

Best Practice

for Academic
Administration in
Faculties at
**Higher Education
Institutions**

Second
Edition

*Revised
May 2016*

Published by:

HEFAF

Higher Education
Faculty Administrators
Forum

An Ethical Code of Conduct for Faculty Administrators

1. THE PURPOSE OF THE CODE

- The purpose of this Code is to formulate and internalise the core values, inclusive of principles, norms and standards, which guide the Faculty Administrators ethical conduct in work activities and interactions with colleagues and clients¹.
- 1 'Clients' refer to both prospective and registered students of the institution as well as external parties such as government organisations, student sponsor organisations or employers, parents, and service providers, etc.
- Through the application of this Code, the Faculty Administrator shall increase the good reputation and standing of the institution within the community it serves. In addition, the trust of both colleagues and clients shall be garnered through the Faculty Administrator's work outputs. These include effective management of human resources, sound decision-making and the maintenance of a high level of professional skills.

2. CORE VALUES

The following core values are relevant to the Faculty Administrator's Code of Conduct:

- Treat all colleagues and clients equally, fairly and with human dignity
- Show the proper respect for the leadership of the institution and for positions of appointed authority within the organisation
- Strive to deliver work outputs of the highest quality and excellence
- Always maintain the professional demeanour and job dedication expected of a Faculty Administrator
- Have a vested knowledge of the statutory regulations, policies and procedures that govern the institution and abide thereto, or contribute to the improvement of them to the best interests of the institution

3. PRINCIPLES GUIDING CONDUCT

The Faculty Administrator shall be guided by the following principles relating to conduct:

- Honesty and integrity
- Fairness
- Transparency
- A zero tolerance for corruption
- Ethical execution of duties
- A commitment to service excellence

4. STATEMENT OF ETHICS

"The Faculty Administrator shall strive to maintain the highest standards of ethics and morality in conducting and fulfilling the responsibilities inherent to the position of Faculty Administrator. This includes all actions directed towards colleagues, clients and the institution itself. The Faculty Administrator further undertakes to report all incidences of unethical behaviour and/or misconduct to the institution's authorities."

5. APPLICATION OF THIS CODE

In application of this code, the Faculty Administrator shall follow the methodology of:

- Open communication
- Participative management
- Adherence to the policies, rules & regulations of the institution
- Best Practice for Faculty Administration
- Clearly-defined responsibilities and job descriptions
- Well-defined lines of authority
- Expansion of personal knowledge of the work environment, and
- The development of skills that may contribute to improved performance within the faculty

6. ADHERENCE TO THE CODE

- This Code is underwritten by the Higher Education Faculty Administrators Forum (HEFAF), an international forum for Faculty Administrators. As such, all institutional members of HEFAF support this Code of Ethical Conduct. They furthermore undertake to both adhere to and promote this Code, within their institutions and their Executive Management, as a norm for all Faculty Administrators.

index

Preface	4
Background to the First Edition	4
Background to the Second Edition	5
Revision of the Second Edition – May 2016	8
Glossary of terms	10
Focus area 1: Organization and policies	13
1.1 Organizational structure	13
1.2 Reporting line	14
1.3 Designations and Career paths	15
1.4 Profile: Knowledge, Skills and Qualification	15
1.5 Accountability and Responsibilities: Faculty Administrator	16
1.6 Institutional policies and regulations	17
1.7 Management Information reporting	18
1.8 Faculty Administrators forum	18
Focus area 2: Planning process	19
2.1 Planning the academic year	19
2.2 Specification of qualification regulations	19
2.3 Timetable	20
2.4 The faculty's marketing	21
Focus area 3: Academic Administration Processes	22
3.1 Applications and admissions	22
3.2 Student registrations	22
3.3 Academic exclusions	24
3.4 Examinations / Assessments	25
3.5 Graduation	26
3.6 Communication with students	27
Best practice for the Administration of Master's and Doctor's Degrees for Faculties in Higher Education Institutions	28
Acknowledgements	28
Introduction	29
Glossary	29
1 Organisational structure for administration of higher degrees	31
2 Enquiries	31
4 Registration	33
5 Examination and assessment	34

Background to the First Edition

The first edition of this publication was initiated at a national conference for Faculty Administrators that was held in Pretoria on 23 and 24 May 2002. The then, Integrated Tertiary Software (Pty) Ltd, presented the conference that was attended by 78 delegates representing 23 higher education institutions from Southern Africa.

At this conference a forum was formed that was officially constituted as the Tertiary Institutions Faculty Administrators Forum (TIFAF). The constitution of TIFAF was approved at its first Annual General Meeting in April 2003. The goal of TIFAF was formulated in its constitution as follows:

*To collectively address common issues and challenges within a network of colleagues from the academic and faculty administration function within tertiary institutions. To furthermore define general **best practice** for academic and faculty administration that will keep up to date with current and future developments in this function.*

During the 2002 conference a workshop was held during which the delegates identified '**best practice**' for the function of faculty administration. Delegates initially focused on four identified areas that covered this function. '**Best practices**' were identified, which were then formulated in a first draft document with the purpose to eventually be published as a TIFAF publication.

The first draft document was reviewed and expanded upon at a further workshop that was held during the April 2003 annual conference of TIFAF in Port Elizabeth. 95 delegates representing 22 tertiary institutions from Southern Africa participated in this review workshop, which meant that 27 tertiary institutions made a contribution to the first published edition of this document.

The concept of 'best practice' is defined as:

The formulation of key process steps and / or events (strategies and tactics) and sub-steps in an organized, structured and chronological order as they take place in practice. The description of the events is clear and simple to understand by all levels of staff working in the particular function.

Defined and formulated '**best practice**' must adhere to the following requirements:

- It must set benchmarks which institutions strive to accomplish.
- It is about implemented practices that work, rather than theoretical models and prescribed text.
- It is about the leading practice that best works for a particular individual process, rather than an overall performance at one institution.
- It is dynamic and must be reviewed from time to time to incorporate the latest implemented '**best practices**'.

Note: The '**best practice**' defined in this publication serves as a guideline to institutions, but there will always be some institutions that deviate from these guidelines for justifiable reasons.

The Second Edition

In terms of the last mentioned requirement for the formulation of '**best practice**'; due to a far-reaching change in the higher education landscape in South Africa since 2003, resulting not only in the merging of a number of universities and technikons, but the replacement of the previous technikon system with new 'universities of technology' it was inevitable that the 1st edition of '**Best practice for Faculty Administration**' needed to be revised and updated.

Therefore at the 2008 conference and annual general meeting of TIFAF in Tshwane, Gauteng, three important events took place.

- Firstly, in various breakaway groups, the initial 2003 publication was revised and reformulated to align it to the latest '**best practices**' for faculty administration for 2008/9.

- Secondly, at the AGM of TIFAF, it was decided to change the name of the forum to commonly used terminology, and therefore the name was changed to the 'Higher Education Faculty Administrators Forum', abbreviated as HEFAF.
- It was also decided to extend the forum to include as members of the HEFAF, both the colleges from a restructured Further Education and Training (FET) sector in South Africa and private higher education institutions.

A new focus area of **best practice** processes was identified and formulated, namely the administration of master's and doctor's degrees within faculties, as it was evident that Faculty Administrators are closely involved with these processes. Two previous focus areas were also combined into the comprehensive focus area of student administration that addresses the student life cycle at a higher education institution.

Important note: One point of extensive debate was the structure of faculty administration. In the majority of participating institutions, the faculty administration function is decentralized, where it forms an integral part of the faculty's structure. This structure was therefore formulated as the '**best practice**'. However, in some participating institutions, the structure of faculty administration is centralized under the academic / student administration function of the institution. There was consensus that this structure has some advantages to the Faculty Administrator in terms of career paths, application of central policies, uniformity of faculty administration throughout the institution, and other identified benefits. This implies that some of the functions that are described in this document as '**best practice**' in a decentralized structure do not apply in a centralized structure. However, the merging of many institutions in South Africa resulted in very large faculties at these institutions in terms of student numbers. There was consensus that in these cases a decentralized structure would be deemed '**best practice**'.

Contributions

The following institutions that were members of HEFAF in 2008 are recognised for their contribution to the compilation of the 2nd edition of this publication:

- Botswana College of Agriculture
- Botswana College of Open and Distance Learning
- Cape Peninsula University of Technology
- Central University of Technology, FS
- Durban University of Technology
- Mangosuthu University of Technology
- National University of Lesotho
- Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
- North-West University
- Polytechnic of Namibia (now the Namibia University for Science and Technology)
- Rhodes University
- Tshwane University of Technology
- UNISA
- University of Botswana
- University of Cape Town
- University of Fort Hare
- University of the Free State
- University of Johannesburg
- University of KwaZulu-Natal
- University of Limpopo
- University of Namibia
- University of Pretoria
- University of Stellenbosch
- University of Venda
- University of Western Cape
- University of Witwatersrand
- Vaal University of Technology
- Walter Sisulu University
- ITS Business Solutions (Pty) Ltd (now Adapt IT (Pty) Ltd), the administrator of HEFAF.

Revision of the Second Edition – May 2016

The Management Committee of HEFAF decided at a meeting held in November 2015, that it was time to update the second edition to the latest best practices for academic administration in faculties at Higher Education Institutions. It was further decided that instead of taking the entire document under revision at the 2016 HEFAF Conference, rather to invite a small workgroup (SWG) consisting of members of the currently elected Management Committee plus a limited number of invited HEFAF members who have extensive experience in faculty administration and who had made continued inputs to the Forum over a number of years, which would take the publication under review. The recommendations of the SWG will then be tabled at the 2016 HEFAF Conference for discussion and publication once approved.

The SWG held the review workshop on 25 February 2016 at The Birchwood Hotel, Boksburg, Gauteng.

Members of the HEFAF Management Committee:

- Chairperson: Mr George Mofokeng, VUT
- Deputy chair: Mr Paul Soato, UFS
- Additional member: Mr George Mahlangu, University of Mpumalanga
- TVET Colleges Representative: Ms Thilo Dookhi, Elangeni TVET College
- Administrator: Mr Peet du Plessis, Adapt IT Training & Development

Invited HEFAF Members:

- Ms Lizette Hollander Manager: Department Transport and Supply Chain Management, UJ
- Mr Pragasen Reddy Faculty Officer, DUT
- Ms Ranitha Ramdeyal Manager: College Academic Services, UKZN
- Ms Zelda Slabber Ex HEFAF Chair and Senior Manager: Faculty Admin, NMMU
- Ms Annelie Roets Senior Manager: Graduations and Inaugural Addresses, UP

The two important general recommendations that the SWG wants to make are as follows:

1. That the name of the publication should be changed from "*Best practice for Faculty Administration in Higher Education Institutions*" to "*Best practice for Academic Administration in Faculties at Higher Education Institutions*". The SWG recommended this change in order to align the title with the commonly used terminology of "academic administration". The function of academic administration is however inclusive of all administrative functions pertaining to the student academic life cycle, including inter alia, applications, registrations, timetabling, examinations and graduation. The title therefore, refers specifically to academic administration performed by faculty administrators within a faculty (or equivalent), school or academic department.
2. Since the Colleges for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET), previously known as Further Education and Training (FET), were incorporated in the Department for Higher Education and Training (DHET), they were invited to join HEFAF as institutional members. Mixed reaction was experienced; limited numbers of TVET Colleges joined the Forum with limited attendance at the annual conferences. The reasons for this are speculative and are therefore not discussed in this document.

It became evident during the review of the best practice publication, that to try to incorporate the academic practices at TVET Colleges with the Faculty administrative practices and procedures as was initially intended will not be viable. The TVET Colleges have neither the faculty structure, nor sufficient synergy in academic administration practices and procedures. The SWG therefore recommended that HEFAF should rather explore the possibility to organise a separate best practice workshop for academic administrators at TVET Colleges to define and then publish a further best practice document that is specifically for TVET Colleges.

Glossary of terms

The following glossary of terms is not presented as a comprehensive list of terminology used worldwide in institutions of higher learning, but rather an attempt to describe the general terms used in the compilation of this **best practice** document and as commonly used during the workshops that revised the first edition.

Academic structure: This is the structure of all academic qualifications / study programmes offered by a university which are linked to a faculty, then to an academic department, and then to all the subjects / courses / modules that form part of the curriculum for the qualification / programme. It includes all pre- and co-requisites and credits per subject / course / module, NQF level, formats of offering and all relevant information related to the completion of a particular qualification, i.e. degree, diploma, etc. This structure is maintained on the university's student information system.

Dean or Executive Dean: The person who has been appointed by the university as the academic head of a faculty and who has the executive responsibility for both the academic and administrative functions of the faculty.

Department: A sub-section of a faculty's organisational structure, based on an academic field and / or main subject. A department is responsible for the qualifications or study programmes linked to the field or main subject. An academic department is headed up by a Head of Department (HOD).

Examiner or Assessor: The person, usually from the full-time lecturing staff, who is appointed by the institution, to set an examination paper for a specific module, compile a marking memorandum for such a paper, and mark or assess the scripts of the candidates who sat the examination, to award a mark that indicates whether or not the student has obtained the required mark or the necessary competency level for the specified learning outcomes of the module.

- Faculty / School*:** A sub-section of a university's academic structure, based on a collective but related number of study fields or a discipline, e.g. Faculty of Medicine or School of Business. A faculty is headed up by a Dean or Executive Dean.
- *Note:** Where reference in this document is made to "faculty" it includes "school" and vice versa.
- Faculty Administrator:** The person who has been appointed to execute the administrative functions of a faculty that includes inter alia, student academic administration, financial administration and committee administration. For a comprehensive description of a Faculty Administrator's responsibilities, please refer to par. 1.4 and 1.5 of this document.
- Faculty Manager:** The person who has been appointed to manage the overall administrative functions of a faculty, and who is a member of the faculty's executive management team. For a comprehensive description of a Faculty Manager's responsibilities, please refer to par. 1.5.5 of this document.
- HOD:** The person who is appointed as the head of an academic department or school.
- Moderator:** The person who has been appointed to review an examination paper to ensure consistency and standards and who also moderates a sample of marked scripts to ensure consistency of the assessment by the examiner.
- Policy:** This is a document that defines how the university and its staff must conduct itself in the performing of a certain action to achieve institutional goals. Policies are by definition, a way of conduct for the entire institution and therefore are approved by the council of the institution.

- Process:** A process is a defined course of actions that leads to a specific objective or outcome, according to a defined policy. Process follows policy.
- Procedures:** The breaking-down of a process in a chronological sequence of step-by-step tasks, thus regulating in detail what, when and where tasks should be executed; by whom and what documentation or forms are to be used. Procedures follow policy and process.
- Regulations:** These are statutes passed by certain legislation which are enforceable in order to ensure the smooth running of operations of an institution.
- Rules:** One of a set of explicit or understood regulations or principles governing conduct or procedure within a particular area of activity.

1 Focus area 1: Organization and policies

1.1 Organizational structure

- 1.1.1 The policies and procedures that regulate and manage faculty administration need to be coordinated to ensure a uniform standard of the management, administration and application of these institutional policies, procedures and regulations throughout all faculties / schools*.

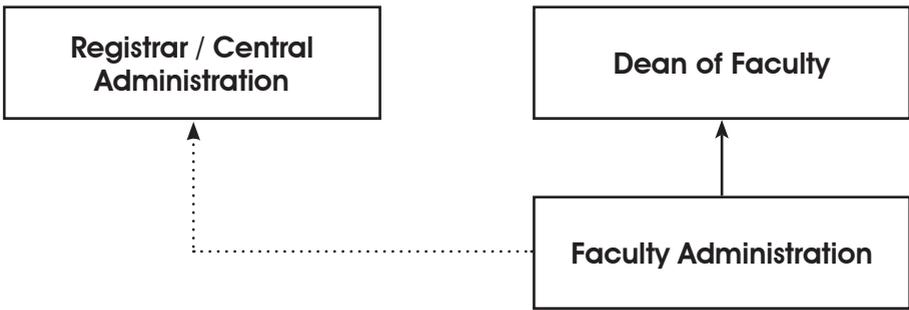
* Throughout this document the word 'faculty' will also mean 'school' as in the structure of some institutions a school denotes an equivalent to a faculty.

Best practice is therefore that policies and procedures are formulated at an institutional level for quality assurance and to ensure uniformity of execution thereof within the faculties.

- 1.1.2 Each individual faculty however, requires that certain policies, procedures and regulations that only apply to the specific faculty, are administered in accordance with the responsibilities assigned to the faculty's administrative management.

Best practice is that the responsibility for the administrative processes that only apply specifically to a particular faculty is therefore decentralised.

- 1.1.3 The size of an institution and its faculties determines the way in which the organizational structure should be designed and the extent to which institutional policies and procedures are centralized or decentralized. This structure in turn determines the lines of reporting of the faculty administration. In the majority of institutions that contributed to the compilation of this document, (and therefore deemed as **best practice**) the structure assigns the overall management responsibilities of a faculty to the Dean or Executive Dean, and the responsibility of the administration to the Faculty Administrator or a Faculty Manager. The Faculty Administrator / Manager reports directly to the Dean in a line function, and is linked by a dotted line to the central academic / student administration management in respect of institutional policies and procedures of this function.



This structure depicts a dotted line linking faculty administration in a staff function to the Registrar / Central Student Administration, which means that the faculty administration is responsible for the application of the institutional policies and procedures with respect to the broad functions as specified in par. 1.5.1.

The direct line to the Dean depicts a line of responsibility in so far as /inasmuch as the administration of a particular faculty is concerned, with respect to the functions specified in par. 1.5.

- 1.1.4 A clear distinction must be made between the responsibilities of the faculty administration personnel and the secretarial and / or front office services of the faculty.

Best practice is to ensure that the responsibilities of the faculty administration personnel are clearly separated from those of the faculty's secretarial / front office personnel and that these responsibilities are specified in the respective job descriptions which are clearly communicated to Deans and Heads of Departments.

1.2 Reporting line

- 1.2.1 In the majority of structures it is clear that the Faculty Administrators will have a dual reporting line. With regards to faculty policies and procedures, the reporting line is directly to the Dean. With regards to institutional policies and procedures, the reporting line is indirectly to the Registrar / Director: Academic Administration.
- 1.2.2 The Registrar / Director: Academic Administration is responsible for the integrated institutional planning of all student administration functions and the academic calendar.

1.3 Designations and Career paths

1.3.1 Designations for the various promotional post levels in the function of faculty administration vary from one institution to the next, with for example, 'administrative assistant' designated at the lowest level and 'faculty manager' at the highest.

It is **best practice** that a promotion from one post level to the next goes together with an enrichment of the post, increased responsibilities and a higher level of skills and experience.

1.3.2 It is **best practice** to provide for a career path in faculty administration through the designation of the post levels that will ensure that the faculty attracts and retains quality and skilled staff.

1.3.3 The number of posts and post levels must be in line with the size of the institution and its faculties, as well as the volume of work and the level of responsibility assigned to a specific post. It is deemed **best practice** for institutions to develop a formula for staffing requirements based on the previously mentioned variables and constraints e.g. funding.

1.4 Profile: Knowledge, Skills and Qualification

For each post level in faculty administration; knowledge, skills and qualification requirements will differ. The profile of the core post in faculty administration, i.e. the Faculty Administrator / Officer, is herewith defined in detail in accordance with **best practice**, and then that profile is expanded with the additional responsibilities assigned to the post of Faculty Manager.

1.4.1 The Faculty Administrator requires a good working knowledge of the following:

- The higher education environment
- Legislation that pertains to higher education
- Institutional policies, regulations and procedures
- Department of Higher Education and Training policies, regulations and requirements
- South African Qualifications Authority [SAQA], National Qualifications Framework [NQF], Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework [HEQSF], and in the case of other countries, their regulatory bodies
- Applicable professional bodies
- Quality assurance policies and controlling bodies

- Institutional governance
- Academic calendar and timetabling
- Academic structure, course regulations and academic processes
- Management information system

1.4.2 The following skills, inter alia, are required from the **Faculty Administrator**:

- Interpersonal skills
- Verbal and written communication skills, including compilation of minutes
- Organisational skills
- Computer literacy, with knowledge of relevant Student Information systems
- Supervisory skills
- Initiative and creative skills
- Ability to work independently and under pressure meeting deadlines
- Accuracy

1.4.3 In addition to 1.4.1 above, the **Faculty Manager** should have a good working knowledge of the following:

- Human Resources management and good labour practices
- Financial and budgetary techniques
- Student financial aid schemes
- Marketing and promotions

1.4.4 In addition to the above, the following skills are required from the **Faculty Manager**:

- Managerial skills and strategic thinking
- Leadership
- High level communication skills, both written and verbal

1.5 Accountability and Responsibilities: Faculty Administrator

In line with the profile defined in par. 1.4 above, here follows a list of responsibilities for which the Faculty Administrator should be accountable.

***Note:** This is not in any manner meant to be a 'job description', nor an exhaustive list of all responsibilities, but it can certainly serve as a generic guideline for institutions when the job description is formulated.*

- 1.5.1 Responsibility for and / or coordination of the effective and efficient academic administration processes within the faculty, which could include inter alia:
- i) Student enquiries
 - ii) Applications, selection and admissions
 - iii) Registration and student records
 - iv) Budget control
 - v) Examinations / assessments
 - vi) Graduation
- 1.5.2 Responsible for liaison between internal and external stakeholders
- 1.5.3 Responsible for the supervision, training and appraisal of subordinates
- 1.5.4 Responsible for **other faculty specific administrative matters**, which include inter alia:
- Application and administration of the regulations governing the qualifications / programmes that fall under the faculty
 - Financial administration and budget control within the Faculty Office
 - Quality of data on the student information system
 - Link between faculty and central administration
 - Reporting and management information
 - Health and safety
 - Timetable planning and coordination
 - Marketing information including faculty prospectus
 - Human resources / subordinates
 - Secretariat support to Faculty Committees
 - Maintenance of the academic structure
- 1.5.5 The **Faculty Manager's** responsibility is expanded to include the management of the faculty's administration and administrative personnel complement, financial matters, and importantly, to be a member of the strategic management team of the faculty.

1.6 Institutional policies and regulations

- 1.6.1 As the Faculty Administrator is responsible for the application of the institutional and faculty regulations, they are in the best position to represent the faculty at regulation meetings, to make recommendations to sub-committees of Senate

when dealing with the formulation of and amendments to regulations and other academic administrative matters.

Best practice is therefore that Faculty Administrators must be appointed on the applicable Senate sub-committees, or alternatively must be on the agenda distribution list in order to make inputs through senior administrative staff member/s who are members of these committees. Faculty Administrators must also be on the distribution list of the minutes of these sub-committee meetings and the Senate minutes.

- 1.6.2 The Faculty Administrator must be part to all meetings pertaining to the student life cycle, e.g. registration planning meeting, graduation planning meeting, as well as the review meetings after these events take place.

1.7 Management Information reporting

- 1.7.1 It is **best practice** that the Faculty Administrator should play a pivotal role in the management information reporting function of the faculty, through obtaining relevant information, interpreting it and then supplying it to Deans and HOD's.
- 1.7.2 The quality of academic administrative data on the system pertaining to the faculty, e.g. the academic structure, student records, faculty budget, etc. remains the responsibility of the Faculty Administrator.

1.8 Faculty Administrators forum

- 1.8.1 It is **best practice** that an internal Faculty Administrators forum or Committee be established which must meet at least once a month to discuss inter alia, standardisation between faculties. Feedback on such meetings must be provided to all levels of the faculty's administrative staff.

Focus area 2:

Planning process

2.1 Planning the academic year

The Faculty Administrator / Manager plays a crucial role in the planning of the faculty's academic year which must be in line with the academic calendar of the institution. It is therefore **best practice** that well before the start of each academic year, the Faculty Administrator arranges an annual planning meeting with all Deans and HODs. The aim of this meeting will be to agree on the processes, involving scheduling and cut-off dates. This action plan must be documented and should specify time frames and staff members' responsible.

2.2 Specification of qualification regulations

2.2.1 The Faculty Administrator is the conduit for any changes to regulations of qualifications that are offered by the particular faculty and must therefore ensure that such changes are done according to the approved policy of the institution. Policies and procedures should be documented and must specify the channels of approval for any changes to the academic regulations of qualifications.

2.2.2 The Faculty Administrator must have superior knowledge of all the elements and parameters within the qualification structure (academic structure) of the faculty. Some of the more important elements are:

- the subjects / courses / modules that may be linked to a qualification
- the institutional coding conventions for subjects / modules and qualifications
- pre- and co-requisites and combinations of subjects / modules
- credit values and weighting / core and elective modules
- qualification specific entrance requirements (national and international)
- details of how subjects / modules are examined
- weighting of assessment factors
- requirements for completion of the qualification

Note: *The above-mentioned list is not an exhaustive list of all the elements and parameters within the academic structure.*

- 2.2.3 It is **best practice** that the Faculty Administrator remains responsible for the quality of data of the particular faculty's academic structure, irrespective of whether the updates of the changes are done in the faculty or by central administration. In the latter case the Faculty Administrator must have select (view only) access to the data on the academic structure, to ensure that the changes are updated correctly and in time for the next academic year / cycle.
- 2.2.4 It is **best practice** that, where the changes to the academic structure are updated by central administration, there is a formal paper trail between faculties and central administration. The responsible person must also sign-off the approved changes by a pre-determined cut-off date.
- 2.2.5 It is **best practice** that the information system requires the user who captures a new programme / course / module on the academic structure, to submit changes to the course fee which will automatically update the fee structure and so electronically inform the student accounts department. A sign-off by the person responsible for changes to the fee structure must be in place.
- 2.2.6 It is **best practice** to obtain signed approval from the academic programme managers that any Senate-approved changes to a particular qualification have been updated. This will also ensure that HODs stick to the cut-off dates for approval by Senate and timely submission of changes to qualification structures. There must be a general policy approved by Senate that late changes to the academic structure, for example during registration, will not be allowed.
- 2.2.7 The Faculty Administrator must verify that the changes are updated in the faculty marketing material / publications.

2.3 Timetable

It is recognised as **best practice** that there must be a centralised institutional lecturing timetable and examination timetable. In order to plan and compile the central timetables, accurate information from faculties is required. The faculty's representative on the central Timetable Committee is responsible for coordinating the planning of the timetable for the faculty and acts as link between faculty staff and the central administration staff responsible for the compilation of the institutional timetable.

2.4 The faculty's marketing

- 2.4.1 In many institutions it is practice to publish faculty brochures and promotional material in addition to the institution's calendar or yearbook. It is **best practice** that the information published on the faculty, must be accurate, up-to-date and sufficiently comprehensive to enable students of the faculty to plan their studies and, if necessary, contact the correct staff member/s for advice. In essence this will be the responsibility of the Faculty Administrator / Manager.
- 2.4.2 The information published on the faculty in promotional material and the institution's website must be relevant and aimed at the students who are the primary users of the information.
- 2.4.3 The marketing activities of the faculty in which the Faculty Administrator should be closely involved are; faculty open days, telemarketing, website information and enquiries from prospective students.

3 Focus area 3: Academic Administration Processes

3.1 Applications and admissions

- 3.1.1 The processes of administration and coordination of applications are centralised in the majority of institutions. Where, in accordance with **best practice**, an on-line application system is deployed, the majority of admissions meeting the minimum system-set criteria, are processed through the system. This means that it is **best practice** to optimize the student information system to do the selection and admission of applicants.
- 3.1.2 It must, however, always be a consideration that some applicants may not have access to on-line submission of applications, and therefore there must be a hard copy application form easily available which can be submitted to the central applications office to be captured and included for selection and admission.
- 3.1.3 In the case where an application needs to be referred for further decision regarding admission, the Faculty Administrator must be authorised to review the referral or to take it up with the Dean, HOD or program leader, where necessary.
- 3.1.4 In the cases where there are specified selection tests to be performed by applicants, it is **best practice** that a faculty retains the responsibility for the selection and admission of applicants in accordance to faculty and qualification specific selection and admission policies.

3.2 Student registrations

- 3.2.1 It is **best practice** that the Faculty Administrator ensures that all applications for exemptions and / or credits for modules passed at another institution for transferring students are submitted to the applicable authority for approval and that such pre-approved exemptions are processed immediately after registration.

- 3.2.2 As the correct registration data is of the utmost importance for the effective academic administration processes of a student's record for the rest of the study period, it is **best practice** that the Faculty Administrator must ensure that the data structures for the self-help and on-line registration is updated and accurate. Where there is still a manual registration process in place, it is the responsibility of the Faculty Administrator to oversee that students' registration details are accurate and complete and then signed off on the registration form before capturing takes place.
- 3.2.3 It is **best practice** that cut-off dates for registrations and late registrations are widely published and these must be enforced.
- 3.2.4 It is **best practice** that changes to the registration data of a student can be done by the student on-line before the cut-off date. Such changes should be subject to approval by the faculty administration or HOD, and it is **best practice** that such approvals are done through an electronic workflow process. No changes should be allowed after the cut-off date.
- 3.2.5 It is **best practice** that a student must fill in a standard form for the cancellation of his/her studies at the institution. This form could be submitted to the faculty administrator, in hard copy, via e mail or by using the student information system which provides an on-line cancellation function, allowing the cancellation to be recorded immediately. The cancellation form should make provision for stating the reason/s for cancellation. A cancellation of registration should also have an electronic workflow to inform other relevant sections, such as student housing and the international office in the case of an international student.
- 3.2.6 It is **best practice** that the information system electronically updates the student's fee account whether faculty administration captures changes to his/her subjects / modules or a cancellation of registration or it is done on-line.
- 3.2.7 It is **best practice** that post-registration verification is done for all students through processing a verification letter that is sent to the students, which they need to verify and return to the administration before the cut-off date. This letter should also inform the student of outstanding documents, if any, to be submitted before a set deadline. Where the functionality exists in the student information system, such a letter must be generated from the system. The letter should also state that if the student does not respond before the set deadline date, the institution could assume that the registration data is correct. Students must be informed about the consequences of incorrect registration data. E.g. the student cannot obtain a semester or year mark and cannot gain access to the examination for subjects / modules for which, s/he is not registered.

- 3.2.8 It is **best practice** to conduct curriculum control after registration. This entails the checking of each student's curriculum record and the utilisation of the validations provided by the student information system to validate the curriculum after registration. For example, pre- and co-requisites are met and that clashes in timetables are avoided.
- 3.2.9 Class attendance is another method to ensure that students are registered correctly, however keeping an attendance register is impractical for large class groups and tedious for the academic staff to administer. For this reason some institutions have instituted electronic fingerprint identification or class access control systems. An effective method that is deployed at some institutions is to have census dates upon which a student must have a certain continuous assessment mark recorded on the student information system. If a student fails to obtain this mark, he/she is informed that registration for that subject / module will be made inactive.
- 3.2.10 The Faculty Administrator must provide inputs to the Faculty's orientation program for first year students in order to inform students about the administrative procedures they need to follow, e.g. the cut-off dates to change or cancel programmes.

3.3 Academic exclusions

The national throughput rate in higher education, i.e. the percentage of students that complete their first qualification, is a concern for government and in the higher education sector. Therefore institutions are compelled to institute measures to improve this throughput rate, and consequently academic administration provides a very important supporting role to achieve this.

- 3.3.1 It is **best practice** to have a clearly defined and Council approved *academic exclusion policy in place that is communicated to all students which must be applied diligently within academic administration.

***Note:** It is not within the scope of this document to stipulate what the content of an academic exclusion policy should be, but merely to emphasize the importance thereof and to point out a few principles that could apply.

- 3.3.2 It is important to identify students who are performing poorly early in their study period. This is best done through the student information system using pre-set parameters in the system to point this out. The Faculty Administrator plays an important role to generate this information by using the student information system

to communicate problems to the academic staff involved or the HOD, who in turn must refer such students for counselling.

- 3.3.3 It is **best practice** that the academic exclusion policy must provide for an appeals process that students need to follow if they want to appeal their exclusion. Such an appeal should be submitted to the Faculty Administrator to verify that the student has followed due process as stipulated in the policy and to determine if the student has indeed grounds for appeal according to the policy. If the Faculty Administrator agrees there is a case, then he/she should refer the appeal to the appropriate decision making body for a ruling.
- 3.3.4 It is **best practice** that the academic exclusion policy makes provision for the process of re-admission of a student that successfully appealed an academic exclusion.

3.4 Examinations / Assessments

In the majority of institutions the examination administration is centrally administered by an Examination Department. However, in the large institutions the administration of examinations has largely been decentralized to faculties and so the Faculty Administrator / Manager takes the responsibility for most of the examination processes. In the latter cases certain processes such as an institutional examination timetable, printing of examination scripts and providing examination materials, etc. are the responsibility of a central department.

It is not the objective of this document to define **best practice** for examination administration. A separate forum for examination administrators handled this matter in 2008. However, due to the close liaison between the Faculty Administrator and the examination function, and in the cases where examination administration is decentralised, **best practice** processes are just briefly defined herewith focusing on the liaison and those processes that are entirely the responsibility of the Faculty Administrator / Manager.

- 3.4.1 It is **best practice** that there must be a regular and formal communication channel, e.g. a quality forum, whereby the central examination department (where applicable) and any other personnel involved with academic administration meet with Faculty Administrators to discuss action plans, cooperation and processes with respect to examinations and the timetable. At this forum faculties should also standardise cut-off dates for submissions across faculties.

- 3.4.2 The planning of the assessment processes within the faculty must involve the Faculty Administrator and in terms of **best practice**, the planning must take place before the commencement of a new academic year or semester. It is **best practice** that the Faculty Administrator coordinates the operational planning that should be done in academic departments, which must include the following:
- Criteria for calculation and weighting of assessment elements in order to update the academic structure
 - Faculty information inputs required for the planning of the examination timetable
 - Examination groups
 - Action plans for processes related to the submission of test / assignment marks, calculation of year or module marks and examination admission status
 - Planning of validation runs to ensure that each student has a class mark by the deadline which has to occur prior to the calculation of examination admission
- 3.4.3 Institutional rules and regulations that govern the assessment / examination processes are approved at Senate level, but due to the linking role that Faculty Administrators have between lecturing staff (examiners), central administration and students, it is **best practice** to request their inputs on the rules and regulations.
- 3.4.4 The policies and procedures must include control measures that are in place to ensure that all faculty administration personnel, lecturers and students, follow the processes closely. It must also specify the validation reports that Faculty Administrators must generate to ensure the validity of data on the student information system.
- 3.4.5 It is **best practice** that the responsibility of the correctness and accuracy of all marks captured on the information system is not that of the Faculty Administrator, but essentially it must remain the responsibility of the academic staff who should sign off the marks before publication.
- 3.4.6 The Faculty Administrator / management ensures that the institutional regulations and cut-off dates are adhered to.

3.5 Graduation

- 3.5.1 The Faculty Administrator must ensure that the processes followed to identify successful graduates are flawless. This must be done continuously throughout the year through proper controls and validations in the student information system, before a graduate candidate is finalised. The earlier a possible graduate can be

identified the sooner there can be an intervention to address problems that may prevent a student from completing his/her qualification. The study record data must be subject to a final audit by the Faculty Administrator and sign-off of the final list by the relevant authority.

- 3.5.2 Faculty Administrators are responsible to finalise the faculty's graduate list and to identify graduates that will receive awards, e.g. faculty awards, subject awards, and these details must be provided to the department that is responsible for the organisation of graduation ceremonies overall. The Faculty Administrators should also attend the graduation ceremony of their faculty to assist the graduation organisers with the sequence of students to be capped.
- 3.5.3 It is **best practice** that there is a graduation protocol document that directs graduation ceremonies and Faculty Administrators must be familiar with this protocol.

3.6 Communication with students

The faculty administration personnel need to ensure that the most effective means of communicating with students of the faculty are utilised. Many academic administrative issues need to be communicated to registered students during the course of the semester and / or academic year. The following methods of communication are identified to ensure effective communication:

- 3.6.1 Announcements during the faculty's first year welcome or orientation.
- 3.6.2 Booklet or orientation guide to be issued at orientation with specific information and dates.
- 3.6.3 Communicating by e-mail is cost-effective and easy to do.
- 3.6.4 Communication by SMS is cost-effective and most cell phone operators now have the facility available for bulk SMSing. Bulk SMS's should however be coordinated to prevent duplication between faculties.
- 3.6.5 Campus radio where applicable, but this method only provides one-way communication.
- 3.6.6 The institution's web site must have a portal where communications can be posted for students to read.

Best practice

for the Administration of Master's and Doctor's Degrees for Faculties in Higher Education Institutions

A supplement to the publication of the Higher Education Faculty Administrators Forum, (HEFAF) *"Best practice for Faculty Administration in Higher and Further Education Institutions"*, 2nd Edition, May 2009.

Acknowledgements

The following members of HEFAF are acknowledged for their contributions to this formulation of **best practice** for the administration of higher degrees:

- Ms Hettie Kirstein – University of Pretoria
- Ms Willemien Mitchell – University of Johannesburg
- Ms Reinette Strydom – Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
- Ms Rene Vosloo - Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University
- Mr Peet du Plessis of Adapt IT (Pty) Ltd, the Administrator of HEFAF, who consolidated the contributions received from the members mentioned.

This supplement was revised by the Small Work Group (SWG) that revised the 2nd Edition in May 2016 that is referred to in the preface to this document (pg. 5). The SWG recommended a substantial reduction to the original addendum, as they agreed that many of those points were standard practices and merely procedural which is not necessarily **best practice** by definition.

Introduction

It is important to note that this definition of **best practice** refers to the **administration of higher degrees** in a faculty that involves the Faculty Administrator, and that it by no means refers to the credibility of academic processes and research processes, which in essence remain the domain of academic staff of a faculty.

The 2016 SWG agreed that this addendum remains separate from the main body of this document due the unique nature of master's and doctorate's (hereafter referred to collectively as "higher degrees") students who require substantially more personal attention from both Faculty Administration and academic staff than under-graduate students.

It was also acknowledged that lectured master's degrees, e.g. an MBA offered by a business school, could require slightly different procedures and processes than what is defined in this addendum.

Glossary

Dissertation

The research work submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining a master's degree. A master's dissertation is an advanced research project of defined scope and limited length. A dissertation is not required to be an original contribution to a particular field of knowledge, though it may be. A dissertation is awarded a mark and the degree may be awarded with distinction.

External examiner

A person, apart from the internal examiner(s), who is appointed by the institution to be responsible for ensuring the standard of a dissertation, thesis or any other research work that is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for a master's or doctor's degree. An external examiner is a recognised expert in the field who is not attached to the institution by means of a formal contract of appointment, or a consultancy contract.

Postgraduate supervision

Postgraduate supervision refers to the supervision or promotion of students' research activities; typically leading in whole, or in part, to the awarding of a master's or doctoral degree.

Thesis

The research work submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for obtaining a doctoral degree. A doctoral thesis is a high-level research project, which must constitute an original contribution to knowledge. The extent to which candidates reveal an extensive as well as intensive knowledge of their subject, and an advanced level of competence in addressing problems that are directly or indirectly relevant to the particular topic, are important considerations in judging the quality of doctoral theses. Marks are not awarded for doctorates.

Treatise

The written work that is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements set for a higher degree qualification (e.g. course work towards master's) and is often referred to at institutions as a "mini-dissertation".

1 Organisational structure for administration of higher degrees

The size of an institution will be the deciding factor determining the extent to which the administration of postgraduate studies is performed from a centralised post-graduate office or decentralised to faculties, the latter being the norm for larger institutions.

- 1.1 It is **best practice** that in a decentralised structure there is a dedicated Faculty Administrator who is responsible for the academic administration of master's and doctor's degrees for that particular faculty.
- 1.2 It is furthermore **best practice** that, irrespective of the organisational structure, there is a documented *Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) for the institutional academic administration of master's and doctor's degrees, whereas this SOP is fully aligned to the *institution's policy that governs master's and doctor's degrees.

***Note:** It is not within the scope of this document to provide prescriptions on the detail that should be contained in the institutional policy and the resultant SOP.

2 Enquiries

- 2.1 In the majority of cases, a prospective post-graduate student will enquire from the faculty on the detailed information pertaining to a master's or doctor's degree and it is **best practice** that the responsible Faculty Administrator provides this as soon as possible in accordance with the SOP.
- 2.2 It is **best practice** that all information on higher degree qualifications published in the faculty brochure and other institutional publications, including the institution's website must be accurate, up-to-date and sufficiently comprehensive to enable the prospective student to make the right choices.
- 2.3 **Informal pre-application discussion.**
Although not a prerequisite for the formal application, it is deemed **best practice**

that a prospective applicant for a research master's or a doctorate (local as well as foreign students) approaches an academic department, with an idea or an area within which they wish to undertake research. The purpose of this is to streamline the formal application process. This academic conversation, that is to be arranged by the Faculty Administrator, is either with the HOD or directly with the academic member of staff whose areas of expertise are known to the applicant.

Furthermore, this discussion enables the relevant academic member of staff, who is most competent in the proposed field of study, to evaluate both the applicant and the proposed area of study. The outcomes of this discussion must then be considered on receipt of the prospective post-graduate student's application.

3. Applications for Master's and Doctoral degree studies

- 3.1 It is **best practice** that the Faculty Administrator (Post-graduate), upon receipt of a new application, does a preliminary verification to determine whether or not the applicant complies with the entrance requirements of the programme. In a case where the university has a central postgraduate office, applications are submitted to this office where it is verified that the applicant complies with the entrance requirements and all the required documentation is attached before it is submitted to the relevant academic department or authority for formal acceptance of the application.
- 3.2 Where a prospective higher degree student is an international student, it is **best practice** that the Faculty Administrator liaises with the institutional international office to establish if all requirements are met by the applicant for higher degree studies, and to ensure that the applicant has a valid study permit, visa, etc. required for a non-resident student to study and enrol at a South African institution.
- 3.3 It is prudent for the international office to make use of a recognised international agency for the recognition and comparison of international qualifications, e.g. NARIC-UK, and that this report then accompanies the application.

4 Registration

The registration procedures for higher degree students must be contained in the Standard Operating Procedure (SOP – Ref. 1.2 above), but the following procedures need mention to ensure that the SOP indeed includes these.

- 4.1 An important responsibility of the Faculty Administrator in respect of registration is to ensure that the academic structure is correct and updated on the student information system prior to registration.
- 4.2 It is **best practice** that the Faculty Administrator ensures that all relevant information regarding registration as a higher degree student, as well as requirements for the registration of the research project and the title thereof, is communicated to the student prior to registration and in accordance with the SOP.
- 4.3 It is **best practice** that suitable supervisors / promoters are identified prior to the registration of the student to prevent a situation where a student is registered for a master's or doctorate and then a suitable supervisor / promoter is not available at the institution for the particular area of research.
- 4.4 It is **best practice** that a formal agreement is signed between the candidate and the institution as postgraduate research implies a partnership and agreement between the candidate and the supervisor / promoter from the department, each having their own respective responsibilities.
- 4.5 The Faculty Administrator should ensure that the supervisor for each higher degree student is provided with a progress report template per student (or system access) to enable the supervisor to track the progress of each student under his/her supervision. It is **best practice** that the student information system makes provision for the supervisor to record all types of progress events on the student's record and that a system-generated progress report is submitted to the applicable Committee responsible for higher degrees.
- 4.6 It is **best practice** that the Faculty Administrator keeps a record of the number of masters' students assigned to any one particular supervisor / promoter to ensure

that the Postgraduate Committee does not overload certain of the academic staff in the faculty by assigning too many students to one individual.

4.7 **Renewal of registration**

Subject to the Institution's / Faculty's regulations, a student for a master's / doctoral degree must complete his/her studies within a prescribed number of years from date of first registering for the degree. Under special circumstances, the Dean, on the recommendation of the HOD, may give approval for a limited fixed extension of the period.

5 **Examination and assessment**

- 5.1 It is **best practice** that the institution has a comprehensive guideline for the examination of research dissertations and theses and that the Faculty Administrator ensures that this guideline document is supplied to all examiners on appointment.
- 5.2 It is **best practice** that a code of conduct applicable to promoters/supervisors, examiners/assessors and research candidates is compiled and provided to these role players to ensure that they are aware of their duties, roles and responsibilities.
- 5.3 It is **best practice** that every Institution / Faculty has a published comprehensive process and regulations on how master's dissertations must be prepared and examined.
- 5.4 Candidates must inform their supervisor in writing of their intention to submit their dissertation or thesis for assessment. Such notice must be given at least two months before the prospective date of submission in order to allow sufficient time for the Faculty Administrator to appoint examiners/assessors.
- 5.5 The Faculty Manager should be designated with the comprehensive responsibility to organise and administer the assessment processes for postgraduate degrees in accordance with SOP.

The logo for HEFAF (Higher Education Faculty Administrators Forum) features the acronym 'HEFAF' in a bold, sans-serif font. The letters are white with a blue outline. A thick blue horizontal bar is positioned below the text, extending from the left edge of the 'H' to the right edge of the 'F'. The background of the entire page is a dark blue gradient with several large, overlapping circles in various shades of blue.

Higher Education
Faculty Administrators
Forum

A decorative horizontal bar with a blue-to-white gradient, located on the left side of the page.

Administered by **Adapt IT Training and Development**
50 Bushbuck Lane, Monument Park, 0181, Pretoria
Tel: +27 12 425 5600 | Fax: +27 12 460 5337
training@adaptit.co.za

The logo for Adapt IT Training & Development. It features a stylized blue 'U' shape above the text 'adapt IT' in a bold, sans-serif font. To the right of 'adapt IT' is a vertical line, followed by the text 'Training & Development' in a smaller, sans-serif font.

adapt IT | Training & Development
www.adaptit.co.za/training