ITL Resource No. 3
Access and Admissions

Each of the seven Improving Teaching & Learning Resources can be read and used individually, although there are cross-references as some are closely related. However, it is important to read the Introduction, as it deals with the purpose of the Resources and how they relate to the Higher Education Quality Committee’s quality assurance mandate and its quality promotion and capacity development activities.

In this Resource...

- Focus Area
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FOREWORD

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) prioritised quality issues in teaching and learning very early on in the development of its quality assurance systems. Mandated by legislation to conduct institutional audits and programme accreditation and to promote quality and quality assurance, the HEQC initiated a project in 2002 aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

The project on teaching and learning was intended to refocus attention on one of the core functions of higher education in an environment where the restructuring of higher education had given much attention to issues such as governance, financing and the ‘size and shape’ of the system. The project also reflected the importance of quality-related capacity development in the work of the HEQC, especially in a context where historical disadvantage impacts on the capacities of academic staff to plan and deliver good quality programmes and on the capacities of students to benefit from them. These issues needed to be addressed and to be brought to the centre of the debate about the purposes of a new quality assurance system for South Africa. Moreover, the project fitted in with international debates and developments in higher education, which were prioritising the learning experiences of students as well as giving increased attention to the professionalisation of higher education teaching and to staff development and support.

The HEQC set up the project in a way that would involve a number of role-players. It was important to draw on teaching and learning expertise in higher education as well as maximise the impact of those involved within higher education institutions. The Resources for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning should be seen therefore as the fruit of an extensive collaboration between the HEQC, a large number of experts and practitioners and a range of public and private higher education institutions.

It is hoped that the Resources will be adapted creatively for a number of purposes and used by higher education practitioners individually and in teams in the process of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to give effect to the transformation objectives in the restructuring of higher education, especially in relation to redress and equity and to the responsiveness of higher education to national goals and challenges.

The HEQC looks forward to further cooperation with key partners in higher education in effectively developing and using the Resources. We would like to acknowledge that funding for the project and this publication was made available by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation.

Dr Mala Singh
Executive Director
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The Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources are the product of an ongoing collaboration between the HEQC and a wide range of academics based in private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). These included several academics from other countries that assisted with the project or provided advice. The 14 regional workshops at which the draft Resources were introduced and discussed in 2003 were generously hosted by public HEIs.

FOCUS AREA

This ITL Resource on Access & Admissions deals with institutional policy and practice relating to access management, in respect of the admission, selection and placement of students. These policies and practices are crucial in determining an institution’s ‘size’ (the number of students it enrols), its student composition (the kinds of students it targets and enrols) and its ‘shape’ (the types of programmes into which students are placed). Clearly, admissions policies also impact at the programme level, but this Resource does not deal directly with entry requirements for specific programmes; that aspect of quality is assured through the HEQC’s procedures for programme accreditation and re-accreditation. This Resource relates closely to, and should be used in conjunction with, ITL Resource No. 4 on Student Development & Support, which deals with curriculum and learning environment issues aimed at ensuring that access leads to academic success.

KEY CONCEPTS

The following concepts are used to describe the different dimensions of institutional admissions policy and practice, which form part of an access management strategy:

Access

The widening of higher education (HE) access is an equity-driven concern and relates to the strategies and procedures that an institution undertakes to make its educational services accessible to a diversity of students. This usually involves adjusting traditional entry requirements. It also involves developing flexible entry requirements and selection mechanisms, such as assessment for purposes of the recognition of prior learning (RPL), institutional- or programme-specific entry tests or alternative admissions procedures, and mature age exemptions. The widening of access further involves intensive curriculum development, and often staff development as well, both to ensure that HE curricula are responsive to the learning needs of a diverse student intake and to enhance retention and
graduation rates. (The provision of curriculum enrichment opportunities and academic development is dealt with in detail in Resource No. 4 on Student Development & Support). The challenge of widening access and participation is to ensure that those to whom access is granted have a fair chance of academic success.

In the National Plan for Higher Education (Ministry of Education, 2001a), the Department of Education (DoE) has set equity targets for the HE system as a whole, including, for example, the need to move towards race and gender representivity in enrolment and to address skewed representation in science, engineering and technology (SET), business and commerce, and postgraduate programmes in particular. The NPHE also emphasises the need to ensure that representivity in enrolment leads to representivity in graduate output (NPHE, 2001: 3.2). While enrolment statistics for individual institutions are unlikely to be able to mirror the DoE’s national system targets, institutions are expected to set their own enrolment targets, which include equity targets, taking national enrolment targets into account.

Enrolment

Enrolment refers to the regulation and management of admissions, usually at national level. For example, in the NPHE (2001: 2.2), the DoE has set national enrolment targets in terms of ‘size’ (a participation rate in HE of the 20–24 year age group of 20% to be achieved over the next 10–15 years), and ‘shape’ (enrolments to be 40% in the humanities, 30% in business and commerce and 30% in SET over the next 10–15 years). However, institutional enrolment targets and results will be affected by a range of factors over which institutions do not always exercise control; examples include historical, geographical and socio-economic contexts, supply and demand factors, competition from other institutions, institutional missions and approved ‘Programme and Qualification Mix’ (PQM) plans.

Admissions management

This refers to the policies and procedures that an institution sets up to manage the admission, selection and placement of students. Admissions management includes the systems, structures, staff and services that an institution establishes to recruit students, process applications, select and place students on particular programmes, and integrate academic acceptance with adequate student support and financial and housing services, and so on.

Selection and placement

This is the heart of any admissions policy and involves the specific criteria and procedures that an HEI uses to select applicants and to place them in a particular programme (e.g. foundation or extended curriculum, as appropriate) of study.

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RATIONALE

In developed countries during the second half of the 20th century, public HE was seen as a vehicle for offering individuals equality of opportunity and the possibility of social mobility. The extent to which this goal has been achieved is debatable. However, in the South African post-apartheid context there is a strong imperative for public HEIs to commit themselves to furthering social justice through widening access and increasing representivity. The HEQC has identified transformation as underpinning its conceptualisation of quality, and a critical element of this is the part played by HE in equity and redress. Likewise, the promotion of ‘equity of access and outcomes’ and the ‘redress of past inequalities through ensuring that student, graduate and staff profiles reflect the demographic composition of South African society’ is one of the DoE’s strategic objectives for the transformation of the HE system (see NPHE, 2001, and The Transformation and Reconstruction of the Higher Education System, DoE, 2002g).

In the NPHE (2001: 3.2), the DoE makes explicit its position on access and equity. As noted above, the DoE suggests that the current participation rate of 15% of the 20–24 year old cohort is too low and that, as a middle income country, South Africa should achieve a participation rate of at least 20% over the next 10–15 years. The participation of African and Coloured students in HE was estimated in 2002 as being at 12% (see DoE, 2002g: 3.1.1). One significant contributing factor is the weak output of the schooling system. For example, in the 2002 Senior Certificate results, 68.9% of all who wrote the examination gained a Senior Certificate, while only 24.5% of these obtained matriculation with endorsement (the official entry requirement for universities). The latter is estimated to be less than 10% of the Grade 9 school cohort (SAUVCA–CTP, 2003: 147). Although between 1993 and 2000 the proportion of African students in the HE system increased from 40% to 60%, such statistics hide the fact that the majority of African students are enrolled in distance education humanities courses and teacher training programmes. The proportion of African students in SET and business and commerce programmes remains low (Badat, 2004: 21).

In the NPHE, the DoE urges institutions (particularly those where Black students constitute less than 50% of the total enrolment) to establish targets and strategies for achieving the national benchmarks in order to move towards equity in the demographic composition of their student bodies.

With respect to gender, it is estimated that, in 2000, 53% of all students in universities and what were formerly designated as technikons (now universities of technology) were female. But, as is the case for African students, females are seriously under-represented in ‘hard’ areas such as SET and business and commerce and are also under-represented in postgraduate studies (Cloete and Bunting, 2000: 17). The DoE is therefore also concerned that equity targets ensure that Black and women students are selected and placed in those programmes where they are currently under-represented (see DoE, 2002g: 3.1.2).

The concept of ‘disadvantage’ should be defined by class as well as race and gender. This suggests that it is inadequate simply to target Black and women students for access, but that institutions should also aim to admit students who have attended disadvantaged schools (an indicator of lower class status). This can be done by identifying rural and township schools and by using alternative admission routes to admit a certain quota of students from such schools.
The term ‘underprepared students’ is widely used, but this concept should be used together with that of ‘underprepared institutions’. Both concepts should be employed to examine dimensions of underpreparedness other than the academic, such as cultural and social.

DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. Kathy Luckett, the coordinator of the working group, was asked to write this section so as to reflect on issues that were discussed by the working group in the course of developing the first draft of the Resources.

Note that the views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

Clearly, an institution’s admissions policy is an obvious place to look for evidence for or indicators of the realisation of the national transformatory goals and values outlined above. However, the challenge for HEIs in South Africa is not simply to open access, but to do so in ways that are responsible, financially feasible and academically sustainable. The widening of access inevitably requires additional resources to be spent on students who are underprepared for HE study. Institutions have to weigh up these national demands for equity with the need to act responsibly towards the student (who may incur debts and not succeed at HE studies), towards the state (that may subsidise and provide financial aid for the student) and towards its teaching staff (who are required to carry additional teaching demands). HEIs also have to balance social justice demands with other goals and purposes of HE, such as the need to produce internationally recognised research and high quality graduates.

Some of the tensions around access are recognised by the DoE in the NPHE, where the Department acknowledges that it will be difficult to significantly increase the annual intake of non-traditional students in the short- to medium-term (2001: 22), because of the chronic mismatch between output from the schooling system and HE entry requirements, for universities in particular. Rather, the DoE wants in the medium-term to focus on improving the efficiency of the HE system in terms of improving graduation and retention rates, particularly the disproportionately high Black student failure and drop-out rates. The DoE sets a national target to improve graduation rates over the next 10–15 years to 25% of the total enrolment for three-year programmes. Given that Black student failure and drop-out rates are disproportionately high and that SET and business/ commerce programmes generally have even higher failure rates, there is a potential tension between the widening of access and attaining a better ‘shape’, and the achievement of greater efficiency. However, past practice would suggest that the most effective solution to this problem is to support the widening of access with comprehensive, sustained, high quality curriculum interventions, which develop students’ general academic and cognitive skills, their language competence and their capacity for self-directed learning, in the context of
mainstream learning; thus ensuring such students’ eventual success in HE (see Resource No. 4 on Student Development & Support).

Finally, it should be noted that, given the different histories of HEIs in South Africa and their consequent differences in student intake and composition, issues of access and admissions are realised in very different institutional contexts. The complexity and challenge of access issues will be compounded in the context of merged institutions (see below).

THE CURRENT ADMISSIONS POLICY CONTEXT

The Higher Education Act (1997) does not specify a minimum admissions requirement for HE study; but it does require that ‘the admissions policy of a public higher education institution must provide for the redress of past inequalities’. While providing for the continuation of current admissions arrangements to public HEIs, as administered by the Matriculation Board of the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA) and by the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP), the HE Act re-affirms the right of public HEIs to determine their own admissions policies subject to the provisions of the Act. This includes the right to determine entrance requirements for particular programmes, student numbers for particular programmes and the manner of their selection. Public HEIs are obliged to publish their admissions policies. The HE Act does not attempt to set a legislative framework for admission to private HEIs; in the case of the latter, it is assumed that when applying for registration (with the registrar of private HEIs), information concerning admissions requirements must be furnished.

Currently, admissions requirements are as follows:

Admission to Universities of Technology

Admissions requirements for study at universities of technology are determined in the Joint Statute for Technikons by the CTP. Currently, a learner must be in possession of a Senior Certificate to be eligible to enrol for diploma study at a university of technology. Admissions requirements for study at universities of technology can also be a National Certificate N3 with passes in official languages and passes of a minimum of 40% in at least four subjects, or a National Certificate N4 with passes in at least four appropriate subjects attained with 50% or more provided that there is proof of communicative competence in the institution’s medium of instruction. These requirements will be amended once the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) qualification is finalised.

The statute also makes provision for admission of students in respect of work experience, age and maturity, as well as for those students with foreign qualifications (in particular from the Southern African Development Community, or SADC) region. Universities of technology are also empowered to set additional admissions requirements for specific programmes. For example, programmes that involve the study of mathematics and science often have such additional requirements. Contrary to the situation at universities, universities of technology do not distinguish between admissions requirements for diploma and degree study. This is because the admissions requirement for the Bachelor of Technology (BTech) degree is currently an appropriate National Diploma (NDip) or equivalent.
Admission to Universities:

To register for degree study at a public university in South Africa, a student needs to be in possession of a Senior Certificate with a matriculation endorsement or a certificate of complete or conditional matriculation exemption. The ministerially approved regulations published in terms of the provisions of Section 74 of the HE Act (1997), as amended, set out the criteria and rules under which the various types of certificates of endorsement, complete and conditional exemption may be granted. The administration of this admissions policy is undertaken, on behalf of the universities, by the Matriculation Board of SAUVCA. The rules governing both endorsement and exemption status are extremely complex, especially in terms of the required combinations of Grade 12 subjects. Some universities also offer initial diplomas, e.g. in the case of teacher education. For these programmes, students in possession of only a Senior Certificate may be admitted to a university.

Universities are also allowed to set additional admissions requirements – that is, over and above the minimum mentioned above – for specific programmes. This is established practice for professional degrees, particularly for the health professions. In most cases this has been due to infrastructural limitations on places and to agreements between the universities and the professional board/council in question. In those programmes where mathematics and science feature strongly, it is common practice for universities to specify minimum Higher Grade Senior Certificate performance levels in these subjects. More recently, as universities have developed more focused programmes in response to demands for greater relevance and responsiveness, this practice has become increasingly widespread. A growing number of universities now also specify additional minimum requirements for language.

During the 1990s, exceptions to this admissions policy were allowed. Indeed, the number of students admitted by exception is on the increase owing to the lack of fit between current policy, the government’s strong equity agenda and the reality that the number of students exiting the schooling system with matriculation endorsement or exemption is on the decline. The Joint Statute of the Universities allows the Matriculation Board to issue a certificate of conditional exemption ‘to a person who, in the opinion of the senate of a university, has demonstrated, in a selection process approved by that senate, that he or she is suitable for admission to bachelor’s degree studies, which certificate shall be valid for admission to that university only’. This practice, known as Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption,5 has been used with increasing frequency in the past few years as universities have responded to falling student numbers and the inadequate matriculated output from the schooling system. The granting of Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption plus the provision of a foundation programme could be viewed as a form of RPL, in that the university concerned admits students who do not meet the statutory admissions requirements, provides them with a form of appropriate prior learning (the foundation programme) and then assesses and recognises this prior learning as the equivalent of a Senior Certificate with endorsement i.e. exemption.

5 In the case of private HEIs, it is usually the management or academic board of the institution that would make decisions about admissions and alternative admissions requirements.
Also under the Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption concession, some universities have introduced institution-specific entrance tests for prospective students. In most cases, all students with a Senior Certificate below a certain aggregate are required to write these tests. The results are normally used to assist university administrators in making alternative admissions and placement decisions. This development is due largely to the now widely accepted fact that the Senior Certificate is only a reliable predictor of academic performance for those students within the top range of scores. Admissions based solely on Senior Certificate results for those within the lower range of scores are therefore believed to exclude unfairly many students with academic potential.

**RECENT POLICY INITIATIVES THAT WILL IMPACT ON ADMISSIONS POLICIES**

Below, we discuss more recent policy initiatives that will have an impact on institutional admissions policies.

**South African Qualifications Authority**

SAQA's requirement that all qualification specifications for registration on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) include the recognition of prior learning (RPL) as a means of entry to the programme leading to the specified qualification poses a challenge to HEIs. Recognising prior learning (or current competence) is promoted as a strategy for increasing access to non-traditional, mature students. The DoE suggests in the NPHE (2001) that increasing access for workers, mature learners and disabled learners is an important goal in its own right. However, currently in HE, with the exception of a few successful innovations, the goal of implementing RPL remains unrealised on any significant scale. This is due both to the contested nature of some of the assumptions on which RPL is based and to the high levels of resources and assessment expertise that it entails. If HEIs are to take up the RPL challenge responsibly, they will need to integrate RPL into their access and curriculum development policies and strategies. They will also need to develop RPL selection instruments and assessment protocols based on the specification of entry requirements in terms of generic learning outcomes. Furthermore, institutions will need to set aside dedicated human and financial resources for counselling, educational interventions and labour-intensive assessment procedures. These are all necessary if applicants are to be enabled to develop protocols such as learning portfolios, in which they articulate prior experiential learning (usually tacit and context-dependent) in recognisable, explicit and abstract academic discourse. The HEQC devolves responsibility for the quality assurance (QA) of RPL to HEIs, provided that they furnish sufficient evidence of having established effective quality management systems in that area.

SAQA has also challenged traditional assumptions about school-leaving requirements. In its *FETC Policy Document* (April, 2001), SAQA has proposed the abolition of the Higher/Standard/Lower Grade distinction made in the current Senior Certificate examination and recommended that a simple pass in the FETC be the statutory minimum requirement for admission to all institutions in the HE sector. SAQA also regards the endorsement/exemption requirement on the Senior Certificate for admission to universities as an obstacle to widening access.
The Higher Education Qualifications Framework

In 2001 the Council on Higher Education (CHE) produced *A New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications Discussion Document* (released by the DoE in 2002 and known as the ‘NAP’ document), which proposed how the NQF could accommodate a structured qualification sub-system for HE which would supersede existing HE regulations. A key objective was to facilitate vertical, diagonal and horizontal progression. One proposal advanced in the NAP was to adopt a ‘nested approach’ to standards-setting in an attempt to protect the centre of the nest (the actual programme that gets delivered) from undue bureaucratic interference, and to retain for academics the authority to design, teach, assess and evaluate their own programmes. In July 2004, the DoE published *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework* with a view to arriving at a final decision. The HEQF accepts the ‘nested’ approach and supports the proposal that the NQF will have 10 levels (with HE on levels 5–10), each defined by broad level descriptors in terms of applied competence and autonomy of learning. The designation of each qualification type is also stated.

The Funding of Public Higher Education: A New Framework

The DoE has indicated in its new funding framework that it will allocate a portion of ‘earmarked funding’ for ‘foundation programmes and teaching development’. For at least the first five years of the operation of the new funding framework, this will amount to approximately 15% additional funding in terms of full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolment on foundation programmes. This will apply to first-time entering contact students (DoE, 2002b: 25). Foundation programme students will be funded at subsidy prices equivalent to those for standard undergraduate cells. Institutions will have to bid for their share of this earmarked funding through the three-year rolling plan process. It is assumed that by ‘foundation programmes’ the DoE means discrete, add-on programmes pegged at level 5. It is not clear what these proposals mean for the funding of integrated models of academic development, but it seems unlikely that there will be additional funding for students enrolled in this form of academic and curriculum development.

At a general level the new framework for funding involves a shift to the allocation of 50% of teaching funding on the basis of output (50% remains for input, i.e. students registered). This steering of the system towards greater efficiency has already been mentioned above; the NPHE set a national target for improving graduation rates to 25% of the enrolment for three-year programmes. However, it is unlikely that these output goals can be met without the implementation of academic development measures. Strategies for improving access and equity, and the quantity and quality of graduate output, should not be seen in opposition, but rather as a relationship that must be managed by providing adequate resources to support the curriculum interventions required for historically and educationally disadvantaged students to succeed.

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7 Hereafter: HEQF (2004). Note that, at the time of publishing these Resources, the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework: Draft for discussion* (Ministry of Education: 2004) had not yet been finalised.

8 15 November 2002.
Proposals for the Establishment of a National Higher Education Information and Applications Service for South Africa

The DoE’s National Higher Education Information and Applications Service (NHEIAS) proposals recommend the establishment of a national centralised information and applications service for all first-entry students wishing to study at undergraduate level at any South African public HEI. It is recommended in the proposals that institutions retain their right to set admissions criteria and the number of places available for specific programmes and that the NHEIAS generate offers to applicants on this basis. The objective of these proposals appears to be the rationalisation of the admissions process, in the interests of national planning and efficiency gains and ensuring that all students have access to the same range of choices.

Institutional Restructuring

The DoE’s restructuring of the HE landscape through institutional mergers and in particular through the creation of ‘comprehensive’ institutions, means that most institutions are having to redevelop their admissions policies and redesign their curricula. While the merger process provides new opportunities for improving access and admissions policies and practices, it also requires guidance from the DoE in terms of the finalisation of outstanding policy documents such as the HEQF and review of the NQF.

Proposals for a Further Education and Training Certificate

The DoE intends to phase in the new FETC from 2006 to replace the Senior Certificate as the level 4 exit qualification from 2008. The National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12 (Oct 2002) suggests that there will be 3 FETCs:

1. FETC (General) – the schooling pathway;
2. FETC (General Vocational) – the FET colleges pathway; and
3. FETC (TOP) – the trade, occupational and professional pathway.

The proposed FETC is a 130 credit whole qualification pegged at level 4 on the NQF and will be awarded on the basis of a minimum of 60 credits achieved in the 30%–39% band and 70 credits in the 40%–49% band. There will be no Higher/Standard/Lower Grade distinctions, and five grading bands. It is anticipated that the FETC will be the equivalent of the current Senior Certificate without matriculation endorsement (SAUVCA–CTP, 2003). While this may be an adequate level of attainment for a school-leaving certificate, given that disparities in the quality of provision of schooling provision will remain in the medium term, there is concern in the HE sector that the proposed FETC will not serve as an adequate threshold for entry to HE. SAUVCA has suggested a need to establish minimum thresholds for HE entry, especially levels of numeracy and literacy, and to run further admissions and placement tests alongside the FETC for entry to HE. Even if such a dual testing system is developed, this will not, in the medium term, do away with the need for alternative access routes into HE for students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds.

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EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

The following questions may be adapted for self-evaluating the quality of an institution’s access and admissions policy and practice. The questions are clustered according to the three dimensions of an admissions policy, namely: access, admissions management, and selection and placement.

ACCESS

1. Does the institution set explicit equity-driven enrolment targets? How do the institution’s enrolment targets cater for optimum size, student composition and ‘shape’ issues (i.e. what kinds of students get placed in what types of programmes)?

2. Does the institution have a well-motivated and comprehensive admissions and access policy approved by Senate and Council? To what extent is the admissions policy informed by the institution’s mission, its enrolment targets, its approved PQM (for public HEIs), the demand for access and its socio-economic context?

ADMISSIONS MANAGEMENT

1. How is the admissions policy managed and implemented? To what extent does the policy involve the adoption of a holistic approach to the management of admissions and access?

2. How are admissions policies publicised across the institution? Is there consistency in the application of admissions policies?

3. How does the institution proactively liaise with potential pools of students in its local communities? How does it proactively disseminate information on what the institution can offer?

4. To what extent are applicants’ enquiries promptly and effectively dealt with? To what extent are applications systematically and transparently processed according to explicit admissions policy and procedures?

5. How does the institution, in its recruitment and admissions procedures, provide applicants with the following: guidance about a range of flexible entry routes; broad curriculum and career guidance; and assistance with respect to second choices, re-routing and the like?

6. How does the institution cater for applicants who meet its admissions requirements but are not offered places?

7. To what extent are selection and placement trends at both institutional and programme level monitored via a sound management information system (MIS)? Are findings fed back into the admissions system to inform and improve admissions policy and selection and placement procedures?
SELECTION AND PLACEMENT

1. To what extent are the institution’s academic planning and admissions requirements based on defensible selection criteria? Has the institution developed mechanisms for flexible entry routes that are not based solely on school-leaving results? If so, how are such mechanisms validated?

2. To what extent has the institution developed a range of differentiated access options, at the entry level, into which students can be placed appropriately, ensuring that there is a good fit between levels of preparedness and the demands of the curriculum?
EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS

ACCESS

Evaluative Question 1: Equity of access

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors
Enrolment targets to address equity concerns are set by the institution. Access routes and a range of flexible entry routes are designed to support these targets. Management information shows that progress is being made towards realising these targets across faculties, programmes and levels.

Evaluative Question 2: Alignment between admissions policy & strategic & academic planning

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors
The institution uses an approved and publicised admissions policy. The admissions policy is aligned with the institution’s mission, enrolment targets, strategic plan and PQM. The policy also takes account of the demand for access and the institution’s socio-economic context. It includes realistic plans to meet specified size and shape enrolment targets within set time frames. These are clearly spelt out in terms of enrolment targets for both ‘regular’ and ‘flexible’ entry routes.

The institution’s capacity to contribute towards the attainment of the policy goals of the NPHE (2001, 2.2; 2.4-2.6) is fully exploited.

ADMISSIONS MANAGEMENT

Evaluative Question 1: Policy & management structures

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors
There is clarity on the roles, functions and reporting lines of those responsible for developing and implementing admissions policy. For example, the institution has a clearly defined admissions policy development structure, which is driven by a senior executive officer, directly accountable for the admissions policy. The implementation of the policy is also driven by a senior manager, with structures clearly accountable to him/her.

The policy and organisational structures enable the integration and coordination of functions that impact directly on student admissions. In particular, functional links are established and maintained between structures/ divisions such as: the institutional admissions committee; academic development programmes; alternative assessment services (e.g. RPL, alternative admissions); the student data/ records system; faculty administrations; faculty admission and re-admission committees; academic planning; financial aid and student housing; and student representatives or organisations.

This means that an offer of a place to a particular applicant includes the allocation of accommodation and, where applicable and possible, an offer of financial aid, ensuring that students are settled efficiently on arrival at the institution.
Evaluative Question 2. Internal dissemination & consistency of application

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors
The admissions policy is accessible to all who need it, e.g. it is posted on the institution's website. Admissions Officers, Faculty Managers and other staff dealing with admissions are well acquainted with the institutional admissions policy and procedures. The policy stipulations are applied consistently across the institution.

Evaluative Question 3: Recruitment & dissemination of admissions information

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors
Information on the institution’s educational opportunities, admissions regulations and application procedures (both regular and flexible) are disseminated to prospective students in good time for students to make appropriate decisions. A variety of accessible, student-centred dissemination strategies is employed to enhance the attainment of the institution's size and shape targets, e.g. websites, resource packs for students who present themselves for the first time at registration etc.

The disseminated information is accurate and comprehensive and avoids making unrealistic promises.

Evaluative Question 4: Effectiveness, efficiency & transparency

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors
The institution provides efficient and accurate responses to applicants’ enquiries. Admissions officers are in a position to pronounce on the status (e.g. rejected, waitlisted, accepted) of an application at any given moment. The MIS used allows constant data update and simultaneous access by all related offices.

All decisions taken in relation to prospective students' admissions are clearly and openly accounted for in terms of the provisions of the policy.

The Admissions Office, or related divisions, is equipped to serve the needs of a diversity of applicants.

Clear and effective communication lines between admissions officers and programme managers are maintained throughout the admissions cycle.

Where an institution has positioned itself to enrol a significant number of students from SADC countries and beyond, a specialised unit is in place to deal with the logistics of enrolling foreign/ international students.

Evaluative Question 5: Flexibility of entry routes & advisory services

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors
The institution has identified specialised personnel to deal with applicants’ queries about career options, curriculum choices and second choice re-routing. These services are proactive and efforts are made to alert potential students to any flexible/ alternative entry routes provided by the institution.
Evaluative Question 6: Management of unplaced students

**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**
Cases of applicants meeting minimum admissions requirements but not being placed in a programme are investigated, with a view to identifying the factors inhibiting access. Inter-institutional links are established and strategies are in place to re-route such applications.

Cases of applicants being offered a place but not taking it up are also investigated. The reasons for such applicants’ failure to register are fed into the admissions review process.

The institution can provide evidence to demonstrate that its admissions policy and recruitment strategies ensure a good match of demand and supply of educational provision, with minimal wastage.

Evaluative Question 7: Monitoring & improvement

**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**
An applications MIS, linked to a student MIS, is in place and allows selection, placement, registration and student progression to be recorded and traced through to graduation. This enables equity targets to be monitored across faculties and programmes and the results of the admissions policy to be researched and fed back into future deliberations and improved enrolment and admissions strategies.

SELECTION & PLACEMENT

Evaluative Question 1: Defensible selection criteria & placement processes

**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**
National admissions criteria, as set out by statute, professional bodies etc. are acknowledged and adhered to.

Selection criteria and mechanisms for flexible entry routes and the widening of access are well motivated, researched and evaluated.

Where appropriate, these include credible mechanisms and student support for the implementation of RPL/ recognition of current competence.

Evaluative Question 2: Differentiated access options & responsible placements

**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**
The results of admissions mechanisms are used judiciously to place students in appropriate programmes/ curricula (e.g. foundation/ bridging programmes, enriched/ extended curricula).

The institution aims to ensure that students admitted via flexible/ alternative selection mechanisms have a fair chance of academic success.
SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND REVIEW

These suggestions are not intended to be used as a checklist. They are offered rather to assist and guide HEIs on what may be considered appropriate sources of data and evidence. This list will obviously need to be adjusted depending on the nature and context of the institution under consideration.

1. Institutional mission, strategic plans, three-year rolling plans and approved PQM (for public HEIs);
2. Student enrolment equity targets and reports on the monitoring of these targets;
3. Evidence of the extent to which student enrolment equity targets have been realised;
4. Enrolment, graduation and retention rates;
5. Admissions policy documentation, including policy on flexible/alternative admissions, RPL, re-admission etc.;
6. Terms of reference or standing orders for the admissions committee or equivalent;
7. Organogram illustrating admissions organisational structure and reporting lines;
8. Prospectus, application forms, resource packs and other documentation sent to prospective applicants, with a covering rationale;
9. Promotional material: examples of flyers, websites, media clips and other forms of recruitment undertaken;
10. Documentation on career and curriculum guidance prepared for students;
11. Examples of selection assessment instruments;
12. Documentation and enrolment statistics on institutional provision of flexible entry routes including subsequent curriculum enrichment, e.g. student development programmes/extended curricula etc.;
13. Student feedback on admissions procedures;
14. Reports on the findings of admissions research and evaluation; and
15. Institutional internal and external review reports.
ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

BTech  Bachelor of Technology
CHE  Council on Higher Education
CTP  Committee of Technikon Principals
DoE  Department of Education
FET  Further Education and Training
FETC  Further Education and Training Certificate
FTE  Full-time Equivalent
HE  Higher Education
HEI  Higher Education Institution
HEQC  Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF  Higher Education Qualifications Framework
ITL  Improving Teaching & Learning
MIS  Management Information System
NDip  National Diploma
NHEIAS  National Higher Education Information and Applications Service
NPHE  National Plan for Higher Education
NQF  National Qualifications Framework
PQM  Programme and Qualification Mix
QA  Quality Assurance
RPL  Recognition of Prior Learning
SADC  Southern African Development Community
SAFCERT  South African Certification Council
SAQA  South African Qualifications Authority
SAUVCA  South African University Vice-Chancellors Association
SET  Science, Engineering and Technology
TOP  Trade, Occupational and Professional
access The widening of access to higher education is an equity-driven concern and relates to the strategies and procedures that an institution undertakes to make its educational services accessible to a diversity of students.

admissions management refers to the policies and procedures that an institution sets up to manage the admissions, selection and placement of students.

enrolment refers to regulation and management of admissions usually at national level.

matriculation endorsement is an endorsement to a Senior Certificate issued by SAFCERT in accordance with the regulations recommended by SAUVCA via the Matriculation Board, approved by the Minister of Education and published in the Government Gazette.

matriculation exemption refers to a certificate of complete or conditional exemption from the matriculation endorsement requirement issued by the Matriculation Board on behalf of SAUVCA to candidates who satisfied regulations for complete or conditional exemption as published in the Government Gazette.

selection and placement involves the specific criteria and procedures that a provider uses to select applicants and to place them in a particular programme of study.
REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READING


