

# CHAPTER 1

## OVERVIEW OF THE CHE

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The CHE defines its mission as contributing to the development of a higher education system characterised by quality and excellence, equity, responsiveness to economic and social development needs and effective and efficient provision, governance and management. It seeks to make this contribution:

- By providing informed, considered, independent and strategic advice on higher education (HE) issues to the Minister of Education
- Through the QA activities of its sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)
- Through publications and through broader dissemination of information, through conferences and workshops on HE and other focused activities.

### 2. MEMBERSHIP

The *Higher Education Act* makes provision for a chairperson, 13 ordinary members, co-opted members (maximum 3) and 6 non-voting members. The Minister of Education appoints the members of the CHE following a public call for nominations for HE stakeholders and the general public. Members are appointed for a four-year period and the chairperson for five years.

The Ministry of Education issued a public call for nominations to the CHE in early 2002. In June 2002, the CHE was reconstituted with the following membership:

#### Chairperson

Mr S Macozoma\*

#### Ordinary members

Prof. HP Africa	Prof. SF Coetzee*	Prof. B Figaji*
Prof. GJ Gerwel (Resigned)	Ms JA Glennie	Ms T January-McLean*
Dr MC Koorts	Mr J Mamabolo	Mr V Nhlapo
Mr E Patel (Resigned)	Prof. AM Perez	Prof. MF Ramashala
Prof. SJ Saunders		

#### Co-opted members

None

#### Non-voting members

Ms A Canca (Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology)  
Ms N Badsha\* (Department of Education)  
Mr SBA Isaacs (South African Qualifications Authority)  
Dr A Kaniki (National Research Foundation)  
Vacant (Representative of the Department of Labour)  
Vacant (Representative of the Provincial Heads of the Committee of Education)

#### Ex-officio

Prof. S Badat \*

(\* Members serving on the Executive Committee of the CHE)

The members of the CHE are appointed in their own right as people with specialist knowledge and expertise on HE matters. In this regard, and despite the members of the CHE being drawn from various constituencies, the CHE functions as an independent, expert, statutory body rather than a body of delegates or representatives of organisations, institutions or constituencies. The term of office of the ordinary CHE members is until June 2006, and that of the Chairperson until June 2007.

### 3. RESPONSIBILITIES OF THE CHE

The *Act* and the Education *White Paper* 3 of 1997 set out the responsibilities of the CHE. These include:

- Advising the Minister on all HE issues on which the CHE's advice is sought
- Advising the Minister on its own initiative on HE issues that the CHE regards as important
- Designing and implementing a system for QA in HE and establishing the HEQC
- Advising the Minister on the appropriate shape and size of the HE system, including its desired institutional configuration
- Advising the Minister in particular on the new funding arrangements for HE
- Advising the Minister in particular on language policy in HE
- Developing a means for monitoring and evaluating whether, how, to what extent and with what consequences the vision, policy goals and objectives for HE defined in the *White Paper* on HE are being realised
- Promoting the access of students to HE
- Providing advice to the Minister on the proposed new Education MIS for HE
- Formulating advice for the Minister on a new academic policy for HE, including a diploma/degree structure which would advance the policy objectives of the *White Paper*
- Formulating advice for the Minister on stimulating greater institutional responsiveness to societal needs, especially those linked to stimulating South Africa's economy, such as greater HE-industry partnerships
- Appointing an independent assessment panel from which the Minister is able to appoint assessors to conduct investigations into particular issues at public HEIs
- Establishing healthy interactions with HE stakeholders on the CHE's work
- Producing regular reports on the state of South African HE
- Convening an annual consultative conference of HE stakeholders
- Participating in the development of a coherent HRD framework for South Africa in concert with other organisations
- Contributing to the development of HE through publications and conferences.

The numerous and varied responsibilities require the CHE to engage in many different forms, kinds and types of activities. The CHE is required to be both reactive and proactive in the rendering of advice to the Minister. It is also required to provide advice on both a formal and informal basis. On occasions it has needed to provide advice at short notice and with considerable speed, while at other times it has been relatively cushioned from immediate time and other pressures.

In summary, the work of the CHE involves:

- **Advising** the Minister at his/her request or proactively on all policy matters related to HE
- Assuming **executive responsibility for quality assurance** within HE and training - including programme accreditation, institutional audits, programme evaluation and quality promotion and capacity building
- **Monitoring and evaluating** whether, how, to what extent and with what consequences the vision, policy goals and objectives for higher education are being realised, including **reporting** on the state of South African HE
- **Contributing to developing HE** - giving leadership around key national and systemic issues, producing publications and holding conferences and research to sensitise government and stakeholders to immediate and long-term challenges of HE.
- **Consulting with stakeholders** around HE.

## 4. THE CHARACTER AND ROLE OF THE CHE

The CHE is a product of the intense debates around relations between state and civil society - debates that resulted in a number of independent statutory bodies that are composed in a similar way to the CHE and have mandates similar to that of the CHE. There was a historical consensus that there was virtue in having a body, such as the CHE, composed of persons with special knowledge and experience of HE and HE-related matters that are nominated by a public process, rather than a body of delegates or representatives of stakeholders.

The activities of the past five years have been significant in unfolding the institutional character, identity and role of the CHE. It is generally agreed that the CHE has four policy-related roles - policy *advice*, policy *monitoring*, policy *development* and policy *implementation*. However, the four functions will vary depending on the responsibility and issue involved.

### 1. Policy advice

This is the principal role of CHE since its mandate is to advise the Minister of Education on policy matters, both on request and also proactively.

### 2. Policy monitoring

This is an important role of the CHE that is accorded to it by the *White Paper* and is also implicit in the requirement of *the Act*, as amended, for the CHE to produce regular reports on the state of South African HE. There is systemic value for an independent statutory body, working in partnership with various stakeholders and organisations, to undertake the monitoring and evaluation of progress towards the achievement of policy goals.

### 3. Policy development

This is undertaken in relation to and essentially limited to the domain of QA. The CHE has only taken on work of a policy development nature outside of QA at the request of the Ministry of Education in areas that it was mutually agreed - for example, Academic Policy - would be more appropriate for an independent body to conduct such work. However, the CHE has sought to ensure that engaging in work of a policy development nature does not compromise its responsibility to ultimately advise on eventual policy.

### 4. Policy implementation

This role pertains exclusively to the QA (programme accreditation, re-accreditation and review, institutional audits and quality promotion and capacity development) function of the CHE.

The CHE seeks to work closely and co-operatively with stakeholders (including the DoE), to hear their views on a number of issues and to be responsive to their concerns and interests. Representatives of, and participants from, national stakeholder organisations and individual HEIs contribute tremendously to the work of some committees and activities of the CHE. At the same time, the CHE tries to accommodate all invitations and requests from stakeholders and individual institutions related to participation in meetings, conferences, workshops, seminars and other activities.

Some of the views of the CHE and its advice to the Minister of Education find favour among a large number of stakeholders and institutions but leave a few dissatisfied. Other views and advice correspond with the views of some stakeholders and institutions but not with those of others. Yet other advice receives endorsement from only a few stakeholders.

Overall, the CHE does not hesitate to provide advice and recommendations to the Minister that is at odds with the views of individual stakeholders or sectors of HE but which the CHE believes to be in the best interests of the system at large. This, of course, does not endear the CHE to stakeholders all of the time. Such a situation is to be expected and must be seen as an outcome of its legislative mandate. Indeed, it is almost guaranteed by the nature of the CHE.

The understanding of itself that the CHE publicly promotes through its practice is that it is not a transmission belt for the views of stakeholders. Stakeholders must and do communicate directly with the Minister. The CHE is also not a buffer body, as it is sometimes described, in the sense of mediating between institutions and government, though if such a role is required nothing in principle precludes this. Instead, the understanding of itself that the CHE promotes is that it has been purposely and deliberately established to provide to the Minister, without fear and with courage, informed,

considered and independent advice which is in the national interest. That is, while the CHE must take and does take the views of stakeholders seriously, it is required to do considerably more than simply collate and aggregate these views in advising the Minister of Education. It is also required to interrogate and mediate these views, and offer its own independent advice to the Minister.

Thus, as an alternative to both the transmission belt and the buffer modes of operation, the CHE tries to contribute to a central steering model by trying to carve out a space for an independent, proactive and intellectually engaged type of intervention. The appropriateness and value of such a role is confirmed by two statements of the Minister of Education, in his address at the CHE consultative conference in November 2000. On the one hand Minister Asmal pointed out that he expected a far greater level of intellectual engagement from the HE community on issues of transformation and criticised the lack of this. At the same time, discussing the challenge of redress and equity in HE, Minister Asmal made clear his expectations of the CHE – **“I am relying on the CHE to take the lead in stimulating debate on redress and equity in higher education and providing me with appropriate advice on the matter”** – thereby highlighting the proactive role the CHE should take around specific issues.

This proactive role in putting issues on the agenda of stakeholders and stimulating debate seems particularly necessary in order to counteract two relatively generalised tendencies in terms of policy making and implementation. First, is the tendency on the part of some actors to interpret and implement policy in highly selective ways with the effect of almost distorting and undermining the original policy goals and objectives. Second, is the equally unsatisfactory tendency to formulate policy without giving sufficient consideration to both the conceptual and practical issues that implementation raise.

The recent past has alerted the CHE of the need to draw attention to conceptual aspects of policy when they are overshadowed by concern with implementation, and to also critique policy if it is lacking conceptually or technically or when implementation is insufficient, poor or haphazard. The steering model also implies another kind of intellectual engagement – keeping up with the current international debates on HE, bringing to the fore issues deemed relevant to South Africa and stimulating discussion among stakeholders.

The institutional character of the CHE as an independent body must therefore be embodied in its roles of:

- Providing the Minister, without fear and with courage, informed, considered and independent advice which it considers to be in the national interest
- Having to make considered, fair and objective decisions and judgements around quality matters
- Providing intellectual leadership around key national and systemic issues.

For example, the CHE must certainly take as its point of departure the values, principles and policy goals of the *White Paper*, and the policy instruments and mechanisms that are advanced for the achievement of policy goals. However, it must also subject, where necessary, these goals and instruments to critical scrutiny and raise their appropriateness in relation to the fiscal environment, the capacities of HEIs, the available human and financial resources and so forth.

Such a role may occasionally bring the CHE into disagreements and conflict with stakeholders, including the DoE. This cannot be avoided, without the independence (and value) of the CHE being compromised. It does demand tremendous wisdom, integrity, honesty and fairness on the part of the CHE.

Of course, the CHE does not operate in a vacuum, nor does it have a blank cheque. The CHE's activities and advice to the Minister of Education are and will be shaped by a number of factors. These include:

- The legislative framework for HE and the values, principles and policy goals and objectives contained in the *White Paper* and the *National Plan for HE*
- The changing requirements of economy and society and different social groups
- The goals, aims, aspirations and initiatives of national stakeholders and HEIs and science and technology institutions
- The local and international knowledge and information base with respect to HE issues, questions and practices
- The financial and HR capacities of the CHE.