

# **COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION (CHE)**

## **MINIMUM PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION STANDARDS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS IN LESOTHO**

### **1. FOREWORD**

The Council on Higher Education in Lesotho (CHE) was founded by the Higher Education Act of 2004. In addition to regulation of higher education in Lesotho, CHE has a mandate to ensure that the quality of higher education provided in Lesotho meets regional and international standards. Specifically CHE has a mandate to:

- a) Promote quality assurance in higher education;
- b) Audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions;
- c) Accredite programmes and issue certificates of accreditation;
- d) Monitor and evaluate the performance of academic programmes offered in higher education institutions.

The need for quality assurance in higher education is necessitated by a number of internal and external factors; including the shift from universities as institutions of the elite to institutions of a mass of students, diminishing funding levels, increasing calls for accountability of those running the universities, and globalization.

In order to build and enhance the quality of programmes offered in our institutions of higher learning, CHE has developed standards and criteria that will inform a range of quality assurance processes such as programme accreditation, institutional audits, monitoring and evaluation. Throughout the world, regulatory bodies like CHE have developed threshold standards that are based on best practice principles. We refer to these as Minimum Programme Accreditation Standards. These standards cover the following core functions of the institutions:

- i) Goals and Objectives of the Programme;
- ii) Financing of Programme;
- iii) Programme Design & Development;
- iv) Teaching & Learning Strategy;
- v) Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms;
- vi) Physical Resources & Infrastructure;
- vii) Staffing;
- viii) Admissions;
- ix) Assessment of Learner Attainment;
- x) Student Support Services;
- xi) Research & Innovation;
- xii) Community/Industry Engagement;
- xiii) Internationalization.

These standards shall apply to all academic programmes leading to diplomas, degrees, postgraduate diplomas, and doctorates. In essence, the standards are designed to cover Levels 5 through 10 of the Qualifications Framework of Lesotho (QFL). These standards will provide the shape and context for programme accreditation, institutional self-assessment and internal quality assurance processes.

## 2. MINIMUM PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION STANDARDS

<i>The programme is in line with the institutions' mission and forms part of the faculty/department's operational plans to achieve stated goals and objectives. The programme meets national needs and articulates well with other relevant programmes.</i>		<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Decision</i>			<i>Points for Action</i>
<i>STANDARD</i>	<i>CRITERIA</i>		<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	
a) Goals and Objectives of the Programme	(i) The faculty offering the programme is administered by a high calibre, experienced and competent management team with strategic vision and leadership as evidenced by their resumes, the nature of operational plans and the appropriateness of the institution's policy documents; (ii) The programme has a vision and mission statements that are in line with institutional and national educational goals; (iii) The faculty/department offering the programme has a strategic plan in place with measurable objectives and realistic timeframes which it implements; (iv) The goals and objectives of the programme are in line with the vision and mission of the faculty/department as articulated in the strategic plan; (v) The intended outcomes of the programme are consistent with the strategic plan of the faculty/department offering the programme; (vi) The governing structures for the faculty/department allow for timely and effective decision-making to ensure proper administration of the programme; (vii) The policy documents enable sufficient input from academics and relevant external stakeholders and student participation where relevant.					
<i>The planning of the programme is directly linked to the budget processes, the amount of resources that are allocated and the sustainability of the funding models used.</i>		<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Decision</i>			<i>Points for Action</i>
			<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	
b) Financing of the Programme	(i) The faculty/department offering the programme has sufficient financial resources to run the programme and ensure its sustainability given the projected student enrolment, and the academic and support staff complement needed to run the programme effectively;					

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(ii) The faculty/department has a well-developed business plan showing projected student intake, recurrent expenditure and the details of how the programme is being financed;</li> <li>(iii) The programme budget follows a defined process and procedure;</li> <li>(iv) The budget takes into account the programme plans;</li> <li>(v) The programme has a transparent system for distribution of resources;</li> <li>(vi) The programme has a plan for responding to financial emergencies and unforeseen occurrences;</li> <li>(vii) The faculty/department offering the programme demonstrates that there are sound financial policies and controls to ensure production of an unqualified financial audit statement;</li> <li>(viii) The programme is offered by a faculty/department that has adhered to a financial audit schedule using both internal and external auditors.</li> </ul>					
<p><b><i>Programmes design is in line with national, regional and international needs, and meets the requirements of learners and employers. Clearly defined design and approval procedures ensure the intellectual credibility of what is offered.</i></b></p>		<b><i>Evidence</i></b>	<b><i>Decision</i></b>			<b><i>Points for Action</i></b>
			<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	
c) Programme Design & Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Principles and guidelines needed for the process of programme development are in place and well-known to staff;</li> <li>(ii) The process of development and approval of the programme was rigorous and thorough as evidenced by the documentation showing the extent of consultations with internal and external stakeholders, including benchmarking;</li> <li>(iii) The programme has been formally approved by the relevant and appropriate internal governance structures;</li> <li>(iv) The programme design shows a good balance in the development of theoretical, practical, problem solving and experiential skills, and is in line with the requirements of specific disciplines and the purpose of the programme;</li> <li>(v) Where relevant, the programme is closely aligned with current professional practices and shows potential to develop the required professional competencies in line with the national needs;</li> </ul>					

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(vi) The rationale for the programme is responsive to Lesotho’s socio-economic needs and the needs of the regional and international labour market where appropriate;</li> <li>(vii) The programme and its proposed activities show explicit links with the worlds of work, business, industry or community;</li> <li>(viii) The programme offers articulation possibilities with related programmes offered within and across the institutions found in Lesotho, in the region, and in the international world;</li> <li>(ix) The programme is coherent in that concepts, units and modules are logically connected and allow for progression in knowledge development;</li> <li>(x) The programme adequately integrates a range of emerging issues where appropriate;</li> <li>(xi) A clear internal and external audit and review schedule is available and the faculty/department has capacity to implement it;</li> <li>(xii) The intended exit level competencies of those who complete the programme are clearly articulated, appropriate for the purpose of the programme and aligned with the programme design and the assessment criteria;</li> <li>(xiii) The content is based on the latest theories and findings gleaned from related research literature and effectively integrates relevant examples and applications.</li> </ul>					
<p><i>A teaching strategy that takes into account the context for teaching, the type of students served and available resources exists. The teaching and learning processes are adequately monitored and evaluated, and the teaching staff has access to appropriate professional development activities.</i></p>		<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Decision</b>			<b>Points for Action</b>
			<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	
<p>d) Teaching &amp; Learning Strategy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Class size enables effective utilization of the teaching and learning resources available at the study site and is appropriate for the programme purpose;</li> <li>(ii) The teaching and learning strategies employ a variety of innovative pedagogical approaches;</li> <li>(iii) The teaching and learning strategy is clearly articulated and</li> </ul>					

	<p>appropriate for the programme's purpose;</p> <p>(iv) A variety of appropriate teaching resources, including Information Technology (IT) are available to the teaching staff and the students;</p> <p>(v) Laboratory, workshops and seminars are hands-on and investigatory where applicable, and are adequately resourced for the number of students being taught;</p> <p>(vi) There is a system for monitoring and evaluating the process of teaching that is linked to a professional development strategy;</p> <p>(vii) A system exists for ensuring that students attend classes, and it is adequately linked to a right to sit for examinations.</p>					
<b><i>Internal and external quality assurance mechanisms ensure the programme does meet its stated objectives.</i></b>		<b><i>Evidence</i></b>	<b><i>Decision</i></b>			<b><i>Points for Action</i></b>
			<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	
e) Internal Quality Assurance Plan or System	<p>(i) The programme delivery is guided by a comprehensive institutional quality assurance policy;</p> <p>(ii) Internal quality assurance mechanisms are in place to monitor the effectiveness of the day-to-day activities of the faculty/department offering the programme, including governance, finances, teaching and assessment;</p> <p>(iii) A management system for monitoring the performance of administrative, teaching and support staff is in place;</p> <p>(iv) Internal quality assurance tools enable use of multiple sources of information to monitor the quality of teaching, including classroom observations and student feedback;</p> <p>(v) A process is in place to ensure that appropriate action is taken on the basis of information gathered on the monitoring of the quality of teaching;</p> <p>(vi) Internal quality assurance mechanisms are bench-marked against best practices.</p>					

<i>The infrastructure and the physical resources available for use enable the programme to achieve its stated objectives.</i>		<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Decision</i>			<i>Points for Action</i>
			<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	
f) Physical Resources & Infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Depending on the type of programme and student enrolment, adequate space and buildings exist to accommodate teaching staff, management staff, support staff and the processes of teaching and learning;</li> <li>(ii) The infrastructure and teaching facilities available enable use of a variety of innovative methods of teaching and learning;</li> <li>(iii) The information technology infrastructure provides access to electronic information appropriate for the programme and its purpose as evidenced by the ratio of students to computers of 1:14 or better;</li> <li>(iv) Depending on the type of programme and projected students enrolment, the teaching materials and related equipment available enable the most effective methods of delivery;</li> <li>(v) The structures, policies, plans and processes exist to ensure that the management and maintenance of the infrastructure and resources continuously create an enabling environment for high standards of delivery of content;</li> <li>(vi) All buildings meet health and safety requirements;</li> <li>(vii) All buildings available for students' accommodation enable a safe and conducive living and learning environment.</li> </ul>					
<i>The calibre of staff working in the programme, working conditions, professional development mechanisms, and productivity enable the programme to meet its stated objectives.</i>		<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Decision</i>			<i>Points for Action</i>
g) Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) The recruitment and selection policy ensures that the most experienced and high calibre academic and support staff members are recruited in an objective and transparent way;</li> <li>(ii) Except for those teaching in a programme leading to the highest qualification in the discipline, at least 90% of the teaching staff hold a qualification higher than the exit level of the programme;</li> </ul>					

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(iii) The support staff is adequately qualified for the job they are doing;</li> <li>(iv) Teaching resources, research facilities and other working conditions enable teaching staff to meet performance expectations;</li> <li>(v) Staff development policy and plan exist and ensure that all staff continually get professional support in order to sharpen their skills;</li> <li>(vi) The promotion criteria are based on a performance appraisal system, and are focused on a wide range of factors, including teaching, research, publications and community outreach activities.</li> </ul>					
<p><i>The process of admitting students into the programme is fair, transparent, efficient, and ensures that the most deserving candidates are admitted into the programme.</i></p>	<p><b>Evidence</b></p>	<p><b>Decision</b></p>			<p><b>Points for Action</b></p>	
		<p><i>Fully Met</i></p>	<p><i>Partially Met</i></p>	<p><i>Not Met</i></p>		
<p>h) Admission Policy</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) The admission policy is well-articulated and communicated to the clients and general public;</li> <li>(ii) The criteria or conditions of admission have been made public;</li> <li>(iii) Admission strictly adheres to enrolment plan or admission quota;</li> <li>(iv) Subject to the availability of infrastructure and human resources, all qualifying local students have equal opportunity to access to the programme irrespective of race, nationality, sex, physical ability, religious affiliation or political affiliation;</li> <li>(v) Depending on the admission quota for foreign students, all qualifying foreign students have an equal chance of being admitted irrespective of race, nationality, sex, physical ability, religious affiliation or political affiliation;</li> <li>(vi) The admission criteria ensures recruitment of the most qualified students based on the selection criteria;</li> <li>(vii) Admission and registration processes exist that can be</li> </ul>					

	executed effectively and within timeframes that enable uninterrupted teaching to commence on a set date.					
<b><i>The assessment system used in the programme is efficient, fair, secure, and employs quality control mechanisms designed to protect the intellectual credibility of the programme.</i></b>		<b><i>Evidence</i></b>	<b><i>Decision</i></b>			<b><i>Points for Action</i></b>
			<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	
i) Assessment of Learner Attainment	<p>(i) Appropriate assessment policy and procedures exist to ensure high attainment levels that are transparent to staff, students and the general public;</p> <p>(ii) Internal policy and processes exist to ensure that the students' performance are closely monitored, regularly updated, and are accordingly advised on the progress they are making in their studies;</p> <p>(iii) The internal moderation system and peer review mechanisms exist and enable refinement of examination tools prior to externalization, where applicable;</p> <p>(iv) An appropriate external moderation system exists, has clear guidelines, and ensures that action is taken on the basis of feedback from external examiners;</p> <p>(v) The programme has a clear intellectual honesty policy for the staff and students, and a mechanism that enables corrective measures to be taken;</p> <p>(vi) The faculty/department offering the programme has policies that ensure zero tolerance for cheating, copying or any form of examination malpractices that threaten the integrity and authenticity of the examination process;</p> <p>(vii) End of year assessment and grading processes are executed efficiently and within timeframes that enable the next academic year to commence smoothly;</p> <p>(viii) A system is in place to ensure safe storage of results, timely retrieval of students' results, and the issuing of valid and secure certificates.</p>					

<i>Medical, recreational and academic student support structures enable a conducive teaching and learning environment, and the attainment of the programme's stated objectives.</i>		<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Decision</i>			<i>Points for Action</i>
			<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	
j) Student support Structures	(i) Depending on the type of programme and student enrolment, the library service has enough materials to support the proposed programme and an appropriate library management system;					

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(ii) The students have access to electronic information appropriate for the programme and its purpose as evidenced by the ratio of the number of computers to the number of students of 1:14 or better;</li> <li>(iii) The programme has a student advisement or personal tutorship system that ensures that the students get expert advice at each crucial stage of the programme;</li> <li>(iv) The student representative body or part thereof represents the students at key decision-making structures of the programme;</li> <li>(v) The students have access to counselling services provided by qualified staff;</li> <li>(vi) The students have access to a clinic or medical facility that provides basic medical services, including HIV and AIDS services;</li> <li>(vii) The students have access to sporting and recreational facilities;</li> <li>(viii) A clear students' grievance handling procedure exists, has been disseminated to the students and the staff, and is implemented accordingly.</li> </ul>					
<b><i>A research and innovation component of the programme keeps faculty/department members on the cutting edge of knowledge creation, addresses industry and community needs, and supports the attainment of the instructional objectives of the programme.</i></b>		<b><i>Evidence</i></b>	<b><i>Decision</i></b>			<b><i>Points for Action</i></b>
k) Research & Innovation			<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) Policies, systems, and structures that ensure the quality of research conducted in the faculty/department are in place, including capacity building;</li> <li>(ii) The research infrastructure, including equipment, ICT resources and other resources enable a desirable research output of the faculty/department;</li> <li>(iii) The amount of research funding available to staff and students is proportionate to the faculty/departmental budget;</li> <li>(iv) Funding is enough to enable general institutional research;</li> </ul>					

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(v) The department gets enough research grants and commissioned studies to supplement the departmental budget;</li> <li>(vi) The research output of the faculty/department is commensurate with the academic credentials of those populating the faculty/department;</li> <li>(v) The research outputs of the faculty/department have significant impact on the developments in the community, industry and private sector as evidenced by patents, membership of research networks and the number of post-graduate students;</li> <li>(vii) The faculty/department regularly evaluates its research goals;</li> <li>(viii) The faculty/departmental staff use their research findings to inform teaching.</li> </ul>					
<p><i>The programme is adequately linked to community, industry and private sector in terms of educational programmes and research projects, and these links enable the programme to attain its stated objectives.</i></p>		<b>Evidence</b>	<b>Decision</b>			<b>Points for Action</b>
<p>l) Community/ Industry Engagement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) The faculty/department has at least one educational project serving the community;</li> <li>(ii) The faculty/department has built partnerships with government, community, industry and private organisations to advance its educational agenda;</li> <li>(iii) The faculty/department has a well-known system for documenting and dealing with complaints from the general public;</li> <li>(iv) There is evidence that the faculty/department learns from its stakeholders and uses this knowledge to improve its capacity to serve the needs of stakeholders;</li> <li>(v) The faculty/department regularly engages in a publicity campaign to inform stakeholders of its educational programmes;</li> <li>(vi) The faculty/department has attained its community engagement goals as articulated in the strategic plan.</li> </ul>			<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	

<i>Programme content and activities are adequately globalized, and the students and staff frequently engage in various forms of international engagements to enrich their learning experiences.</i>		<i>Evidence</i>	<i>Decision</i>			<i>Points for Action</i>
			<i>Fully Met</i>	<i>Partially Met</i>	<i>Not Met</i>	
m) Internationalization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(i) There is evidence that the faculty/department has effected significant changes in the programme designed to increase the international content of the curriculum;</li> <li>(ii) The students have a range of opportunities to interact with international scholars and learners;</li> <li>(iii) Groups of learners and staff have undertaken exchange visits to regional and international institutions;</li> <li>(iv) There is evidence of existing partnerships with regional and international institutions, and these partnerships have impacted positively on teaching and research in the faculty/department;</li> <li>(v) The faculty/institution has put in place processes, procedures, and policies to ensure mobility of students, credit accumulation and transfer.</li> </ul>					

### **3. ACCREDITATION DECISIONS**

#### **3.1 Accreditation Phases**

- a) Candidacy Phase (New Programmes):** A new programme for which (a) a form is filled in and submitted to CHE describing how the programme measures up against the set of minimal accreditation standards, and (b) a panel of experts establishes that the programme does meet most of the criteria for accreditation except for a few of them that can only be verified when the programme is running, may be admitted to the Candidacy Phase. Such a programme may be provisionally offered for a maximum of two academic years after which a decision can be made on its accreditation.
- b) Accreditation Phase (Existing Programmes):** All programmes that are both existing and running prior to the accreditation period automatically qualify for the Accreditation Phase. Accreditation will consist of four stages: (a) Self-assessment, (b) External assessment using Minimum Programme Accreditation Standards, (c) Site Visits, and (d) Report-writing and decision-making.

#### **3.2 Evaluation Framework**

To evaluate each programme, the Accreditation Panel will check it against each of the 13 standards, highlighting evidence for each criteria, decision and points for action in each case. To decide whether the programme qualifies for Accreditation, Probationary Accreditation, Denial of Accreditation or Withdrawal of Accreditation as provided in Section 3.3, the Panel will consider two categories of the standards: (a) Required Standards, and (b) Recommended Standards.

##### **(a) Required Standards**

- (i) Goals and Objectives of the Programme;
- (ii) Financing of the Programme;
- (iii) Programme Design & Development;
- (iv) Teaching & Learning Strategy;
- (v) Internal Quality Assurance Mechanisms;
- (vi) Physical Resources & Infrastructure;
- (vii) Staffing;
- (viii) Admissions;
- (ix) Assessment of Learner Attainment;
- (x) Student Support Services.

##### **(b) Recommended Standards**

- (i) Research & Innovation;
- (ii) Community/Industry Engagement;
- (iii) Internationalization.

In order for a programme to qualify for either Accreditation or Probationary Accreditation, it must do generally well on **Required Standards**. The Evaluation Framework is designed in such a way that it provides a range of performance levels so that a programme can either fail to achieve, achieve or surpass expectations.

### 3.3 Accreditation Decision Framework

- a) **Accreditation:** The programme meets minimum requirements;
- b) **Probationary Accreditation:** The programme partially satisfies the requirements but shows potential to meet the rest of the requirements within a period to be determined by CHE but not exceeding two academic years after which a decision can be made on its accreditation.
- c) **Denial of Accreditation:** The programme fails to meet minimum requirements;
- d) **Withdrawal of Accreditation:** A previously accredited programme fails to meet minimum requirements upon another round of accreditation.

These initial thoughts on programme accreditation are premised on our perusal of the accreditation documents for Botswana, Namibia, Nigeria and South Africa, objective analyses of the status of higher education institutions in Lesotho, and on our own knowledge about the provision of higher education.

To prepare for programme accreditation, institutions will be allowed a grace period of a maximum of one year (12 months), following official approval and gazetting of Minimum Accreditation Standards as regulations.