



7th SOUTHERN AFRICAN QUALITY ASSURANCE NETWORK (SAQAN) CONFERENCE

Hosted by:

<p><i>The Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE)</i></p>	<p><i>Rainbow Towers Hotel & Conference Centre, Harare Zimbabwe 23 - 25 September 2026</i></p>
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CONFERENCE THEME

FOSTERING EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH EFFECTIVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS: BEST PRACTICES, CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SADC REGION

1. Main Objectives of the Conference

- i. Promote best practices and innovation in internal and external quality assurance systems across the SADC region.
- ii. Identify and analyze critical success factors, enablers, and challenges in implementing sustainable QA frameworks in higher education.
- iii. Explore the role of digital transformation, emerging technologies, and data-driven approaches in enhancing QA effectiveness.
- iv. Strengthen stakeholder engagement, regional collaboration, and policy alignment to foster inclusive and harmonized QA systems.

2. Theme of the 7th SAQAN Conference

FOSTERING EXCELLENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH EFFECTIVE INTERNAL AND EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS: BEST PRACTICES, CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS, CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE SADC REGION

In today's rapidly evolving global landscape, the quality of higher education is crucial for national development, economic competitiveness, and social justice within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. As higher education institutions (HEIs) grapple with increasing pressures to meet diverse stakeholder expectations, adapt to technological advancements, and address shifting labour market demands, effective quality assurance (QA) systems have become essential. This concept note outlines the need for a regional conference focused on strengthening these systems, highlighting best practices, critical success factors, enablers, challenges, and opportunities specific to the SADC region. The conference aims to foster collaboration and promote excellence in higher education across the region.

3. Rationale

A regional conference on fostering excellence in higher education through effective internal and external quality assurance systems is essential for several reasons:

- **Addressing common challenges:** HEIs in the SADC region often face similar challenges related to QA, such as limited resources, staff resistance, data quality issues, bureaucratic processes, a lack of expertise, and the need to align with international standards. A regional conference provides a platform to share

experiences, discuss common problems, and develop collective, context-specific solutions.

- **Sharing best practices:** The conference will facilitate the exchange of best practices in internal and external QA, enabling institutions to learn from successful models and adapt them to their specific contexts. This includes sharing effective strategies for institutional self-assessment, program review, student feedback mechanisms, faculty development, curriculum development, accreditation, and external evaluation.
- **Promoting harmonization and standardization:** A regional conference can contribute to the harmonization of QA standards and practices across the SADC region, promoting greater comparability and recognition of qualifications. This is particularly important for facilitating student and staff mobility, cross-border education, and regional integration within SADC.
- **Building capacity:** The conference will provide opportunities for capacity building and professional development for QA professionals, institutional leaders, faculty members, and other stakeholders. Workshops, seminars, and training sessions can enhance participants' knowledge and skills in designing, implementing, and evaluating QA systems.
- **Fostering collaboration and networking:** The conference will bring together key stakeholders from across the SADC region, including policymakers, QA agencies, HEI leaders, faculty, students, and industry representatives. This will foster collaboration, networking, and the development of partnerships to support QA initiatives.
- **Raising awareness and advocacy:** The conference will raise awareness of the importance of QA in higher education and advocate for policies and resources that support its effective implementation. This includes promoting a culture of quality, continuous improvement, and stakeholder engagement.
- **Responding to global trends:** The conference will address emerging trends and challenges in higher education, such as the increasing use of technology, the rise of online learning, the need for competency-based education, and the importance of internationalization. It will explore how QA systems can adapt to these trends and ensure the quality and relevance of higher education in the 21st century.
- **Alignment with regional priorities:** Improving the quality of higher education is a key priority for the SADC region. A conference on this topic will contribute to the broader regional agenda of enhancing the competitiveness and relevance of higher education, aligning with regional priorities for socio-economic development.

Join us in shaping the future of higher education in the SADC region as this conference offers a unique opportunity to engage with thought leaders, share transformative ideas, and co-create actionable solutions that will elevate quality assurance practices and foster excellence across institutions. Be part of the movement driving sustainable, inclusive, and globally competitive higher education.

4. Sub-themes and their focus areas

1. Strengthening internal quality assurance mechanisms for continuous institutional improvement

- Developing and implementing effective internal QA policies and practices
- Institutional self-assessment, program reviews, and faculty development
- Cultivating a culture of quality and continuous improvement within HEIs
- Role of leadership and institutional commitment in sustaining IQA

2. Enhancing external quality assurance: accreditation, audits, and regional harmonization

- Best practices in external QA processes: accreditation, audits, and evaluations
- Aligning QA frameworks and standards across SADC for mutual recognition
- Promoting quality assurance interoperability to facilitate student and staff mobility
- Addressing challenges in external QA implementation and compliance

3. Innovation and technology in quality assurance: Digital transformation and data-driven approaches

- Leveraging technology and data analytics to streamline QA processes
- Quality assurance in online and blended learning environments
- Using digital tools for real-time monitoring, reporting, and feedback
- Challenges and opportunities of AI and emerging technologies in QA

4. Stakeholder engagement and collaboration for inclusive quality assurance

- Engaging students, faculty, employers, and communities in QA processes
- Building effective partnerships between HEIs, QA agencies, and industry

- Advocacy and raising awareness on the importance of QA in higher education
- Strategies for fostering collaboration and networking across the SADC region

5. Critical success factors and enablers for effective QA implementation

- Strengthening leadership, stakeholder engagement, and policy alignment for successful QA implementation.
- Addressing resource limitations, change resistance, and equity gaps in QA systems.
- Leveraging innovation, digital tools, and collaboration to enhance QA effectiveness.
- Adapting QA models to suit varied disciplines, learning modes, and pedagogical approaches.

5. 2026 Conference Paper Options

1. Long Papers		
Word Count: Abstract: 100-150 words Full Long Paper: up to 6000 words, excluding abstract but including references	Submission deadline by: 27 March 2026 Email to: saqan.conference@zimche.ac.zw	Final Submission date for re-worked papers: 08 May 2026. Email to saqan.conference@zimche.ac.zw
Format: Similar to articles/papers required by journals, i.e., abstract, introduction, literature review/conceptual framework, theoretical framework, methodology, findings, discussion and conclusion. Please indicate the corresponding author if there is more than one author.		
Reviewing Process: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Long papers are reviewed by at least two qualified peer reviewers. On completion the corresponding author is advised of the outcome. 2. If the paper is accepted with modifications, the re-worked paper(s) must be submitted as noted above to saqan.conference@zimche.ac.zw by 8 May 2026. 		

3. The Review Panel presumes that: the paper is original; permission has been granted by all authors to have the paper presented at the 7th SAQAN conference.
4. At least one of the authors is registered and attends the conference to present the accepted paper.
5. The author's details shall be removed before submission to reviewers by the Organising Committee.
6. Long papers presented at the conference will be considered for publication in the first edition of the *SAQAN Journal for Quality Assurance in Higher Education*, which will be launched at the conference.

Presentation of Accepted paper, Programme Requirements

1. **By 26 June 2026**, author(s) with accepted long papers are required to prepare and submit:
 - 1.1 Paper PowerPoint presentation slides
 - 1.2 Present the paper during the thematic programme sessions. Authors are expected to briefly introduce themselves to the delegates and present their paper and respond to questions from the floor during the Q and A session.

2. Short Papers

Word Count: Abstract: 100-150 words Full Short Paper: 1700 words (excluding Abstract but including Reference list)	Submission deadline by: 27 March 2026 Email to: saqan.conference@zimche.ac.zw	Final Submission date for re-worked papers: 08 May 2026.. Email to saqan.conference@zimche.ac.zw
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Format: Similar to short papers required by journals, i.e., abstract, introduction, literature review/conceptual framework, theoretical framework, methodology, findings,

discussion and conclusion. Short papers should highlight the preliminary findings and the significance of the research. Please indicate the corresponding author if there is more than one author.

Reviewing Process:

1. Short papers are reviewed by at least two qualified peer reviewers. On completion the corresponding author is advised of the outcome.
2. If the short paper is accepted with modifications, the re-worked paper(s) must be submitted as noted above to saqan.conference@zimche.ac.zw by 08 May 2026.
3. The Review Panel presumes that: the paper is original; permission has been granted by all authors to have the paper presented at the 7th SAQAN conference.
4. At least one of the authors is registered and attends the conference to present the accepted short paper.
5. The author’s details shall be removed before submission to reviewers by the Organising Committee.

Presentation of Accepted short paper, Programme Requirements

1. By **26 June 2026** author(s) with accepted short papers are required to prepare and submit:
 - 1.1 Paper PowerPoint presentation slides
 - 1.2 Present the short paper during the thematic programme sessions. Authors are expected to briefly introduce themselves to the delegates and present their paper and respond to questions from the floor during the Q and A session.

3. Poster Papers

<p>Word Count: Abstract: 100-150 words Full Poster: 1 500 words</p>	<p>Submission deadline by: 27 March 2026 Email to: saqan.conference@zimche.ac.zw</p>	<p>Final Submission date for re-worked papers: 08 May 2026. Email to: saqan.conference@zimche.ac.zw</p>
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Poster Paper Content:

A word document providing an outline of the content of the poster. Corresponding author details must be indicated if there is more than one author.

1. Reviewing Process: Reviewers look for interesting topics for further research with content that illustrates the main features of the research.
2. The author's details shall be removed before submission to reviewers by the Organising Committee.

Presentation Requirements:

1. Presenters are required to bring a standard poster to the conference.
2. A session for poster presentation shall be allocated during the Conference programme.
3. Presenters are required to be present to present their posters and interact with delegates.

REGISTRATION FEES

SADC and International Participants	USD300-00
Participants whose institutions are members or associated members of SAQAN	USD275-00
Local Participants	USD275-00

Banking Details:

Account name: Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education
<p style="text-align: center;">Stanbic Bank Zimbabwe Samora Machel Avenue Harare Zimbabwe Account number: 914 000 6070 166 Swift Code: SBICZWHX</p>

Or

Request for an invoice from: finance@zimche.ac.zw

6. Accommodation information

Accommodation information will be available on the ZIMCHE website (www.zimche.ac.zw) under the SAQAN Conference section starting 1 March 2026. Alternatively, you may contact us via email addresses provided below.

7. More information

For further information call or email:

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