



**COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION**  
**Higher Education Quality Committee**

**COMMUNIQUÉ ON PLANS AND ACTIVITIES FOR 2004**

March 2004

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# HEQC COMMUNIQUÉ<sup>1</sup>

The year 2004 presents a number of challenges for the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) and for higher education institutions as far as quality issues are concerned. One major challenge is the implementation of the HEQC's new audit and accreditation systems in the latter part of 2004, which will place considerable demands on the HEQC and higher education institutions alike as far as human capacity, financial resources and time are concerned. Implementation will take place against the background of a number of unresolved systemic issues, including proposals under consideration for a new Academic Policy, a revised National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and a sustainable formula for HEQC funding. The HEQC is confident, however, that its planning and systems development as well as the knowledge and practical experience gained during the pilot audits and processes of programme accreditation and re-accreditation, provide a good foundation for discharging its quality assurance mandate.

This Communiqué is intended to inform higher education institutions and other stakeholders of recent developments in the HEQC's work, as well as its envisaged plans and activities for 2004.

## 1. Institutional Audits

### (i) Pilot audits

In 2003 the HEQC conducted pilot audits at the University of Pretoria, Vaal Triangle Technikon and Midrand Graduate Institute. This was followed by structured evaluation sessions with the 3 institutions and audit panel members. All 3 institutions have commented on their draft pilot audit reports and these will be finalised by the HEQC at its Board meeting of 4th May 2004. A number of research projects were also initiated by the HEQC to obtain an independent assessment of the audit process and the adequacy of the HEQC's audit criteria and other documentation. This has made possible the adaptation and refinement of audit processes and documentation, including streamlining of the criteria and a reduction in their number.

### (ii) Audit documentation and regulations

The following HEQC audit documentation will be released in the course of 2004:

- Institutional Audit Framework.
- Audit Criteria.
- Institutional Audit Manual.
- Auditors' Manual.

Regulations are being developed for the HEQC's audit process and will be gazetted for comment by the Department of Education (DoE) before finalisation.

### (iii) Regional workshops on Audit Requirements

In May 2004, the HEQC will conduct five regional workshops in order to brief higher education institutions on the finalised policy framework and criteria for its audit system, and

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<sup>1</sup> The Communiqué can also be accessed on the CHE/HEQC website.<http://www.che.ac.za>

assist institutions with queries and concerns about operational issues involved in the audit process. It is hoped that the workshops will be attended by relevant institutional representatives.

#### **(iv) Auditor preparation and training**

The HEQC had earlier requested all higher education institutions and other stakeholders to nominate senior experienced people for inclusion in the database from which participants are chosen for auditor preparation and training workshops. Criteria such as institutional sectors, race, gender, expertise, seniority and experience have been taken into account in the selection of workshop participants. An orientation and preparation workshop for auditors will be held in May 2004. Auditors for 2004 audits will be selected from members who were part of pilot audit panels in 2003, and persons who have attended HEQC's auditor preparation workshops. An auditor register will be maintained by the HEQC. A second auditor preparation workshop will be held later in the year.

#### **(v) Audits in 2004**

The HEQC will conduct six audits in the latter half of 2004, which will include one public higher education institution (Central University of Technology, Free State) and five private institutions. These include City Varsity, Management College of Southern Africa (MANCOSA), Oval International Computer Education and Bond South Africa (the last will be audited in collaboration with the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA)). HEQC staff are in frequent contact with colleagues from these institutions. The HEQC also intends conducting preparatory workshops for these institutions.

Institutions which were provisionally identified for audit in 2005 are being contacted by the HEQC at the moment in order to finalise the dates for the audits.

#### **(vi) Merging institutions**

The HEQC intends supporting merging institutions in 2004 with a range of initiatives. The HEQC will use donor funding to support merging institutions in developing new quality assurance systems and preparing to meet the HEQC's audit and programme accreditation requirements. The Executive Director of the HEQC and the chairperson of the HEQC Board are in the process of visiting all institutions that were merged in January 2004 to brief Vice-Chancellors and senior academic colleagues about HEQC planning and development projects for merging institutions.

#### **(vii) Quality Assurance and Universities of Technology<sup>2</sup>**

A paper has been commissioned on the implications for quality assurance and the work of the HEQC of the transformation of technikons into Universities of Technology. A small expert group will be established to assist with planning for a national seminar, following the publication of the commissioned paper. Colleagues from the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP) will be involved in this project.

#### **(viii) Other projects**

The HEQC has commissioned the production of two research documents for internal use, as well as for the use of institutional auditors and higher education institutions. The first is a

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<sup>2</sup> Following an announcement by the Minister of Education in 2003, technikons will in future be known as Universities of Technology.

guide to understanding institutional quantitative information in the area of the HEQC's Audit Criteria. The second document is a case study that analyses the enrolment and throughput rates by race and gender in a faculty, the strategies used to deal with redress and equity in relation to access and success, and faculty curriculum reform initiatives for improvement in these areas. These documents will be made available in May 2004.

## **2. Programme Accreditation and Co-ordination**

### **(i) Public higher education**

#### **(a) Routine accreditation of public higher education programmes**

- Number of programmes evaluated: In 2003, the HEQC processed 285 applications to offer new programmes submitted by public higher education institutions. Of the 158 programmes submitted by universities, 70 were accredited, 56 received conditional accreditation and 32 were not accredited. Of the 107 programmes submitted by technikons, 82 were accredited and 18 were not accredited. Seven programmes were submitted late and were not tabled at accreditation meetings.

Ten agricultural colleges (as well as the Polytechnic of Namibia) had follow-up visits, as a result of which 20 programmes received conditional accreditation.

- Conditional accreditation: The HEQC will follow up on the conditions of all programmes offered by public higher education institutions which were granted conditional accreditation in the period 2001-3. Requirements for this exercise will be communicated to the relevant institutions in late May 2004. The format used will be that of written submissions, supplemented by a site visit, where necessary.
- Current and new accreditation system: The HEQC's Interim Joint Committee (IJC) will meet on 31 May 2004 (deadline for submissions: 30 April 2004) and 4 October 2004 (deadline for submissions: 1 September 2004) to consider applications for new programmes from public higher education institutions. The meeting of 4 October 2004 will be the last where separate accreditation systems will be used for universities, technikons and private higher education. The HEQC will hold five regional workshops on its new programme accreditation framework and criteria before introducing the new accreditation system in October 2004.

#### **(b) External Quality Assurance at Agricultural Colleges in 2004**

The HEQC requested the CTP to manage evaluation visits to agricultural colleges in 2003. The HEQC has taken over this responsibility for 2004. The Association of Principals of Agricultural Colleges (APAC) has been requested to ensure that all applications from agricultural colleges to offer new higher education programmes are submitted to the HEQC's IJC. Nine agricultural colleges offering higher education programmes are involved. A schedule for site visits has been developed and communicated to institutions. Most visits are scheduled for the first half of 2004.

## **(ii) Private higher education**

### **(a) Routine accreditation of private higher education programmes**

In 2003, the HEQC processed 218 applications to offer new programmes from 61 private higher education institutions. Of these programmes, 46 percent were accredited. The HEQC intends evaluating about 95 branches of registered private higher education institutions under the current accreditation system, the aim of the project being to determine the level of consistency in quality between the main site of delivery and branch campuses of these institutions.

Accreditation of new programmes will be conducted under the current accreditation system until 30 September 2004 and the new system will be implemented in October 2004. Submission deadlines for applications are 31 March 2004 (for the meeting of the Accreditation Committee of the HEQC on 1 July 2004) and 30 June 2004 (for the meeting of 1 October 2004).

### **(b) Re-accreditation**

Fifteen private higher education institutions (with 35 learning programmes) were granted registration by the DoE until 31 December 2004 and have to apply for re-accreditation by 31 March 2004. The HEQC held a workshop for these institutions on 20 January 2004.

### **(c) Conditional accreditation**

The HEQC will follow up on private higher education institutions and learning programmes that received conditional accreditation, in order to determine the extent to which the conditions set have been complied with. This follow up exercise is scheduled to be completed by 30 April 2004.

## **(iii) Finalisation of Programme Accreditation Framework and Accreditation Criteria**

The HEQC is at present finalising its Programme Accreditation Framework and Accreditation Criteria. Comments on the draft criteria were received from 15 institutions, the CTP, South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA) and Association of Private Providers of Education and Training Development (APPETD). The criteria were revised in the light of these comments. The final Programme Accreditation Framework and Programme Criteria will be released by the HEQC in mid 2004 and the new system implemented in October 2004 to evaluate new programmes for delivery in 2006.

## **(iv) Masters of Business Administration (MBA) Review**

The HEQC finalised the criteria and manual for MBA re-accreditation in April 2003 in consultation with all South African institutions and business schools offering MBA programmes. The manual also incorporated comment from international experts. The International Reference Group constituted for this purpose included experts from the United States of America, the Netherlands, Australia, Hong Kong, the United Kingdom and South Africa. The main purposes of the MBA re-accreditation were to:

- Evaluate MBAs offered at public and registered private higher education institutions in South Africa, in order to establish the extent, scope and quality of provision.
- Re-accredit MBAs in public and registered private institutions to ensure a common framework for quality.

- Improve the quality of MBA provision in South Africa and make it internationally competitive.

Site visits by peer review panels were completed for 28 institutions offering a total of 38 MBA programmes. Draft recommendations on accreditation were circulated to all institutions for comment. The HEQC Board is in the process of finalising decisions on the accreditation outcomes and these will be made available in early May. A research report on the state of MBA provision in South Africa is under preparation, based on the findings of the MBA review.

#### **(v) Other National Reviews**

The HEQC is in the process of identifying other programme areas where national reviews like the MBA review could be conducted. Discussions on a possible review of teacher education programmes have been held with members of the Ministerial Team tasked with developing a national framework for teacher education, as well as with officials of the higher education division of the DoE. Issues under discussion include resources for funding the review, selecting the appropriate qualifications for review, the nature of and time frame for the review, and the terms of participation of the different stakeholders and role-players in the review.

#### **(vi) Project on NQF level 5 Qualifications**

In view of concerns raised about the quality of qualifications registered at Level 5 of the NQF, a meeting of the CTP, APPETD, DoE, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the HEQC was convened on 22 January 2004. It was resolved to:

- Audit and review current Level 5 qualifications against possible descriptions of Level 5 learning complexity.
- Begin with refining Level 5 Level descriptors for the certificate qualification.
- Identify, in close interface with the relevant Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs), which learning areas and qualifications are required for particular economic growth areas and develop level descriptors for these generic qualifications.

The CTP is acting as a secretariat for this project on behalf of the HEQC. A draft report is expected in October 2004.

#### **(vii) Delegation of quality assurance functions to institutions**

In its policy documents the HEQC had indicated its intention to delegate quality assurance responsibility for certification, short courses, moderation of assessment, training of assessors and recognition of prior learning (RPL) to higher education institutions themselves. In order to prepare a sound basis for these delegations, information was requested from institutions in 2003 on policies, implementation and evaluation arrangements for the above areas of delegation. Feedback was obtained towards the end of 2003 and a status report is being developed in each of the above areas, with recommendations and conditions for delegation. The reports on RPL and moderation of assessment have been received and the whole exercise will be completed by mid 2004. The recommendations will be considered by a committee established for this purpose and forwarded for ratification to the HEQC Board.

### **(viii) Project on the quality management of research**

Guidelines have been developed by the HEQC for institutional self-assessment of research quality management. A consultative workshop was convened at the beginning of 2004 to finalise the guidelines. The guidelines were revised and edited and will be circulated to institutions in June 2004. The guidelines were also used in the development of the research related audit criteria.

### **(ix) SAQA National Learner Records Database (NLRD)**

As an Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA), the HEQC is required to provide information to SAQA on learner records. The HEQC will inform private providers at its private provider forum of 29 April 2004 about NLRD requirements, the format for submission of data and the point of submission. The HEQC will communicate individually with public providers who have not yet submitted their Higher Education Management Information System (HEMIS) data in the required format for submission to the NLRD.

### **(x) Co-ordination**

In mid 2003 the HEQC published a Directory of ETQAs and Professional Councils, which was distributed to all stakeholders. The directory contained information on the quality assurance mandates, systems and requirements of 74 ETQAs and professional councils in higher education. A call was made towards the end of 2003 for outstanding information, corrections or omissions in order to update the directory. The directory will be updated on the CHE's website in April 2004.

In order to expedite the process of concluding Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with ETQAs and professional councils, a consultative meeting was held on 12 February with Deputy Vice-Chancellors and other representatives from public higher education institutions. A report of this meeting is on the CHE website.

The following activities are planned for 2004:

- Presentation and discussion of issues related to MoUs at the forum for private higher education institutions on 29 April 2004.
- Setting up a committee to evaluate the alignment of ETQA accreditation criteria with the HEQC's accreditation criteria. These recommendations will be tabled at the HEQC Board for a final decision.
- Gazetting and signing of MoUs. It is envisaged that the first set of MoUs will be tabled at the HEQC Board meeting in May 2004.
- Pilot testing, monitoring and reviewing of MoUs – from April 2004 till the end of 2004.
- Two workshops/meetings with ETQAs and professional councils in May and July 2004, in order to address issues of quality assurance in higher education.

## **3. Quality Promotion and Capacity Development (QPCD)**

### **(i) Framework document**

The QPCD framework document is being drafted and will be released for stakeholder comment by the end of June 2004.

## **(ii) Training workshops**

An auditor preparation workshop will be held in May 2004. The auditor preparation programme for 2004 will include refresher workshops for those who participated in auditor training workshops last year as well as workshops for audit chairpersons and writers of audit reports.

Workshops for the training of programme evaluators will take place in the second half of 2004 and will be based on the new programme accreditation framework and criteria.

## **(iii) Teaching and Learning Project**

The Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) resource pack is being edited and will be published on the HEQC website in mid 2004.

## **(iv) Quality Assurance Forums**

The first of the Quality Assurance Managers' Forum meetings for 2004 will take place on 21 April 2004 (for public higher education institutions) and 29 April 2004 (for private higher education institutions). The purpose of the forums is to share information and good practice on quality assurance, and to provide quality assurance managers with an opportunity to interact with the HEQC and each other on issues of concern. A two-day Forum workshop later in 2004 will focus on self-evaluation. Quality assurance managers will receive from the HEQC electronic information updates between workshops in addition to HEQC communiqués.

## **(v) Vocational Education Project**

In 2003 a group of participants from higher education institutions, professional bodies and SETAs were invited to a workshop on vocational higher education, led by Dr John Brennan of the Centre for Higher Educational Research and Information at the Open University in the United Kingdom. The HEQC has commissioned a paper on quality issues in vocational higher education in South Africa. A small expert group will be established to assist with planning for a national seminar, following the publication of the paper.

## **4. International Liaison**

The following activities have taken / are taking place with regard to international liaison:

- A memorandum of co-operation was concluded with the AUQA for a period of three years. The agreement includes exchange of information, staff visits and joint audit activities for Australian universities operating in South Africa.
- A memorandum of understanding was concluded with the Polytechnic of Namibia. This entails an institutional audit by the HEQC at the request of the Polytechnic and accreditation of its programmes on a cost recovery basis. Relevant staff of the Polytechnic will be invited to participate in capacity development workshops of the HEQC. This arrangement is supported by the Ministry of Education of Namibia and the Namibian Qualifications Authority, as well as by the DoE, in view of the fact that it gives effect to the Southern African Development Community (SADC) protocol on Education and Training.
- Senior HEQC staff are engaged in initiatives supported by the British Council to establish a Southern African Quality Assurance Group. A meeting to discuss quality assurance in the region was held in Maputo in November 2003.

- The CHE/HEQC is co-organiser of a workshop together with the Association of African Universities (AAU) in Accra, Ghana, in late April 2004 on the implications of the World Trade Organization (WTO) General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) for African higher education. The objectives of the workshop are to disseminate information on GATS to key role-players in African higher education and to initiate an advocacy programme and research activities on this topic.
- A memorandum of co-operation is being explored between the HEQC and the National Assessment and Accreditation Council of India (NAAC).
- Senior HEQC staff have presented papers and participated in meetings of the International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education (INQAAHE) and the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as a way of keeping track of and contributing to developments in quality assurance at an international level.

## **5. SAQA Audit of the HEQC**

SAQA audited the HEQC in November 2003 during a five-day site visit. The compliance audit was part of SAQA's requirements for ETQAs. The HEQC has received a qualified draft audit report from SAQA, on the basis of a number of systemic problems, which cannot be resolved by the HEQC alone e.g. clashing legislative mandates of different ETQAs.

## **List of acronyms**

AAU	Association of African Universities
APAC	Association of Principals of Agricultural Colleges
APPETD	Association of Private Providers of Education and Training Development
AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
DoE	Department of Education
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HEMIS	Higher Education Management Information Systems
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
IJC	Interim Joint Committee
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies in Higher Education
ITL	Improving Teaching and Learning
MANCOSA	Management College of Southern Africa
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MoU	Memoranda of Understanding
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council
NLRD	National Learner Records Database
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QPCD	Quality Promotion and Capacity Development
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAUVCA	South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
WTO	World Trade Organization