

COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION (CHE)



Schedule 8

SITE VISIT GUIDELINES FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

August 2013

INTRODUCTION

This document is intended to assist higher education institutions to prepare for site visits to be undertaken as part of the accreditation process. It articulates the context of programme accreditation, addresses the nature and purpose of site visits, and deals with key aspects of the organization and administration of site visits. More importantly, it provides ethical guidelines to be followed by institutions as they interact with members of the Accreditation Panel.

THE CONTEXT FOR PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) in Lesotho is responsible for the accreditation of programmes offered in higher education institutions as mandated by the Higher Education Act, 2004.

The process of programme accreditation is intended to improve the quality of programme offerings across higher education institutions in Lesotho.

In terms of Section 5 (13) of the Higher Education Act, 2004, CHE has mandate to fulfil the following tasks:

- Promotion of quality assurance across higher education institutions;
- Auditing of quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions;
- Accreditation of programmes and the issuing of certificate of accreditation;
- Monitoring and evaluation of the performance of higher education institutions.

In line with section 13 (3) of the Higher Education Act, 2004, the Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee (HEQAC) will delegate some of its quality assurance tasks to a group of skilled professionals who serve as members of accreditation panels, audit panels and programme review teams. More specifically, in order to validate the claims made by those running the programmes or institutions in the self-evaluation reports, the panels will conduct site visits and develop the accreditation report with a clear recommendation on whether to grant or not to grant accreditation.

The purpose of this section is to outline the context for CHE's programme accreditation. With regard to programme accreditation, those based in the higher education institutions and members of the public should note the following:

- a) Minimum Programme Accreditation Standards apply to all programmes offered at main campuses and satellite campuses and off- campus programmes;
- b) The criteria described in the standards apply to contact (face-to-face) and distance education (and e-learning programmes);
- c) Foreign institutions which offer higher education programmes in Lesotho are also subject to the CHE's programme accreditation requirements irrespective of their mode of delivery. In addition, these institutions have to satisfy the registration requirements in line with Higher Education Act, 2004.
- d) Given that programme accreditation is one of the pre-conditions for registration of private higher education institutions, CHE expects institutions to start with a

manageable number of programmes and progressively increase the number of programmes as their capacity increases.

PREPARATION FOR A SITE VISIT

Key Contacts

A designated **CHE official** will be a contact person on matters related to the logistics and the administration of the site visit. The institution will be given the necessary contact details for this person once it has accepted the accreditation panel as proposed by CHE.

The institution is expected to appoint a **Site Visit Coordinator** who will serve as its liaison person before and during the site visit. The CHE must be informed as soon as possible of the contacts of this person. The site visit coordinator is responsible for making all necessary preparations and arrangements for the site visit on behalf of the institution. He/she must be available throughout the site visit period to attend all matters pertaining to the accreditation process.

Duration of Site Visit

The site visit shall normally take a minimum of one full working day depending on the nature of the programme being considered for accreditation.

Format of Site Visit

A typical site visit schedule will include but is not limited to the following:

- Meeting between the Accreditation Panel, and the Head of the Unit/Institution, Programme Coordinator(s) and the Quality assurance Officer(s);
- Visits to key teaching facilities, including libraries, lecture venues, laboratories, computer facilities and other major elements of the physical infrastructure of the institution related to the programme being considered for accreditation;
- Reading and reflection periods for members of the Accreditation Panel;
- Interviews with key informants, including academic staff, administrative staff, support staff, students and alumni related to the programme being considered for accreditation;
- A concluding session with the Head and/or senior management of the unit/institution offering the programme.

Finally the Site Visit Coordinator, working in collaboration with a designated CHE official, shall notify key informants to be interviewed, and prepare venues for sessions and catering arrangements.

SITE VISIT REQUIREMENTS

Site Visit Coordinator

As indicated earlier, each institution must appoint a site visit coordinator whose role includes to:

- Oversee institutional preparations for a site visit;

- Oversee the organization and administration of the visit;
- Provide essential information to the Accreditation Panel;
- Act as liaison between the institution and Chairperson of the Accreditation Panel;
- Look after the well-being of the panel during the site visit.

Directions and Parking

- Marked and signposted reserved parking bays for panel members' vehicle(s), close to the venue for the visit, must be arranged;
- Clear signs must be erected leading from the parking bays to the plenary or other break-away rooms.

Plenary Room and Break-away Rooms

One main plenary room and breakaway rooms with movable tables and chairs must be made available for the panel during the site visit. The layout of each room should include the following:

- Tables and chairs for the panel and interviewees;
- Extension cables and plug points for panel members' laptop computers;
- Flipcharts and marker pens in each room;
- Display tables in the plenary room for categorized documentary evidence (*see below*);
- Photocopying facilities;
- Name tags for interviewees and desk name signs for panel members (large enough for visibility).

Documentary Evidence

The institution is required to provide relevant materials and documents for examination and reading by the panel. These materials and documents should be appropriately filed and catalogued, and preferably linked to each of the 13 categories of accreditation criteria (standards). A list of the materials and documents (an evidence 'map' or 'key') must be available for the panel. All materials and documents should be displayed in the plenary room.

The materials and documents on display should include all those to which reference was made in the Self- Evaluation Report, any additional information and documentation required by the CHE, additional information and documents judged to be important by the institution to inform the panel of its programme(s), and any additional documentary evidence that may be required by the chairperson of the panel. The display of materials and documents should be organized in such a way as to facilitate ease of access and location, and that mechanisms employed for this purpose are made clear to the panel. If necessary the Site Visit Coordinator may request the Librarian to provide support in arranging documentation for ease of reference by the panel.

A possible list of documents designated for display may vary from one site visit to another depending on the nature of the programme being considered for accreditation. The following

list provides an indication of the key documents that may be displayed during a site visit apart from those submitted to CHE along with the application form and the self-evaluation report:

- Prospectuses, faculty handbooks, academic calendars and student handbooks/guides;
- Strategic plans of the institution and/or unit offering the programme;
- Most recent financial audit report;
- Key policy documentation covering programme design, admissions, staff recruitment, examinations, quality assurance, and recognition of prior learning, etc;
- Learner materials, syllabi, course packs (per module/mode of delivery), and examples of students' work;
- Schedule of courses offered in the programme (say) over the last 3 years, with the relevant staff curricula vitae;
- Samples of assessment tasks and instruments, internal moderation and external examiners' reports;
- Programme completion rates (if applicable), module performance and assessment records;
- Records of students' complaints and grievances;
- Summary of staff accomplishments and publications;
- Advertising materials, promotional materials, information brochures etc;
- Course/ lecturer evaluation responses and summaries;
- Student tracking mechanisms or post programme completion survey reports;
- Any relevant policies or documents that support the institution/unit's mission, goals and objectives.

Each of these materials must be displayed in the plenary room if it is perceived to be closely related to the programme being considered for accreditation. During the site visit, the chairperson of the panel reserves a right to request to see any other documentation that is not included in this list.

Interviews

A major element in a site visit schedule is interviews with key informants, including senior management, academic staff, administrative and support staff, students and alumni. The purpose of the interviews is to validate the claims made in the Self-Evaluation Report and to gather more information about the quality of the programme. Once the institution has received the site visit schedule from the CHE, it is the responsibility of the site visit coordinator to ensure that all interviewees are identified and informed about the interview schedule. It is important that interviewees are informed about the sessions in which they will be interviewed during the site visit, and are directed to the appropriate venues for their interview session(s). The panel may decide to conduct individual interviews or focused group discussions or both.

Catering arrangements

In addition to the provision of coffee and tea making facilities in the plenary room, the institution is requested to provide catering for a light luncheon on the day(s) of the site visit. Arrangements should be made for the luncheon to be served either in the plenary room or,

preferably, in a venue that is not far from the plenary room. No alcoholic beverages should be served to panel members during the site visit, and the CHE will notify the institution of any panel member's special dietary requirements once the panel has been appointed.

Post Site Visit Requirements

Immediately after the site visit has been concluded, the site visit coordinator should ensure that:

- A list of all evidence tabled should be given to the chairperson.
- A list of all persons interviewed should be given to the chairperson.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND ETHICAL GUIDELINES FOR INSTITUTIONS

Confidentiality

Programme accreditation processes, including site visits, provide the CHE and its panels with a lot of institutional information. This information will be used only for the purpose for which it was obtained, programme accreditation. All material, including institutional submissions, will be treated as confidential by the CHE and its panels. In order to ensure that confidentiality is observed, the CHE monitors strictly the dissemination, filing and destruction of confidential information gathered from institutions during the accreditation process. Panel members are required to treat all the documentation accessed during the accreditation process as confidential.

In addition, all panel members are required to sign and adhere to CHE's Code of Ethics, and are required to sign both a legally-binding confidentiality agreement form and gift disclosure form.

Responsibilities of Chairpersons of Panels

During the entire accreditation process, the chairperson serves as the representative of the CHE. A chairperson is selected on the basis of demonstrated and recognized expertise relevant to a particular discipline, and is a trained evaluator. One of the roles and responsibilities of a chairperson is to act as the official link between the panel and the institution during the accreditation process.

Ethical Guidelines for Institutions

In addition to ethical and confidentiality requirements and guidelines for members of the accreditation panel, CHE has developed the following ethical guidelines for which institutions offering programmes are being considered for accreditation:

1. It is the responsibility of each institution to facilitate a thorough and objective appraisal of its programme under evaluation by the CHE;
2. Institutions have the right to object to CHE panel members only if it can be demonstrated, in writing, that a potential conflict of interest does exist. The objection must be exercised with due responsibility;
3. Any perceived inadequacies of CHE procedures or processes should be reported by the institution at the time of their occurrence. This applies to the conduct of the site visit and/or panel members and any incidents that may take place;
4. Institutions are not permitted to make contact with panel members prior to the site visit and after the site visit on issues related to the accreditation process;
5. Institutions or their staff members are not allowed to try to influence the outcome of a site visit by making offers (gifts) to panel members;
6. In terms of CHE policies, no gifts, awards or financial incentives may be offered to panel members before, during or after the site visit;
7. There should be no attempt to record proceedings of the panel or to tamper with documents belonging to panel members;
8. It is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that staff and students required for interviews during the CHE site visit are available at the relevant times and have been properly apprised of all the arrangements, venues, purpose and intent of the site visit;
9. Institutions will be afforded the opportunity to negotiate appropriate site visit dates with CHE. Once these are finalized, the institution is bound to host the site visit. In the event of any unforeseen circumstances that may require a rescheduling, it is the responsibility of the institution to make contact immediately with the CHE;
10. Institutions must ensure that panel members are afforded access to all facilities and resources relevant to the programme(s). Arrangements in this regard must be made with the relevant personnel. Panel members must receive communication of these arrangements at the time of the site visit;
11. Guidelines for the Institutional Display must be adhered to by the institution. The institution has a responsibility to ensure that additional documentation requested by the CHE prior to the site visit/during the site visit, and in exceptional circumstances after the site visit, is made available;
12. It is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that information provided to the public and the CHE is accurate and adequate;
13. It is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that all staff members and students are aware of the accreditation processes and possible outcomes of the accreditation. Information pertaining to accreditation must be made available to the public and internal staff and students;

14. It is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that information is not withheld from the panel or that there is no inadequate disclosure of information which compromises the work of the panel;
15. All information submitted for accreditation purposes or made available to the public/staff/students must be accurate and reflect the actual programmes and practices of the institution;
16. No photographs may be taken of panel members or the procedures of the panel during the site visit.

Adapted with Permission from the *Site Visit Preparation Manual for Institutions:* Council on Higher Education (CHE), South Africa.