

Institutional Audits and Compliance

Alignment with the Manual for Institutional Audits 2021

CHE Manual for Institutional Audits (2021), pages 5–6 – Introduction to Institutional Audits and pages 22–23 – Standard 7: Continuous Improvement

Introduction:

Institutional audits and compliance are essential mechanisms for maintaining the credibility, legitimacy, and public accountability of higher education institutions. These audits assess whether institutions meet national and international quality standards and regulatory requirements. Compliance is not a one-time exercise but a continuous commitment to ethical governance, academic integrity, and student protection.

Key Definitions:

Institutional Audit – A formal, external evaluation of an institution’s quality assurance systems, governance structures, and academic practices to determine alignment with national standards.

Compliance – Adherence to legal, regulatory, and quality assurance requirements established by bodies such as the Council on Higher Education (CHE).

Audit Panel – An external group of trained professionals who conduct the institutional audit, evaluate documentation, and report on institutional performance.

Key Concepts Explained:

Compliance in higher education spans across legal frameworks (e.g., Higher Education Act, NQF Act), accreditation standards, data protection laws (like POPIA), and institutional policies. Institutional audits typically require submission of a Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and a Portfolio of Evidence (PoE), followed by a site visit by an audit panel. Audit readiness is demonstrated through strategic alignment, quality documentation, stakeholder participation, and updated internal quality management systems. Best practices include ongoing internal reviews, audit simulations, transparent governance, and continuous policy updates. Institutions that do not maintain compliance risk accreditation loss, funding cuts, and reputational harm.

Career Benefits:

Professionals with knowledge of institutional audits and compliance are well-suited for leadership and advisory roles in quality assurance, academic governance, policy development, and accreditation management. These skills are in high demand for ensuring institutional sustainability and credibility.

Conclusion:

Institutional audits and compliance practices are the backbone of quality assurance in higher education. By embedding compliance into daily operations and maintaining audit readiness, institutions can safeguard their accreditation status and demonstrate a firm commitment to academic excellence and accountability.