

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is the outcome of research conducted for the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), to inform and enrich development of framework policy for the HEQC's functions of quality promotion and capacity development (QPCD) in South African higher education.

Chapter 1 (Background and Context of the Research) sets out the terms of reference of the project. The research aimed to generate a range of conceptual perspectives and options for modelling the QPCD approach of the HEQC, and so to assist the preparation of the QPCD framework document. A review of relevant literature was conducted, as well as a review of relevant approaches in selected national quality assurance (QA) systems. Interviews with HEQC members and a review of HEQC documentation were utilised to compile an inventory of the HEQC's QPCD activities, and to analyse HEQC experiences and insights with respect to the QPCD function. The research took as its point of departure an existing draft QPCD framework document. It used this as a reference point to compare similar or dissimilar concepts highlighted in the literature, and to track conceptual shifts or advances that have been made by the HEQC in the interim as it has designed and implemented various QPCD initiatives.

Chapter 2 (Concepts and Terminologies: QPCD in the Literature) reviews definitions and meanings attached to the key terms of this research – namely: 'quality promotion' (QP) and 'capacity development' (CD) – by examining a range of concepts, models, and terminologies that occur in relevant literature and documentary sources. It finds that, although QP and CD have different conceptual histories and distinctive emphases, they share significant conceptual elements in a contemporary understanding. In particular, they have in common related objectives of continuous improvement and sustainable development. Therefore, in the context of QA in higher education, QP and CD provide fully compatible opportunities for higher education renewal or transformation. The HEQC's draft QPCD framework is by and large consistent with the conceptual emphases of QP and CD as they emerge in this research, and the framework appears well poised, even in its draft form, to track and adapt to future conceptual developments. Given the relatively weak conceptualisation of QP and CD in the specific context of QA in higher education, the framework also appears to have an opportunity to contribute to, and influence, a fuller understanding of QPCD purposes and approaches in its field.

Chapter 3 (Policy and Practice: QPCD Approaches in National Quality Assurance Systems) considers aspects of QA systems in selected countries around the world. Each overall QA configuration is described, highlighting elements relevant to objectives and functions of quality promotion and capacity development (and also quality enhancement

[QE] which is a key objective/function in some systems). The chapter finds that QP consistently serves both accountability and improvement purposes in national QA systems, and that both quality per se, and QA, are promoted. QA systems in most of the countries in the sample are oriented around QE, rather than CD. That is to say: although continuous quality improvement is a central concept in all of these systems, the achievement of higher education quality and effective QA systems tend not to be analysed primarily from the perspective of developing capacity for their achievement. In QA systems where CD and QE functions co-exist, the QA system appears to have been more explicitly conceived as a support to higher education transformation. No 'best practice' conceptualisation of QP, CD/QE is suggested by the case studies, although an interesting diversity of contextualised approaches is in evidence. Thus, the HEQC would appear to have every reason to tailor its own conceptual approach and programme design, and to orient its QPCD framework self-referentially in the first instance – i.e. with reference to the goals of South Africa's transforming and restructuring higher education system, and its customised definition of quality. These points of reference would then serve to inform innovation adapted to context and resources, or selection of approaches that may have been modelled elsewhere.

Chapter 4 (Organisation, Programme and Activities: QPCD in the HEQC's Experience) provides a synthesis of HEQC perspectives on the nature and conceptualisation of QPCD initiatives to date, as well as on the conceptualisation of a QPCD framework and programme going forward. The chapter compiles inventories of QPCD initiatives, strategies, approaches and methodologies, and comments on concrete aspects of the draft framework. A high-level conceptual model for the framework is suggested, as a means of encapsulating key thinking in this chapter, and to provide a platform for further refinements. Core elements of the suggested model are:

- broad context for the QPCD function: the HEQC's mandate and definition of quality;
- key QPCD tasks: deepening theoretical and practical understanding of quality and QA; supporting reflection and intellectual enquiry into theory and practice of quality and QA; and facilitating systemic learning about quality and QA.;
- agreed strategies and approaches that inform design of initiatives and collaborations;
- initiatives categorised by purpose: reflection and research; QPCD projects and co-ordination; operational support to HEQC core functions and systems; and internal support to the HEQC;
- a considered balance in initiatives that fulfil different purposes;
- interlinked QP and CD concepts and practices informing all initiatives;
- multi-level initiatives: spanning individual, academic programme, institutional (differentiated), sectoral (collective), higher education system and public levels;
- integrated set of interventions with appropriate linkages and feedback loops, in

order to: facilitate multi-level learning; develop quality; improve QA practice; and generate new knowledge about quality and QA; and

- dynamic QPCD approach focusing on: legacy issues (goals of transformation and restructuring); contemporary issues (objectives of self-regulation and continuous improvement in a transformation and restructuring context); and emerging issues (needs for ongoing adaptation).

Chapter 5 (Conclusions) notes that the research has elicited broad conceptual insights, as well as fairly detailed concrete suggestions, for possible incorporation in the QPCD framework document. Accordingly, the chapter organises the principal research findings (formulated more discursively or in more detail in the concluding sections of Chapters 2, 3 and 4) as two sets of conclusions, namely: substantive conclusions; and conclusions on developing the QPCD framework document. The chapter observes that, as a QPCD programme has been initiated by the HEQC in advance of full conceptualisation, there is now an opportunity for the framework to overlay the learning of practice with a conceptual clarity that simultaneously frames, captures and advances experience.