

RULES

1 PURPOSE

The purpose with the set of rules is to ensure the establishment of an environment conducive to the realisation of the premise and policy statements as included in the NWU Quality Policy (approved by Council on **9 September 2021**). The University Management Committee (UMC) approved these rules on **21 July 2021** and Senate approved these rules on **18 August 2021**.

2 OBJECTIVES

At principled level, the NWU views “quality” as much more than a mere compliance exercise. In accordance with the Higher Education Act, 101 of 1997, the Statute and other related national policies, frameworks and/or minimum standards, the objectives with the rules included below are to ensure synergy and focus in the organisational pursuit towards an optimal environment in support of ongoing quality enhancement.

Quality Rules are also developed in support of the NWU dream and purpose, the Quality Policy and the associated Shewhart¹ Cycle of planning, doing (implementation and performance), checking (monitoring and evaluation) and acting (improving/implementing the required changes). The NWU Rules on Quality Enhancement depart broadly from the standards for Institutional Audits² and the Programme Accreditation criteria³ as set by the Council on Higher Education (CHE).

3 DEFINITIONS

In this document:

- 3.1 “**Quality Coordinator**” refers to the person tasked by the Executive Director / Director of each Support Department to support quality enhancement initiatives across sites of delivery, or refers to the person appointed by the Executive Dean to oversee quality enhancement in the faculty;
- 3.2 “**Internal Evaluation**” refers to the evaluation of an academic offering or support department by NWU staff;
- 3.3 “**External Evaluation**” refers to the external evaluation and validation by both external (outside the NWU) and a limited selection of staff members⁴ of the NWU;
- 3.4 “**Core business**” refers to teaching and learning, research, community engagement / implementation of expertise;
- 3.5 “**DHET**” refers to the Department of Higher Education and Training;
- 3.6 “**SAQA**” refers to the South African Qualifications Authority; and
- 3.7 “**Quality Manual**” refers to a document indicating the primary and secondary processes in a particular domain, roles to be performed and the evaluation of the efficiency and effectiveness thereof.

4 RULES

Unless expressly noted otherwise in these rules, the following shall apply with regard to teaching and learning, research, community engagement / implementation of expertise and support services⁵. These rules must be

¹ Dr Walter *Shewhart* adapted this method as a linear flow of 'specification', 'production' and 'inspection'. Also described as a model for change

² Quality Audits

³ Minimum Standards

⁴ NWU Staff members do not have the right to vote on any of these evaluations/ reviews

⁵ Support Departments

read with the Quality Policy, the General Academic Rules for the NWU and all other applicable NWU policies, frameworks and rules.

4.1 MEETING THE DREAM AND PURPOSE⁶

In meeting the dream and purpose, the NWU:

- 4.1.1 Is to ensure that the core business (teaching and learning, research, community engagement / implementation of expertise) and support services are functioning in tandem;
- 4.1.2 Is to ensure that services and/or products are developed and delivered that meet the minimum programme and/or audit criteria as provided/adapted by the CHE/HEQC⁷; and
- 4.1.3 Is to support the regular monitoring, evaluation, reviewing and improving of activities to ensure that standards are maintained and improved.

4.2 APPROACH TO QUALITY

4.2.1 Quality Management System

The NWU operates a documented QMS with clear processes, procedures and guidelines that is designed to ensure that specified criteria and/or standards in support of the core business and support services are met.

4.2.2 Multidimensional

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:

- a) 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, values⁸ and mission statements, and with those of the institution);
- b) 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 DHET requirements, which include governance, planning (PQM), funding and resource allocation, as well as taking into account international developments);
- c) Value for money (judged in relation to the full range of higher education purposes);
- d) Client and needs satisfaction;
- e) Affordability;
- f) 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
- g) Meeting international benchmarks, and repeatability of processes.

4.2.3 Contextual

Furthermore, the NWU considers quality as:

- a) The policies, systems, activities, structures, processes, procedures and guidelines directed towards achieving, maintaining, monitoring and promoting quality;
- b) 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 improvement⁹ and taking action to implement desired changes;
- c) 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;
- d) Informed by the "Shewhart Cycle", which 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);

⁶ Equal to Vision and Mission

⁷ Higher Education Quality Committee

⁸ Ethics in all endeavours; academic integrity; academic freedom and freedom of scientific research; responsibility, accountability, fairness/transparency

⁹ One of the permanent quality objectives of an organisation should be the continual improvement of its process efficiency, its effectiveness and, hence, overall performance.

- Check: Assess the measurements and report the results to decision makers (evaluation); and
 - Act: Decide on changes needed to improve the process (improvement); and
- e) In addition to the quality assurance activities, quality promotion focuses on quality improvement and enhancement by combining self-evaluation with external/peer evaluation (if possible), as well as self-regulation and management.

4.2.4 General:

- a) In addition to the premise in the Quality Policy and the definitions listed in this document, quality assurance comprises the policies, processes, procedures and mechanisms according to which the NWU, or a specific organisational unit or function, ensures that specified quality specifications and standards are maintained. These policies, processes, 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;
- b) The NWU maintains a Quality Manual for each support department and faculty. These are available to staff via the Intranet System or as paper variants where required;
- c) Self-evaluation / critical self-review 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 evaluation/assessment and quality promotion are interlinked, the terms “quality assurance” and “quality enhancement” are used by the NWU in an embracing sense;
- d) Self-evaluation / critical self-review is accepted as the primary mechanism for quality assurance. It is the responsibility of each functional unit at the NWU to establish and apply effective procedures for regular self-evaluation; and
- e) The Research Support Office facilitates the quality assurance (internal and external) of all types of research entities.

4.2.5 Academic Quality

- a) 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 students¹⁰. Quality assurance is a continuous, active and responsive process. Everyone at the NWU needs to be dedicated to continuous improvement.
- b) 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.
- c) 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.
- d) 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.
- e) 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.
- f) 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 internal but predominately external participants in the external evaluation (validation) quality assurance processes.
- g) All faculties’ academic offerings, namely short learning programmes, modules, subjects, qualifications/programmes are evaluated/ reviewed and must pass through a self-evaluation process¹¹ on the basis of the relevant HEQC/CHE and NWU-specific criteria and, in selected cases, be followed by an external evaluation (validation).
- h) Any evaluation resulting in a “needs improvement” will be followed by a second (follow-up) evaluation within 12-18 months (if possible).
- i) Any evaluation resulting in a “does not comply” will be followed by a Senate decision on the phasing-out strategy.
- j) Every unit of evaluation (programme, subject group and the like) must maintain an improvement plan based on regular self-evaluation, peer/external evaluation and progress reports.

¹⁰ 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 Quality Enhancement Office

¹¹ The systematic planning, scheduling, documentation and execution of the self-evaluations should form part of each faculty’s planning process.

- k) For National Reviews the CHE/HEQC's criteria (as amended for purpose of the programme) are used as the basis for self-evaluation of the programme(s).
- l) Evaluation cycles may range between one and seven years¹², according to the following evaluation schedule:
 - Short learning programmes (SLP), short courses, continuous education offerings and/or certificate programmes¹³ of one year and less – every four years;
 - Modules – every four years;
 - Subjects (that form part of the core of any qualification/programme) at undergraduate and honours level – every five years;
 - Undergraduate qualifications/programmes of three years or less – every six years;
 - Undergraduate qualifications/programmes of four years (including extended programmes) – every six years;
 - Honours qualifications/programmes and Postgraduate Diploma qualifications/programmes – every six years. (Undergraduate and honours qualifications/programmes must, if practically possible, be evaluated collectively);
 - Structured master's qualifications/programmes – every six years;
 - Research master's and doctoral programmes – every seven years¹⁴; and
 - Thematic Reviews¹⁵ – every year (as requested and approved by Senate).

4.2.6 Support Quality

- a) Responsibility for support department quality must be located as close as possible to the processes of the concerned support department.
- b) All NWU support departments (functions, services, academic, administrative, student and/or general support units) must have a detailed quality manual to be regularly updated.
- c) Support Department quality assurance must be responsive to the needs of the core business of the university but equally so to national and international contexts, which require the use of limited internal staff but primarily of external/peer, industry and professional experts for the external/peer evaluation/soft review process.
- d) Support departments have to pass through a comprehensive self-evaluation on the basis of acceptable relevant criteria.
- e) External evaluations (peer evaluation and/or soft review) may also be conducted as guided by the supporting guidelines for the evaluation of support services.
- f) 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.
- g) Evaluation cycles may range between one and seven years according to the following evaluation schedule:
 - (i) Thematic evaluations/reviews as identified by UMC¹⁶ members – every year;
 - (ii) Campus-specific/unique support departments with no comparable cross-campus function/role – every six years; and
 - (iii) Support departments with a cross-campus function/role – every seven years.

4.2.7 Responsibility for Quality Assurance

- a) The NWU considers quality assurance as part of the responsibilities and activities of all staff members (both academic and support).
- b) Each faculty and support department will have a “quality coordinator”, who will act as a catalyst for quality.

¹² Also include reviews by statutory bodies.

¹³ Includes certificate programmes accredited/approved/registered by CHE/DHET/SAQA

¹⁴ Research master's and doctoral qualifications/programmes and/or Structured master's qualifications/programmes can also inform a Research Entity review.

¹⁵ Thematic Reviews/Evaluations, e.g. Design, Teaching-Learning, Assessment, Student Retention/Throughput and the like, will be selected, based on need, as approved by Senate.

¹⁶ University Management Committee

- c) Deputy Vice-Chancellors (DVCs), executive deans, deputy deans, executive directors, chief directors, senior directors, directors, deputy directors, managers, heads and all other managers¹⁷, however, remain responsible for ensuring quality in their respective organisational units.
- d) Executive deans report on the outcome of all faculty-related quality evaluations to the respective DVCs at Senate.
- e) Members of UMC report on unit/departmental-related evaluations at UMC and Senate if so determined¹⁸.
- f) 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.
- g) 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.

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¹⁷ Including programme leaders and subject chairs

¹⁸ Such as an "Institutional Audit"