

HERQA Program Accreditation

Accreditation of Post graduate Programs (Masters Programs)

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Addis Ababa

1. Introduction

A key purpose of higher education in Ethiopia is to produce competent, adaptable and responsible citizens who can contribute to the development of the country and to transforming the livelihood of the Ethiopian population. To help meet these purposes, the degree programs offered by higher education institutions (HEIs) need to be accredited to assure their standards. This task of accrediting programs offered by private institutions has been given to the Higher Education Relevance and Quality Agency (HERQA).

HERQA as an autonomous agency was established through the Higher Education Proclamation (351/2003) as one of the key agencies responsible for guiding and regulating the higher education sector in Ethiopia.

2. Purpose of this Document

The purpose of this document is to provide information on the procedures that will be followed by HERQA to consider the accreditation of graduate degree programs. It also sets criteria used during the accreditation process.

3. The Accreditation Procedure

The accreditation has two stages. The first stage involves the submission of documentation that addresses each of the accreditation each focus area given in section 4 below. The second stage involves a HERQA team visiting the HEI site(s). The purposes of the visit are to verify and clarify the documentation, to observe the facilities and to engage in dialogue with senior staff to help gain a fuller understanding of the HEI and the graduate program for which it seeks accreditation.

During and following the site visit the HERQA team will provide feedback to the HEIs to indicate their level of satisfaction with the evidence of compliance with each of the accreditation focus areas and offer advice regarding any perceived need for enhancement.

HERQA will provide the HEI with a written report on their accreditation submission.

Accreditation is essentially a permission to start a program. This permission lasts for three years.

4. Areas of Compliance for Accreditation

The accreditation process seeks evidence of compliance in a number of areas of operation of the HEI and in aspects of the program for which it seeks accreditation. These are dealt within the following sections of this document.

4.1 Experience of Providing Degree Level Programs

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should normally have graduated at least two cohorts of students in any first degree program.

4.2 Finance

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should be able to demonstrate access to sufficient financial resources for the long term support of all aspects of the program.

4.3 Research Climate

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should be able to demonstrate that:

- a) it has established a positive/conducive climate that encourages and supports staff to actively engage in research;
- b) staff who will contribute to the program are engaged research activities;
- c) it has sources of research funds and that adequate funds are available to support the approved research projects of students on the program.

4.4 Links

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should be able to demonstrate that:

- a) it has links with industries, businesses and professions appropriate to the program;
- b) it has links with other HEIs appropriate to the program;
- c) It has links with employers likely to recruit the graduates of the program.

4.5 Facilities

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should be able to demonstrate that it has in place or can establish the following:

- a) Appropriate teaching and research facilities to support the teaching program and the research projects of students;
- b) An adequate library stock of relevant and up-to-date learning resources and research materials to support the program. All the learning resources listed in course descriptions should be stocked and multiple copies of key texts should be available so that there is at least one copy of each key text for every five students. Library resources for the program should be organized in a designated area.
- c) Access, via subscriptions to international academic journals appropriate to the program.
- d) Access to international electronic bibliographic databases appropriate to the program.
- e) Adequate, up-to-date ICT resources to enable students to access electronic resources use the Internet, process research data and write their research theses.

4.6 Organization for Graduate Study

- a) An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should be able to demonstrate that it has in place or is able to put in place a robust administrative structure specific to graduate study.
- b) A department proposing to offer a graduate program should establish a Department Graduate Committee to approve courses and research thesis topics, the assignment of research supervisors and the award of marks and/or grades.
- c) A faculty with two or more departments offering graduate programs should establish a Faculty Graduate Committee to oversee the overall activities of the program.

4.7 Regulations

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should be able to demonstrate that it has in place or is able to put in place comprehensive regulations for graduate study and for the program that are clear and readily available to students and staff.

4.8 Program Duration

- a) Based on the national and international experiences, the postgraduate (Masters) program may have a non-thesis option which can be supported with project work.
- b) The duration of the programs should be:
 - ❖ 18-24 months (3-4 semesters) for full time students
 - ❖ 24-36 months (4-6 semesters) for part-time students

4.9 Program Credit Hours

- a) Total credit hours requirement should be 24-36 credit hours for thesis option, and 30-42 credit hours for non-thesis option
- b) Semester load
 - ❖ Semester load for full time students should be within the range of 9-12 credit hours
 - ❖ Semester load for part-time students should be within the range of 6-9 credit hours

HEIs should provide a breakdown of the student workload (lectures, seminars, tutorials, supervision meetings, workshops, laboratories, field work, research, private study *etc*) and indicate how they will communicate this workload to applicants and registered students.

4.10 Program Research Requirement

A proposed graduate program must have a research component requiring students to carry out a research project and to report this in a thesis of a length and form as stipulated in the graduate study regulations of the HEI.

4.11 Program Description

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should provide:

- a) a rationale for the proposed program;
- b) evidence that there is demand for the program;
- c) evidence that the program is relevant;
- d) evidence that the program has been devised in consultation with appropriate stakeholders and academic peers;
- e) the aims and objectives of the program;
- f) the semester by semester structure of the program;
- g) the courses that make up the program and their credit ratings;
- h) course descriptions that identify clear aims, objective and expected learning outcomes, outline the learning activities and list full references to up-to-date key texts and other books, articles and learning resources to be used on the course;

4.12 Program Monitoring and Evaluation

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should indicate how it proposes to:

- a) maintain appropriate academic standards and enhance the quality of the program;
- b) monitor the success of the program against appropriate internal and/or external indicators and targets.

4.13 Student Assessment

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should:

- a) describe how it will assess the students;
- b) set out the assessment weightings of the program courses (including the research thesis);
- c) provide transparent criteria for course grades and the award of the degree;
- d) describe how its assessment practices will ensure fairness to students;

- e) describe how it will moderate grading;
- f) describe how it will appoint examiners and the duties they will have;
- g) exclude a student's research supervisor from the assessment of the student's research thesis;

4.14 Review of Student Progress

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should indicate how it proposes to:

- ❖ put in place and bring to the attention of students and relevant staff clearly defined mechanisms for regular formal reviews of student progress.

4.15 Staffing

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should be able to demonstrate that it can accomplish the following:

- a) Assign academic staff to the program who are suitably well qualified and experienced, all whom should hold higher degrees, several of whom should hold doctorates and nearly all of whom have experience of university teaching;
- b) All academic staff should have at least the rank of assistant professor.
- c) Maintain at least 50% of the program staff are permanent;
- d) Maintain a staff to student ratio of 1:20;
- e) Assign a senior member of the program teaching staff with experience of graduate degree teaching to be the program leader;
- f) Assign research thesis supervisors who have the appropriate skills and subject knowledge to support, encourage, guide and monitor graduate students effectively;
- g) Provide each higher degree student with a research thesis/project advisor;
- h) Each advisor should not be assigned more than 8 advisees;
- i) Communicate clearly the responsibilities of all graduate student supervisors to supervisors and students through written guidance;

- j) Ensure that the quality of higher degree supervision is not put at risk as a result of an excessive volume and range of responsibilities assigned to individual supervisors;
- k) Where appropriate, provide induction, professional development, coaching and mentoring for program staff as identified by needs analysis;
- l) Staff requirement per program should be at least
 - ❖ 2 assistant professors for the first year
 - ❖ 3 assistant professors for the second year

4.16 Admission of Students

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should:

- a) have clearly defined and declared admissions criteria;
- b) have admission criteria that require students to possess a first degree (or equivalent) from an accredited HEI;
- c) apply admissions criteria fairly and consistently;
- d) admit only those applicants who are appropriately prepared and qualified and who should gain benefit from the program;
- e) involve at least two members of the academic staff in admissions decision. Such staff should have received instruction, advice and guidance in respect of selection and admissions procedures and
- f) number of students to be enrolled per program should not exceed 45.

4.17 Student Representation

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should indicate how it proposes to:

- ❖ put in place and make known procedures for students to be represented on appropriate bodies that manage the program.

4.18 Feedback

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should indicate how it proposes to:

- ❖ put in place mechanisms to collect, review and, where appropriate, respond to feedback from those concerned with the program (e.g. students, staff and employers of graduates).

5. Complaints

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should indicate how it proposes to:

- ❖ establish, and make known, independent and formal procedures to resolve effectively complaints from graduate students about the quality of their learning experience and the provision of resources and support, including research thesis supervision.

6. Appeals

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should indicate how it proposes to:

- ❖ put in place formal procedures to deal with any appeals made by higher degree students and make clear the acceptable grounds for appeals.

7. Information Provision

An HEI seeking accreditation of a graduate program should indicate how it proposes to:

- a) communicate the entitlements and responsibilities of students undertaking the program to applicants and registered students;
- b) communicate the assessment requirements of the program to applicants and registered students;
- c) communicate the assessment weightings (including the weighting of the research thesis) of the program to applicants and registered students;
- d) provide entering students with sufficient and clear information to enable them to begin their studies with an understanding of the academic and social environment in which they will be working;
- e) communicate the graduate regulations and program information to registered students.

In keeping with HERQA's commitment to continuous improvement, it is intended that this document will be reviewed regularly and updated as required. Users of this document are invited to contribute to this review at any time by alerting HERQA to any perceived errors and providing constructive written feedback on its utility.

New versions of this document will be indicated by a new issue date and a change in the last character of the reference number.