



NORTH-WEST UNIVERSITY
YUNIBESITI YA BOKONE-BOPHIRIMA
NOORDWES-UNIVERSITEIT
INSTITUTIONAL OFFICE

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Quality Policy

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Quality Policy

1 Preamble

As a pre-eminent university in Africa, driven by the pursuit of knowledge and innovation, with a unique institutional culture based upon the values the University espouses, the North-West University has adopted this Quality Policy on 22 June 2007 and a revised version on 25 November 2011.

2 Premise

The Quality Policy of the North-West University (NWU) is based on the following premise:

“Quality Assurance” is the activity of providing evidence needed to establish confidence among all concerned that the quality-related activities are being performed effectively.

“Quality Control” involves developing systems to ensure [products](#) or [services](#) are designed and produced to meet or exceed stakeholder requirements.

“Quality Evaluation”¹ is the systematic determination of merit, worth and significance of something or someone. Evaluation is often used to characterise and apprise subjects of interest in a wide range of human enterprises.

“Quality Management” is a method of ensuring that all the activities necessary to design, develop and implement a product or service are effective and efficient with respect to the system and its performance.

“Quality Management System” (QMS) is a system that outlines the policies and procedures necessary to improve and control the various processes that will ultimately lead to improved business performance.

3 Purpose of this document

This Quality Policy has been formulated to guide the development and implementation of an Institutional Quality Management System towards ongoing quality enhancement and the fostering of a culture of continuous improvement. This is in support of the vision, namely *to be a pre-eminent university in Africa, driven by the pursuit of knowledge and innovation*. The development of a Quality Management System at the NWU is therefore not regarded as an event but rather as an ongoing process.

3.1 Preamble

As part of the NWU's mission statement, clear reference is made to a “*quality focus*”. Therefore the NWU strives to be an academic institution of high quality. Quality assurance and continuous quality promotion are fundamental to the realisation of the vision and mission of the NWU. The NWU accepts self-driven quality assurance and quality promotion in all academic and support functions as a core value and thus implements a system of this nature. The quality policy furthermore takes into account the historical context, establishment and development of the NWU.

3.2 Aim

This policy aims to establish conditions for assuring and improving the quality of the NWU's core business, namely teaching, learning, research² and community engagement / implementation of expertise. Both the academic and support services are to ensure the realisation of the vision, mission and the institutional planning priorities to which the NWU commits itself.

More specifically, the Quality Policy aims to provide a framework for an efficient and functional quality management system (QMS) with enforceable rules and procedures focusing on the:

¹ In the field of evaluation, there is some degree of disagreement about the difference between the terms *evaluation* and [assessment](#). For the purpose of this policy, these terms are regarded to be interchangeable.

² The Institutional Research Support Commission conducts regular Research Entity reviews (internally or externally) covering, among others, all research-based master's and doctoral academic programmes. The reviews are arranged by the Institutional Research Support Office.

- 3.2.1 Establishment and development of a quality assurance culture in both the academic and support services domains at all campuses and the Institutional Office.
- 3.2.2 Promotion of quality assurance and improvement³ actions at institutional and campus levels.
- 3.2.3 Empowerment of staff in the execution and implementation of quality assurance systems, processes, procedures and mechanisms.
- 3.2.4 Monitoring of the quality assurance actions within functional units of the NWU (campuses, faculties, schools, divisions, units and support services).
- 3.2.5 Monitoring of institutional quality assurance accountability required of the NWU on a national and statutory level.

4 Approach to quality

4.1 *Quality* is furthermore⁴ seen by the NWU as:

- 4.1.1 The policies, systems, activities, structures, processes and procedures directed towards achieving, maintaining, monitoring and promoting quality.
- 4.1.2 Activities that must ensure that standards are specified and achieved consistently and repeatedly. It involves a continuous cycle of setting standards for key activities, judging achievements against the standards, planning for improvement and taking action to implement desired changes.
- 4.1.3 Related activities on all levels, which may include policy setting, process and procedure formulation and implementation, documentation, staff involvement, monitoring, involving clients, training, and sound financial planning and management.
- 4.1.4 Quality improvement is defined according to the “Shewhart Cycle” by four main keys, namely:
 - Plan: Design or revise business process components to improve results (planning);
 - Do: Implement the plan and measure its performance (action);
 - Check: Assess the measurements and report the results to decision makers (evaluation); and
 - Act: Decide on changes needed to improve the process (improvement).

In addition to the quality assurance activities, *quality promotion* focuses on quality improvement by combining self-evaluation with external evaluation (if possible), as well as self-regulation and management.

- 4.2 Self-evaluation is regarded by the NWU as a cornerstone of quality improvement. Formal quality assessment at the NWU is not a one-off procedure but forms part of a cyclical process on the various levels of academic and support activities. Since quality assurance, quality assessment and quality promotion are interlinked, the term quality assurance is used by the NWU in an embracing sense.
- 4.3 The NWU acknowledges that quality is multidimensional and contextual. Therefore the NWU states that, in the context of South Africa and the region, as well as in the context of the international academic community, quality for the NWU entails:
 - 4.3.1 Fitness for purpose (the extent to which the institution’s academic and support structures and embedded processes are aligned with their chosen mission statements and with those of the institution);
 - 4.3.2 Fitness of purpose (the extent to which the NWU relates to national policy and framework, including the Higher Education Act, SAQA, CHE/HEQC and other DoHET requirements, which include governance, planning (PQM), funding and resource allocation, as well as taking into account international developments);
 - 4.3.3 Value for money (judged in relation to the full range of higher education purposes);
 - 4.3.4 Client and needs satisfaction;
 - 4.3.5 Affordability;

³ One of the permanent quality objectives of an organisation should be the continual improvement of its process efficiency, its effectiveness and hence overall performance.

⁴ Compare premise of this policy.

- 4.3.6 Transformation of students and the institution (developing the capabilities of individuals for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth); and
- 4.3.7 Meeting international benchmarks, and repeatability of processes.

Quality at the NWU is therefore to be found in the processes, the products, and the relevance of the products and services.

5 NWU'S quality principles

The following principles guide the Quality Management System (QMS) with respect to its definition of quality:

5.1 Academic

- 5.1.1 Academic quality is best guaranteed when responsibility for it is located as closely as possible to the academic processes of teaching, learning, research and community engagement and it is maintained and enhanced through the professional commitment of staff and students⁵. Quality assurance is a continuous, active and responsive process. Everyone at the NWU needs to be dedicated to continuous improvement.
- 5.1.2 Critical self- and external evaluation of processes and performance and feedback from the evaluation will be a regular feature of quality assurance and promotion at the NWU. Active sharing and dissemination of good practice and the modification of ideas are central to the proper operation of the quality management system.
- 5.1.3 The quality system is effective if it results in the achievement of academic quality. The outcomes of the teaching, learning, research, implementation of expertise / community engagement / community service activities are indicators of this effectiveness. In support of the relevant NWU policies, all faculty-specific processes and procedures must be documented in a Faculty Quality Manual.
- 5.1.4 Effective quality assurance requires the use of external academic, industry statutory/non-statutory and/or professional bodies/councils representation as part of the external evaluation process. The NWU's academic work and its processes for guaranteeing the quality of that work must be responsive to the national and international contexts. This requires the use of predominately external participants in the external evaluation quality assurance processes.
- 5.1.5 All academic programmes (including aligned programmes and subjects) for teaching-learning (including credit-bearing short courses) must pass through a self-evaluation process⁶ on the basis of the relevant HEQC and NWU-specific criteria and, in selected cases, be followed by an external evaluation. Any evaluation resulting in a "needs improvement" will be followed by a second (follow-up) evaluation within 12-18 months. Any evaluation resulting in a "does not comply" will be followed by a campus management decision on the phase-out strategy.
- 5.1.6 Depending on the level and type of programme, the cycle of self-evaluation may vary between three and six years⁷, according to the following evaluation schedule:
- Credit-bearing short courses of 1 year and less, every 3 years.
 - Undergraduate programmes of 3 years or less, every 4 years.
 - Undergraduate programmes of 4 years and more, every 5 years.
 - Honours programmes every 4 years.
 - Subject-in-programme, every 4 years (undergraduate and honours done collectively)
 - Structured master's programmes every 6 years.
 - Research master's and doctoral programmes every 6 years⁸

⁵ The supporting processes on how this is to be conducted and documented are systematically set out in the supporting guidelines that are available on the intranet site of the Institutional Quality Office.

⁶ The systematic planning, scheduling, documentation and execution of the self-evaluations should form part of each faculty's planning process.

⁷ Also include reviews by statutory bodies.

⁸ As part of the Research Entity reviews arranged by the Institutional Research Support Office.

6 Support Services

- 6.1 All functions and services rendered by academic, administrative, student and/or general support units must have a detailed, updated quality manual and pass through a self-evaluation process on the basis of acceptable relevant criteria⁹ at least every six years.
- 6.2 External peer evaluation may also be conducted as guided by the supporting guidelines for the evaluation of support services¹⁰
- 6.3 All self-evaluations and/or peer evaluations must be followed by an improvement plan with actions to respond to the results or weaknesses/deficiencies identified during the evaluation process.

7 Quality assurance bodies

The NWU endorses the work of the HEQC (and other Education and Training Quality Authorities (ETQAs) functioning in higher education¹¹) and participates fully in the national reviews and institutional quality audits.

8 Responsibility for quality assurance

- 8.1 Quality assurance is seen by the NWU as part of the responsibility and activities of all staff (both academic and support).
- 8.2 Each campus will have a “quality coordinator/advisor/director”, supported by faculty quality coordinators¹², who will act as a catalyst for quality. Executive directors (Institutional Management (IM)), vice-rectors, deans, directors and all other managers¹³, however, remain responsible for ensuring quality in their respective organisational units.
- 8.3 Campus vice-rectors report on the outcome of quality evaluations (academic and support services) to their respective campus rectors at an appropriate campus forum. The outcome of evaluations conducted in the Institutional Office will be reported to the Institutional Management.
- 8.4 Overall responsibility for quality assurance rests with the Vice-Chancellor, who will report on the status of quality assurance to the Council of the NWU.
- 8.5 In the formal structured processes implemented at the NWU, managers will play a leading role in evaluating and developing quality at all the levels of the institution, and all staff must be committed to the quality of the institution’s systems, processes, products and services.

9 Amendments/review

Any member of staff or any student at the NWU may, without fear of prejudice, submit any proposal for improvement of this policy to the Institutional Quality Office or the Institutional Registrar. All changes are subject to the approval of Institutional Management, Senate and Council.

This policy must be reviewed at least every 4 years.

Compiled by Dr JM Jacobsz Institutional Quality Office
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⁹ Made available by the Institutional Quality Office on the intranet of the NWU.

¹⁰ Made available by the Institutional Quality Office on the intranet of the NWU.

¹¹ Including statutory/non-statutory and professional councils/boards.

¹² To be decided on by each campus management.

¹³ Including programme leaders and subject chairs.