



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 an internationally recognised university in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, social responsiveness and an ethic of care, the North-West University adopted a Quality Policy in 2004 and revised it in 2007, 2011 and 2016.

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 Evaluation¹” 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.

“Quality Enhancement” is an ongoing process of augmentation or improvement.

3 PURPOSE OF THIS DOCUMENT

This Quality Policy has been formulated and revised to guide the ongoing 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 dream, *namely to be an internationally recognised university in Africa, distinguished for engaged scholarship, social responsiveness and an ethic of care*. 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 purpose statement – namely to excel in innovative learning and teaching and cutting-edge research and supported by the brand promise, Dynamic, Values-driven and Excellence – clear reference is made to an embedded “*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

¹ In the field of evaluation, there is some degree of disagreement about the difference between the terms *evaluation*, *review* 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.

academic and support services are to ensure the realisation of the dream, purpose³, brand promise, values 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:

- 3.2.1 Establishment and development of a quality assurance culture in both the academic and support services domains on all campuses and the Institutional Office.
- 3.2.2 Promotion of quality assurance and improvement⁴ actions at institutional, campus and faculty levels.
- 3.2.3 Empowerment of staff in the development, implementation and execution 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, entities, 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 Furthermore⁵, the NWU considers *quality* as:

- 4.1.1 The policies, systems, activities, structures, processes, procedures and guidelines 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 The “Shewhart Cycle” defines quality improvement according to four key activities, 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 and enhancement 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 evaluation/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

³ Including Vision and Mission

⁴ One of the permanent quality objectives of an organisation should be the continual improvement of its process efficiency, its effectiveness and, hence, overall performance.

⁵ Compare premise of this policy.

evaluation/assessment and quality promotion are interlinked, the terms quality assurance and quality enhancement are 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 dream, purpose, brand promise, values⁶, 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;
- 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.

Thus quality at the NWU is 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 students⁷. 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 and the quality assurance thereof must be documented in a Faculty Quality Manual and updated annually.
- 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

⁶ Ethics in all endeavours; Academic integrity; Academic freedom and freedom of scientific research; Responsibility, accountability, fairness/ transparency; and Embracing diversity.

⁷ 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 Enhancement Office.

to the national and international contexts. This requires the use of internal but predominately external participants in the external evaluation (validation) quality assurance processes.

- 5.1.5 All faculties and academic offerings, namely short learning programme⁸ modules, subjects, qualifications/programmes are evaluated/ reviewed and must pass through a self-evaluation process⁹ on the basis of the relevant HEQC/CHE and NWU-specific criteria and, in selected cases, be followed by an external evaluation (validation).
- 5.1.6 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 Senate decision on the phasing-out strategy.
- 5.1.7 Evaluation cycles may range between one and seven years¹⁰, according to the following evaluation schedule:
- a) Short learning programmes (SLP), short courses, continuous education offerings and or certificate programmes¹¹ of 1 year and less – every three years.
 - b) Modules – every three years.
 - c) Subjects (that form part of the core of any qualification/programme) at undergraduate and honours level – every 4 years.
 - d) Undergraduate qualifications/programmes of 3 years or less – every 5 years.
 - e) Undergraduate qualifications/programmes of 4 years (including extended programmes) – every 5 years.
 - f) Honours qualifications/programmes – every 5 years. (Undergraduate and honours qualifications/programmes must, if practically possible, be evaluated collectively).
 - g) Structured master’s qualifications/programmes – every 6 years¹².
 - h) Research master’s and doctoral programmes – every 6 years¹³
 - i) Faculties – every 7 years¹⁴
 - j) Thematic Reviews – every year¹⁵

6 SUPPORT SERVICES

- 6.1 All NWU support departments (functions, services, academic, administrative, student and/or general support units) must have a detailed quality manual to be regularly updated. Support departments have

⁸ Includes short courses and any type of continuous education offering.

⁹ The systematic planning, scheduling, documentation and execution of the self-evaluations should form part of each faculty’s planning process.

¹⁰ Also include reviews by statutory bodies.

¹¹ As approved by DHET.

¹² Structured master’s qualifications/programmes can also form part of a Research Entity review.

¹³ As part of the Research Entity reviews arranged by the Institutional Research Support Office. Research master’s and doctoral qualifications/programmes that do not form part of any Research Entity review should (also) be evaluated every 6 years.

¹⁴ A time table will be compiled in order to equally spread the evaluation/review of faculties.

¹⁵ Thematic Reviews/Evaluations, e.g. Design, Teaching-Learning, Assessment, Student Retention/Throughput will be selected, based on need, and in consultation with Deans and the DVC: Teaching Learning.

to pass through a comprehensive self-evaluation¹⁶; self-reflection¹⁷; peer evaluation and or soft review process on the basis of acceptable relevant criteria¹⁸ as set out in paragraph 6.4.

- 6.2 External evaluations (peer evaluation and/or soft review) may also be conducted as guided by the supporting guidelines for the evaluation of support services¹⁹.
- 6.3 All self-evaluations, peer evaluations and/or soft reviews must be followed by an improvement plan with actions to respond to the results or weaknesses/deficiencies identified during the evaluation process. This, in turn, is followed by progress reports.
- 6.4 Evaluation cycles may range between one and seven years²⁰ according to the following evaluation schedule:
 - (a) Thematic evaluations/ reviews²¹ as identified in collaboration with Institutional Management members – every year.
 - (b) Campus-specific support departments with no comparable cross-campus function/role – every five years.
 - (c) Support departments with an institutional and/or cross-campus function/role – every six/seven years.

7 QUALITY ASSURANCE BODIES

The NWU endorses the work of the CHE/HEQC (and other Education and Training Quality Authorities (ETQAs) functioning in higher education²²) and participates fully in the national reviews and institutional quality audits.

8 RESPONSIBILITY FOR QUALITY ASSURANCE

- 8.1 The NWU considers quality assurance as part of the responsibilities and activities of all staff members (both academic and support).
- 8.2 Each campus, faculty and support department will have a “quality coordinator”, who will act as a catalyst for quality. DVCs, deans, executive directors, senior directors, directors, managers, heads and all other managers²³, however, remain responsible for ensuring quality in their respective organisational units.
- 8.3 Deans report on the outcome of all faculty-related quality evaluations to the respective deputy vice-chancellors at an appropriate forum.
- 8.4 An annual summarised report covering all quality-related evaluations and or reviews will be tabled at Institutional Management and Senate.
- 8.5 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.
- 8.6 In the formal structured processes implemented at the NWU, each staff member 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.

¹⁶ Also in preparation for a Comprehensive Peer Evaluation/Review

¹⁷ Also in preparation for a Soft Review

¹⁸ Made available by the Institutional Quality Enhancement Office on the intranet of the NWU

¹⁹ Made available by the Institutional Quality Enhancement Office on the intranet of the NWU

²⁰ Also include reviews/accreditation visits by statutory bodies/ if and when applicable.

²¹ Thematic evaluations/ reviews may focus on one criteria or more.

²² Including Statutory/ Non-Statutory and Professional Councils/ Boards

²³ Including programme leaders and subject chairs

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 Quality Enhancement Office or to the Institutional Registrar. All changes are subject to the approval of Institutional Management, Senate and Council.

This policy must be reviewed at least every 5 years.

Compiled by Dr JM Jacobsz

Quality Enhancement

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