assessment; internal and external moderation; monitoring of student progress; explicitness, validity and reliability of assessment practices; recording of assessment results; settling of disputes; the rigour and security of the assessment system; RPL; and for the development of staff competence in assessment.
- Standards of qualifications must be maintained by ensuring that assessment is appropriate to the particular modules and exit level outcomes of the programme in question.
- Assessment criteria should be openly and clearly communicated to students in the interest of validity, transparency and accountability. Assessment judgments should be justifiable; and the roles and responsibilities of the student, lecturer, examiner, moderator and institutional quality assurance/governance departments should be clearly stated and communicated.
- Secure and reliable recording of assessment results and record-keeping systems that ensure the security of the assessment system, especially with regard to plagiarism and other misdemeanours, must be put in place.

Glossary of Terms

Advanced standing is the status granted to a student for admission to study at a higher level than the student's prior knowledge and skills and/or formal studies would have allowed, including exemption where applicable.

Assessment refers to the systematic evaluation of a student's ability to demonstrate the achievement of the learning goals intended in a curriculum.

Credit refers to the measure of the volume of learning required for a qualification, quantified as the number of notional study hours required for achieving the outcomes specified for the qualification.

Credit accumulation refers to the totalling of credits towards the completion of a qualification.

Credit transfer refers to the vertical, horizontal or diagonal relocation of credits towards a qualification.

Credit accumulation and transfer is a term that refers to the arrangement whereby the diverse features of both credit accumulation and credit transfer are combined to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace.

Programme is a structured and purposeful set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification.

Qualification refers to a registered national qualification consisting of a planned combination of learning outcomes which has a defined purpose, intended to provide qualifying students with applied competence and a basis for further learning and which has been assessed in terms of exit level outcomes, registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and certified and awarded by a recognised institution.

Recognition of Prior Learning is a term that refers to the principles and processes through which the prior knowledge and skills of a person are made visible, mediated and rigorously assessed and moderated for the purposes of alternative access and admission, recognition, or further learning and development.

1. Preamble

- 1.1. The South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a comprehensive system for the classification, registration, publication and articulation of quality-assured national qualifications.
- 1.2. The objectives of the NQF are to: create a single integrated national framework for learning achievements; facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths; enhance the quality of education and training; and accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities.
- 1.3. The National Qualifications Framework Act 67 of 2008 mandates the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) to: advance the objectives of the NQF as outlined above; oversee the implementation and further development of the NQF; and coordinate the sub-frameworks, namely the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), the General and Further Education and Training Sub-Framework (GFETQSF) and the Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework (OQSF).
- 1.4. As part of its mandate, SAQA is responsible for the development, after consultation with the Quality Councils (QCs), of national policies for the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and Assessment, among others. The Quality Councils, in turn, are responsible for developing policies for their respective sub-frameworks in line with the national policies developed by SAQA.
- 1.5. In 2013, SAQA released the revised national policy on RPL in terms of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008 to replace the one developed in 2002 under the provisions of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act 58 of 1995. This was followed by the release of national policies on CAT and Assessment in 2014.
- 1.6. In March 2016, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) gazetted the RPL Coordination Policy with the purpose of providing an enabling national policy environment for the further development and implementation of RPL across the post-school education and training system.

2. Purpose

- 2.1. The purpose of the policies outlined in this document is to provide guidelines for the higher education sector with regard to the development of institutional RPL, CAT and Assessment policies in the context of the national policies developed by SAQA and within the framework of the HEQSF.
- 2.2. The policies presented here in complement and/or supplement existing policies and frameworks as developed by the DHET, SAQA, the CHE and other Quality Councils. To this end it is recommended that this policy document should be read in conjunction with the following:
- National Qualifications Framework (NQF) Act 67 of 2008;
 - White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (DHET, 2013);
 - Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) Coordination Policy (DHET, 2016);
 - National Policy for Designing and Implementing Assessment for NQF Qualifications and Part-Qualifications and Professional Designations (SAQA, 2014);
 - National Policy for the Implementation of the Recognition of Prior Learning (SAQA, 2013);
 - NQF Level Descriptors (SAQA, 2012);
 - The Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (2013);
 - National Policy for Credit Accumulation and Transfer (SAQA, 2014);
 - The revised Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (CHE, 2015); and
 - NQFpedia: Standard Glossary of Terms Related to the National Qualifications Framework (SAQA, 2014).

3. Context

- 3.1. The CHE, as the Quality Council for higher education, has the responsibility to interpret national NQF-related policies and criteria within the context of the higher education sector, and, where necessary, to customise such policies in order for them to relate directly to the specific conditions of the sector. It is in this context that the CHE has developed these policies to translate the SAQA policies on the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and Assessment to speak to the higher education environment.
- 3.2. The policies take the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) as the point of reference. The HEQSF establishes common parameters and criteria for the design of higher education qualifications, and facilitates the comparability of different qualifications across the higher education system. The HEQSF operates within the context of a single but diverse and differentiated higher education system, and is concerned with the integrity of whole qualifications.

- 3.3. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes and Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT) and/or articulation are all closely related to assessment practices, and together these three provide the mechanisms for giving effect to the desired movement of individuals within and between non-completed qualifications on the HEQSF as envisaged in the NQF Act 67 of 2008.
- 3.4. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is rooted within the context of lifelong learning and the need to redress inequities of the past as it provides alternative routes of access to higher education. It is the process through which non-formal and/or informal learning are measured, evaluated and “translated” into their perceived formal equivalents for recognition across different contexts. Its intended outcome is the recognition of such prior learning for the purposes of alternative access and admission to higher education learning programmes, or for advancement within qualification programmes.
- 3.5. Credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) is a term that is used to refer to the mechanism for promoting articulation between qualifications within a sub-framework of the NQF. The purpose of CAT is to provide for mobility of students and enhance their chances to successfully complete their qualifications. CAT also provides for articulation across the sub-frameworks of the NQF in order to facilitate lifelong learning and access to the workplace.
- 3.6. Articulation in higher education refers to the mechanisms that enable student mobility between and among higher education institutions. Articulation has “horizontal” aspects dealing with courses and programmes at a given level of learning, and “vertical” aspects, dealing with courses and programmes at different levels.
- 3.7. Articulation within the NQF is both systemic and institution specific. While systemic articulation is based on national policy and formal requirements, specific articulation is based on formal and/ or informal agreements between two or more institutions, and is guided by institutional policies.
- 3.8. Assessment is central to learning and teaching because it is the key mechanism for evaluating the performance of students. As such, it is the basis for awarding credits, and ultimately of qualifications. The policy on assessment is developed on the basis of the understanding that assessment is the critical process that is employed to identify, gather and interpret information and evidence that would enable reasonably objective judgments to be made regarding the extent to which a student has achieved the learning outcomes of a course or module that leads to a qualification.

4. Policy on the recognition of prior learning (RPL)

4.1. Principles of RPL

The following principles seek to create a foundation for the application of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) within higher education.

4.1.1. RPL seeks to achieve inclusion and to overcome a variety of barriers to access and success in higher education. RPL should be premised on overcoming possible barriers to admission to, or registration for higher education studies for those people who lack the formal prerequisites.

4.1.2. RPL is more than a process of assessment: rather, it is a specialised pedagogical process that also includes “translation” of informal and non-formal bodies of knowledge into their formal and structured equivalents based on specified competencies. RPL will require close consideration of the associated epistemologies and specifically of the differentiation between experiential and academic knowledge, and hence of the areas and levels to which RPL can appropriately be applied. It also requires clear understanding of the possible contribution of such informal and/or non-formal knowledge to each particular qualification type in higher education.

4.1.3. The implementation of RPL is context-specific, in terms of institution, discipline, programme and level.

4.2. Application of RPL

The following policy statements seek to guide the application of the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) within higher education.

4.2.1. RPL, as defined nationally by SAQA, applies to informal or non-formal learning only. Learning resulting from formal routes will normally be recognised via Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT), but in cases where CAT is found not to be applicable, the RPL route may be explored.

4.2.2. It is the responsibility of higher education institutions/providers to determine the criteria for the operational implementation of RPL within the guidelines of their admission policies. In the interest of transparency, each higher education institution must clearly stipulate the requirements that must be satisfied for admission through RPL, and must make these requirements publically accessible.

- 4.2.3. RPL may be used to grant access to, or exemption from modules and/or courses that contribute towards a particular qualification. Institutions may recognise forms of prior learning as equivalent to the prescribed formal minimum admission requirements, and may recognise other forms of prior learning for granting advanced standing in particular programmes through exemption from modules or courses at lower levels of the qualification programme. In higher education, exemption from modules or courses does not translate to credits being awarded for those modules.
- 4.2.4. In RPL processes designed to grant access, an RPL application is evaluated against the entry requirements of the qualification in question. Applicants seeking access to higher education who do not hold a National Senior Certificate (NSC) with the appropriate exemption may be considered for the RPL route, but will only be admitted at the institution's discretion in accordance with the institution's RPL policy. An RPL assessment process should be used to evaluate the knowledge of applicants who do not hold a National Senior Certificate or an equivalent qualification, with passes at levels accepted for direct admission to higher education qualification programmes.
- 4.2.5. In higher education, full qualifications are not awarded solely on the basis of RPL; and similarly, RPL cannot be used to grant an individual the exemption from more than 50% of the modules/courses required for any particular qualification. This policy prescript helps prevent the possibility of having the same set of prior knowledge being used for obtaining more than one qualification. It also assists in ensuring that an applicant refreshes his or her prior knowledge with new, cutting-edge content, theories and concepts in the chosen field of study, before obtaining a qualification. Also, it is in line with the regulation that a person must obtain 50% of a qualification at the institution that is going to award the certificate for the qualification.
- 4.2.6. Since RPL in higher education does not lead to credits being awarded against modules or courses that one is exempted from, it follows that if a student is granted exemption from one or more modules that lead to a particular qualification, that particular student will complete the qualification in question with a total number of credit points that are less than the normally required number of credits for the qualification. The academic record of that student will reflect 'exempted' against the modules or courses that she or he was exempted from; while credits will be reflected against the courses or modules that she or he did, got assessed for and achieved the required scores.

- 4.2.7. Applicants seeking access to a postgraduate qualification in a particular field or Classification of Education Subject Matter (CESM) category but who do not hold an undergraduate degree in that field or CESM category may be admitted by RPL if they are able to satisfy the requisite RPL criteria. Such applicants may be given advanced standing but without the award of the primary qualification(s). Institutions are required to spell out in detail their assessment criteria for advanced standing, bearing in mind the needs of adult students.
- 4.2.8. Not more than 10% of a cohort of students in a programme should be admitted through an RPL process. This is a programme accreditation requirement. However, under exceptional circumstances, motivations to exceed this quota will be considered by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) as part of its accreditation processes.
- 4.2.9. Assessment criteria for RPL should not simply replicate those for mainstream study, but should seek to accommodate the knowledge and skills gained in practices outside the higher education institution in terms of their value for the envisaged course of study. Due consideration should be given to the fact, in some cases, the prior knowledge and skills would have been acquired, and would only be more effectively expressed, in languages that are not the media of teaching and learning at a particular institution.
- 4.2.10. Assessment should be undertaken within faculties, schools or departments and not by a central RPL Office, as the disciplinary expertise of academic staff plays a crucial role in assessing the learning achieved by RPL.
- 4.2.11. All institutions must ensure that staff members engaged in RPL implementation are thoroughly informed of the processes and issues involved, and are aware of the barriers commonly experienced by adult learners seeking to enter higher education.
- 4.2.12. In line with the recognition that RPL is a specialised process, institutions must ensure that administrative and support systems, both prior and subsequent to RPL, are in place. Rules and regulations which inform, influence or govern decisions taken in respect to articulation should be transparent. The rules and regulations should include making a fair and transparent appeals process available to applicants who might not feel satisfied with the initial outcome of their applications for RPL.
- 4.2.13. Certificates awarded signifying successful completion of a qualification will not reflect that a candidate has gained access to a programme or been awarded advanced standing through an RPL process. However, as stated in 4.2.6 above, the academic transcripts of those who were exempted from some modules or courses will reflect exemptions achieved through the RPL process, but with no credit points attached.

4.2.14. Institutions should ensure that quality assurance processes that address the specificities of the RPL process (including applications, assessment, and reporting and management systems) are implemented.

4.2.15. Provision should be made by institutions for regular quality review of RPL policies and practices. When reviewing their RPL policies, institutions should seek to address issues relating to resourcing and the consistent and fair administration of institutional RPL practices, staff capacity, resources of time and logistical challenges, and data management practices.

5. Policy on Credit Accumulation and Transfer (CAT)

5.1. Principles of CAT

The following principles seek to create a foundation for the application of CAT within higher education.

5.1.1. A qualification signifies the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement. The HEQSF sets out the range of qualification types in higher education and any qualification offered by a higher education institution must conform to one of the qualifications types or its variants as described in the HEQSF. The HEQSF is about whole qualifications for higher education, understood to comprise of at least 120 credits. The HEQSF does not specify parameters for part qualifications.

5.1.2. Credits are used as a measure of the volume of learning required for a qualification and can be specified in terms of the total minimum numbers of credits required, and in terms of the minimum number of credits required at the specified exit level of the qualification type or its variant as described in the HEQSF. The credit-rating system estimates that 10 notional study hours are equivalent to one credit. Credits represent a measure of all the learning activities engaged in by the student and include, among others, contact time, self-study, WIL, assignments, projects and examinations.

5.1.3. Credit accumulation is the totalling of credits towards the completion of a qualification. Credit transfer is the vertical, horizontal or diagonal relocation of credits towards a qualification.

- 5.1.4. The process of CAT brings together the diverse features of credit accumulation and credit transfer in order to facilitate lifelong learning. It allows a student's achievements to be recognised even if the student does not achieve a qualification. Any or all credits for an incomplete qualification may be recognised by the same or a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for a different qualification, or may be recognised by a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for the same qualification.
- 5.1.5. The process of CAT ensures the mobility of an individual student between programmes and institutions within the constraining parameters set by the requirements of the specific curricula.

5.2. Application of CAT

The following policy statements seek to guide the application of the CAT within higher education.

- 5.2.1. Institutions are required to develop and implement institutional CAT policies in order to ensure equity and inclusiveness; and to actively promote access to learning opportunities. Institutional CAT policies should be premised on overcoming possible barriers of access and promoting success.
- 5.2.2. The development of institutional CAT policies should be based on the principles of access for success, retention, articulation by design, comparison based on credible methods and transparency.
- 5.2.3. Credit accumulation can take place within institutions (total amount of credits within a specific institution/department) or between institutions (recognition of credits between two or more institutions).
- 5.2.4. Credit transfer means carrying over credits either horizontally at the same level of study or vertically from a lower to a higher level of study. Horizontal transfer refers to credits at the same level carried over between institutions where the outcome/curriculum statements (subject content) are identical or comparable. Vertical transfer is where credits of a preceding level of study at one institution are accepted for entry into the next level of study at another institution.
- 5.2.5. The recognition of credits for the purposes of transfer from one qualification to another is determined by the nature of the qualifications, the relationship between them, the nature, complexity, and extent of the curricula associated with the specific subjects to be recognised for exemption and/or inclusion, and the nature of the assessment used.
- 5.2.6. A maximum of 50% of the credits of a completed qualification may be transferred to another qualification. This policy prescript seeks to protect the integrity of qualifications by ensuring that the exception does not become the norm.

- 5.2.7. Credits for an incomplete qualification may be recognised by the same or a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for a different qualification, or may be recognised by a different institution as meeting part of the requirements for the same qualification.
- 5.2.8. Credits obtained from studies that do not lead to a qualification (for example, non-degree studies comprising of modules or courses that are part of a programme which normally leads to qualifications registered on the HEQSF) should count for the credit accumulation and transfer mechanism towards relevant qualifications in the same or different institutions.
- 5.2.9. Short courses offered outside the HEQSF are non-credit bearing and, thus, individuals who register for and attend such short courses are not awarded credits against any level on the National Qualification Framework (NQF). This means no credit will be accumulated and/or transferred from such short courses. However, the learning acquired counts for RPL.
- 5.2.10. Institutions should see to it that policies and procedures are in place to regulate the process of credit accumulation and transfer so as to ensure that the same set of credits cannot be transferred to more than one qualification within an institution, and that credits are not duplicated.
- 5.2.11. An open and transparent process for appealing credit accumulation and transfer decisions within the institution should be put in place. Institutions should also ensure that there are mechanisms in place to provide administrative support to the credit accumulation and transfer processes.
- 5.2.12. Admission and/or governance committees need to address the allocation of credits through CAT proactively. They should ensure that the process followed by the institution is transparent, valid and reliable.

6. Policy on Assessment

6.1 Principles of Assessment

The following principles should underpin sound assessment practices in an institution.

- 6.1.1. Assessment is an integral part of the teaching and learning process and is systematically and purposefully used to identify, gather and interpret information against the required competencies in a qualification in order to make judgement about a student's achievement. It is a continuous and iterative process that is not used to measure learning only but is also as a means to develop lifelong learning and to promote innovative and creative thinking in order to consolidate existing learning and build further learning. Furthermore, assessment is a tool for lecturers to reflect on the success of their teaching approaches.

6.1.2. Assessment procedures and policies should reflect academic integrity and quality through a consistent, reliable, appropriate and systematic approach that establishes that the assessment criteria have been met and that performance to the required standard has been measured. The criteria for effective assessment include:

6.1.2.1. **Validity and reliability:** Assessment must be valid and fit for purpose. The assessment measures what it intends to measure and the actions that are based on the results of the assessment are appropriate and accurate.

6.1.2.2. **Fairness:** Assessment policies, systems and procedures promote equity and fairness to all students and provide assistance to overcome inabilities or disabilities that may have an effect on student performance. Assessment should be perceived to be fair and equitable, giving students a reasonable opportunity to demonstrate their skills and knowledge acquired.

6.1.2.3. **Credibility:** Assessment procedures and practices are supported by effective, reliable and accurate administration procedures. Where assessment involves examinations, the security of the examination papers and marks is essential as is the moderation of paper marking.

6.1.2.4. **Transparency and accountability:** Information on assessment and assessment activities are known and publically available to all stakeholders. There is a clear understanding of the purposes of the assessment process, its consequences and inferences made where all role players can provide evidence of the development and moderation of assessment activities with which they are involved.

6.1.2.5. **Social justice and equality:** There is an absence of bias in assessment practices such that they do not in any way hinder or advantage specific students.

6.1.2.6. **Sensitivity to language:** Care is taken to use appropriate language in assessment so that the use of language does not become a barrier in learning and assessment processes.

6.2. Application (practices and systems) of Assessment

The following policy statements seek to guide assessment systems and practices within higher education.

6.2.1. Institutions are responsible for translating policy into sound assessment practice and should have an overall assessment policy within which the specific procedures for assessment demonstrate and provide evidence of the quality management systems that they have in place. In particular, these should include policies, strategies, procedures and resources to quality assure, support, develop and monitor the implementation of assessment in line with the criteria and requirements of the HEQC.

6.2.2. A comprehensive and inclusive assessment policy should incorporate all institutional policies related to assessment such as the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and Work Integrated Learning (WIL) among others. The relevant governance structures within the institution are responsible for overseeing and monitoring the implementation of the institution's assessment policy.

- 6.2.3. The different modes of delivery of programmes should have appropriate policies and procedures for internal assessment; internal and external moderation; monitoring of student progress; explicitness, validity and reliability of assessment practices; recording of assessment results; settling of disputes; the rigour and security of the assessment system; RPL and the development of staff competence in assessment.
- 6.2.4. Standards of qualifications must be maintained by ensuring that assessment is appropriate to the particular modules and exit level outcomes of the programme in question. Such outcomes must include disciplinary knowledge and competence at the appropriate level for the type of qualification in question as determined by the NQF.
- 6.2.5. There should be an appropriate balance between, and mix of, different teaching, learning and assessment methods in a programme. A range of assessment options should be considered where appropriate, such as (a) peer and self-assessment; (b) formative and summative assessment; (c) continuous and integrated assessment and (d) criterion- and non-criterion assessment which ensures that all learning outcomes are validly assessed. The level of challenge of the assessment in a programme should be appropriate to the level of the qualification to which it leads.
- 6.2.6. Effective assessment practices, which include internal and external assessment and moderation, should test student competence to achieve the intended learning outcomes and also be used to improve the quality of teaching and learning.
- 6.2.6.1. Internal assessment: This is assessment of student learning achievements by academic staff responsible for teaching a course or module within a programme in a system. Assessment criteria must specify the understanding, knowledge, skills, actions, values and attitudes that a student must display in order to provide suitable evidence that outcomes and foundational, practical and reflective competencies have been achieved.
- 6.2.6.2. Internal Moderation: This is an aspect of assessment whereby a staff member who was not directly involved in teaching and setting the assessment tools reviews the internal assessment process. Academic staff members are responsible for designing, implementing and marking both formative and summative student assessments, for recording results and for providing feedback to students. For summative assessment, especially where more than one marker is involved, internal moderation should be undertaken to ensure the reliability of the assessment procedures and marks.

- 6.2.6.3. External Moderation: An institutional assessment policy must provide for a system of external moderation whereby the learning achievements of students at the exit level of a qualification are moderated by appropriately qualified external academics who have been appointed according to clear criteria and procedures and who conduct their responsibilities in terms of clear guidelines. External moderators are recommended by the examining academic department and are independent experts in their fields, and should have qualifications that are at least one level above the level of the qualification being examined, but preferably higher.
- 6.2.7. Suitable learning opportunities should be provided to students in order to facilitate the acquisition of the knowledge and skills specified in the programme outcomes. Information relating to assessment (including learning outcomes, assessment criteria as well as assessment procedures and dates) should be provided in all courses, modules or topics. Equal assessment opportunities must be provided for all learners regardless of ethnicity, gender, culture, disability, social class, language and other contextual features.
- 6.2.8. Assessment criteria should be openly and clearly communicated to students in the interest of validity, transparency and accountability. Assessment judgments should be justifiable (explained and defended) to ensure responsibility and accountability for translating the assessment policy into sound practices that adhere to principles of best practices. The roles and responsibilities of the student, lecturer, examiner, moderator and institutional quality assurance/governance departments should be clearly stated and communicated.
- 6.2.9. Efficient management systems, processes and procedures must be put into place to administer the process, promote good practices for grading, and provide feedback to students. The institution must take measures to ensure the reliability, rigour and security of the assessment system in operation for maximising the accuracy, consistency and credibility of results, including consistency of marking and concurrence between assessors and external examiners on the nature and quality of the evidence that indicates achievement of learning outcomes.
- 6.2.10. Secure and reliable recording of assessment results and record-keeping systems that ensure the security of the assessment system, especially with regard to plagiarism and other misdemeanours, must be put in place. They must be transparent and defensible to all stakeholders. Breaches of assessment regulations must be dealt with effectively and timeously.
- 6.2.11. The assessment system must be rigorous and secure. Rules governing assessment procedures such as the marking and grading of results, aggregation of marks and grades, progression and final award and credit allocation and articulation should be published and communicated to students and relevant stakeholders.

- 6.2.12. The development of staff competence in assessment, whereby academic staff members are provided with training support that will allow them to assess validly and consistently to enhance the overall quality of the module/course/qualification, is a necessity.
- 6.2.13. An open and transparent appeal process should be put into place and institutions need to ensure that there are mechanisms in place to provide administrative support.

ACRONYMS

CAT	Credit and Accumulation Transfer
CESM	Classification of Education Subject Matter
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
GFETQSF	General and Further Education and Training Qualifications Sub-Framework
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HEQSF	Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OQSF	Occupational Qualifications Sub-Framework
QC	Quality Council
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

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