

GOOD PRACTICE GUIDE FOR MANAGING THE QUALITY OF SERVICE-LEARNING

PURPOSE OF THE GUIDE AND INTENDED TARGET AUDIENCE

This Guide presents a framework for managing the quality of service-learning at South African HEIs. The Guide has been developed as a resource for HEIs, to guide the development and implementation of service-learning activities and to be employed as an internal system for managing the quality of service-learning. The focus is on the policies, structures and data that would facilitate the development, implementation, monitoring and review of the quality of higher education service-learning programmes in a manner that will advance the institution's mission and goals, and addresses individual and societal transformation challenges.

The Guide is structured to be of relevance to administrators, quality managers, and academic planners; as well as to deans and heads of faculties, schools and departments; and to programme and module coordinators and academics generally. It is important to note that the Guide is not a prescriptive checklist or an expansion of the HEQC's criteria, but should be adapted and applied in a way that is sensitive to institutional context and mission. This is in alignment with the key principle, adopted by the HEQC, that HEIs are responsible for quality and for its management and improvement. The intention is that this Guide will help institutions to achieve standards for service-learning management on the institutional, faculty/ school, programme/ qualification and module/ course levels, so that institutions can map a trajectory of innovation, enhancement, improvement and transformation.

USING THE GUIDE

How the Guide is used depends on the level of service-learning development within the institution:

- Institutions that have already established service-learning as a core function and already have a system for managing the quality of service-learning can use the Guide to validate the effectiveness of their system.
- Institutions that do not have in place an established service-learning function or a system for managing the quality of service-learning, can use the Guide as a resource providing invaluable guidelines for establishing and implementing such a system.

The Guide provides a framework and mechanisms for managing the quality of service-learning at the various levels. It attempts to be comprehensive regarding service-learning as practised at the various HEIs in South Africa. However, because of the ever-changing face of higher education and the varied nature of systems for managing quality, the Guide cannot be seen as exhaustive. It should also be interpreted as flexible and sensitive, with due regard for the institutional mission and the context in which a particular institution operates. The ‘recommended indicators and arrangements for managing quality’ and the ‘reflective questions’ are not prescriptive, and should rather be used as conceptual resources and heuristic tools to assist in the identification and prioritisation of key quality concerns that may arise from the institutions’ own, unique contexts.

IMPLEMENTING THE GUIDE

This Guide is to be read in conjunction with the self-evaluation instruments (institutional, faculty/ school, programme/ qualification and module/ course levels), which consist of indicators and evaluative questions to enable an institution to validate its service-learning function and activities. It is this information that will serve as evidence of an institution’s claims in response to the HEQC audit criteria relating to managing quality of community engagement in general, and service-learning in particular.

Again, however, it should be noted that this is a *guide* to good practice of service-learning and does NOT form part of the official HEQC audit process. Nevertheless, the Guide could be included in the audit framework for institutions that wish to do so. In such cases the Good Practice Guide and Self-Evaluation Instruments should be used in such a way that they promote an approach to improving quality in higher education that is based on reflection, analysis and scholarship.

SCOPE

This Guide focuses on the service-learning component in two main areas:

- The links between the mission of the institution and planning, resource allocation and management of quality management;
- The core functions of the institution: teaching and learning, research, and community engagement.

While addressing the same broad concerns and following the same logic as the HEQC’s broad audit criteria, this Guide should not be seen as an extension of those audit criteria (which are developmental), or of the HEQC’s programme criteria (which set minimum standards). Rather, without intending to be prescriptive the Guide puts forward a much more detailed set of guidelines for good practice in service-learning.

Thus, the Guide addresses institutional policies, systems, strategies, processes and activities for managing the quality of the core function of service-learning, including relevant academic support services. The Guide considers arrangements for: quality assurance; quality support; quality development and enhancement; and quality monitoring. In summary, the Guide looks at:

- The development and operation of institutional policies for managing quality and systems for service-learning;
- The extent of the institutional knowledge about policies for managing quality and systems for service-learning;
- The effective use of the systems in promoting, developing and improving quality; and
- Evidence (indicators of success and evidence of effectiveness) to be provided by the institution for claims made about service-learning activities.

EVALUATIVE STAGES AND INSTITUTIONAL LEVELS FOR MANAGING THE QUALITY OF SERVICE-LEARNING

Managing quality in the core functions of higher education institutions involves four evaluative stages, namely (1) input, (2) process, (3) output and impact, and (4) review. Therefore, these evaluative stages should form the basis of the framework for managing the quality of service-learning:

- INPUT with regard to the development of service-learning (i.e. mission statement and values; policies and regulations; structures; resources; and strategic and action plans);
- PROCESS-related arrangements for the implementation of service-learning (i.e. management strategies, implementation support, capacity building, and partnership development);
- Monitoring and evaluation to gauge the OUTPUT and IMPACT of service-learning; and
- REVIEW of service-learning modules/ courses.

In line with the HEQC expectations and procedures, self-evaluation should form the primary mechanism for managing the quality of service-learning in the different functional units. Such self-evaluation should be complemented and validated by external peer evaluation. If necessary, this process must be followed by an improvement and development plan with actions to address the gaps or weaknesses identified during the evaluation process.

In terms of managing quality, four levels on which service-learning functions within HEIs have been identified:

- The institutional level;
- The faculty/ school level;
- The programme/ qualification level; and
- The module/ course level.

The self-evaluation instruments for managing the quality of service-learning, presented in this Guide, have been developed in order to make provision for good practice indicators at each of these levels. Differences in terms of usage of the concepts ‘faculty/ school’, ‘programme/ qualification’ and ‘module/ course’ by the various HEIs are provided for throughout the Guide.