

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT OF THE RESEARCH

1.1 INTRODUCTION

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.

The Higher Education Act (1997) gives the HEQC, as a permanent subcommittee of the CHE, responsibility for the promotion of quality assurance (QA), in addition to the accreditation of higher education programmes and the audit of QA mechanisms of all higher education institutions (HEIs).¹

The HEQC's Founding Document (2001) interprets the HEQC's quality promotion role, namely: to promote quality among constituent providers in higher education in order to facilitate the development of quality awareness and quality responsiveness in public and private provision.² Specifically, the Founding Document identifies two broad areas of work that are critical in the South African context:

- capacity development: the development and implementation of initiatives to build and strengthen the capacity for high quality provision at institutional, learning programme and individual levels; and
- quality promotion: the development of a programme of activities to institutionalise a culture of quality in higher education and the commitment to continuous quality improvement.³

The HEQC established a Directorate of Quality Promotion and Capacity Development in order to take forward this work. In accordance with national higher education policy as set out in the White Paper (1997)⁴, and in accordance with the Higher Education Act and the Founding Document, the work of the QPCD Directorate is based on two closely related principles: first, that HEIs have the primary responsibility for quality and for developing effective quality management systems (QMS); and second, that in fulfilling its quality

1 Republic of South Africa (1997). Higher Education Act No 101 of 1997. Government Gazette No 18515, Notice 1655, 19 December 1997. Pretoria, Government Printers: Sections 5(1)(c) and 7.

2 Council on Higher Education (January 2001). Higher Education Quality Committee: Founding Document. Pretoria, Council on Higher Education (CHE): Section 4.1.

3 CHE January 2001 (HEQC Founding Document): Sections 9.4 and 9.5.

4 Department of Education (1997). 'A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education'. Education White Paper 3. Government Gazette No 18207, 15 August 1997. Pretoria, Government Printers.

promotion mandate, the HEQC will play a facilitating role by developing partnerships with HEIs and a broad range of stakeholders.⁵

During the systems-building phase of its work between 2001 and 2004, the HEQC successfully developed, consulted, consolidated and finalised frameworks and criteria for programme accreditation and institutional audit (by 2005, implementation of the accreditation and audit models has accordingly begun).⁶ Development of a comprehensive QPCD framework and model has lagged progress in the accreditation and audit areas, in part because QPCD approaches had to be informed by finalised accreditation and audit models. In the interim, a QPCD framework document has been drafted and currently exists as a work-in-progress draft.⁷ In addition, the Directorate has launched a range of initiatives to serve its broad purposes. These include:

- projects to improve the quality of core functions in a differentiated institutional environment:
 - development by the Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Project of resources/guides for good practice (programme development, programme review, access and admissions, student development, assessment, staff development and self-evaluation, postgraduate research and supervision);⁸
 - development of resource/good practice guides in the areas of Research, and Community Engagement;
 - development of resources in special-topic areas (e.g. distance education, vocational education, library management, religious education).
- special projects in such areas as: institutional QA needs in the context of mergers, and student quality literacy;
- preparation workshops and programmes for auditors, programme evaluators and national review⁹ evaluators;

5 See: CHE January 2001 (HEQC Founding Document): Section 3.

6 See: Council on Higher Education/Higher Education Quality Committee (June 2004a). Framework for Institutional Audits. Pretoria, Council on Higher Education (CHE); Council on Higher Education/Higher Education Quality Committee (June 2004b). Criteria for Institutional Audits. Pretoria, Council on Higher Education (CHE); Council on Higher Education/Higher Education Quality Committee (November 2004a). Framework for Programme Accreditation. Pretoria, Council on Higher Education (CHE); Council on Higher Education/Higher Education Quality Committee (November 2004b). Criteria for Programme Accreditation. Pretoria, Council on Higher Education (CHE).

7 Higher Education Quality Committee (October 2003). Draft Framework for Quality Promotion and Capacity Development. (Draft #5, internal document only.)

8 Council on Higher Education/Higher Education Quality Committee (November 2004c). Improving Teaching and Learning Resources (ITL Introduction and ITL Resources No 1-7). Pretoria, Council on Higher Education (CHE).

9 E.g. the HEQC's national review on selected academic and professional programmes in Education, as currently under way.

- facilitating discussion, dissemination of information and sharing of experiences through: the QA Managers Forum (QAMF); national and regional seminars, workshops and forums; newsletters; and various forms of linkage and exchange between the HEQC and its international counterparts; and
- tracking of QPCD needs and issues through internal research, which analysed responses to a questionnaire (November 2001), and reports of one-day institutional visits (2002-2003), as supplemented by interviews and other documentary research.¹⁰

In the process of designing and implementing these initiatives, the QPCD Directorate has built up a foundation of experience and has generated many insights both conceptual and practical. In 2005, it is necessary to locate, focus and expand (or consolidate, or tailor) this range of initiatives and associated learning within a coherent QPCD framework that takes into account the following –

- a range of possible conceptual models and principles for quality promotion (QP) and capacity development (CD);
- the practical needs of building capability and capacity for high-quality delivery in South African higher education, and in particular building capability and capacity at different levels (individual, programme, institution), and in different areas (core functions of higher education) so that HEQC requirements can be met; and
- requirements for continuous improvement and innovation within the QA arrangements and QMS of South African higher education institutions, especially with the objective of a greater measure of QA self-regulation in view.

Accordingly, the HEQC has undertaken research to inform and enrich the process of QPCD framework development.

1.2 TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE RESEARCH

1.2.1 Rationale

In order to demonstrate its commitment to quality development in South African higher education, and in order to support and reinforce its functions of accreditation and audit, the HEQC must generate a QPCD framework that will:

¹⁰ See Council on Higher Education/Higher Education Quality Committee (August 2003). *The Effects of the Activities of the HEQC on South African Higher Education: An Impact Study*. (Internal document only); and: Council on Higher Education/Higher Education Quality Committee (June 2004c). *Investigating the Response of South African Higher Education Institutions to HEQC Requirements*. (Internal document only.)

- define and encapsulate an approach and principles compatible with the mandate and mission of the CHE/HEQC;
- afford a robust conceptual underpinning to a specified programme of interventions; and
- provide a platform for developing and sustaining a culture of quality in South African higher education institutions, where such a culture has as critical sub-elements: a culture of institutionally-managed evaluation and self-evaluation, a culture of continuous improvement, a culture of intellectual vibrancy, a culture of innovation, and a culture of diversity.

To generate such a framework, the HEQC needs to develop its own understanding of a range of possible models for QPCD and, as far as possible, to tailor a model that takes account of the South African system's priorities, needs and aspirations. This research was undertaken to assist in clarifying possible directions from both the conceptual and the empirical or pragmatic points of view, in ways that would be mutually reinforcing and so facilitative of HEQC policy perspectives.

1.2.2 Purpose and Objectives

Specifically, the purpose of the research was specified as: to generate through targeted research 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.

The objectives of the research were defined as follows –

1. drawing on a variety of documentary sources: to investigate, analyse and report on:
 - a range of conceptual approaches to QPCD in higher education QA environments internationally; and
 - a range of conceptual approaches to advocacy and capacity development in other environments (e.g. development and development aid organisations; funding organisations for research; possibly: advocacy and capacity development initiatives in environmental and public health contexts) and other geographical regions, where these experiences are transferable to the QA environment in South African higher education.
2. to describe, analyse and report on QPCD priorities, needs and gaps within the South African higher education system by:
 - compiling an inventory of QPCD Directorate projects and initiatives to date;
 - analysing project-related and other QPCD Directorate documents (e.g. project proposals and plans, project reports, QAMF reports, seminar papers);

- interviewing HEQC members, in particular members of the QPCD Directorate;
 - considering previous strategic research undertaken by the HEQC regarding: a) the impact of HEQC policies and activities, and b) the response of institutions to HEQC requirements. And the objective of
3. drawing on a) the above analyses, b) existing policy frameworks of the HEQC, and c) the draft QPCD framework document, as an analytical reference point: to synthesise possible options for modelling the QPCD approach of the HEQC and to evaluate ideas in the draft QPCD framework document in light of these.

1.2.3 Approach and Methodology

The research, including preparation of this report, was undertaken within a tight timeframe (26 days) on the understanding that it would be:

- Exploratory, in relation to:
 - definitions, theories, concepts and models in a range of contexts;
 - experiences and learnings of the QPCD Directorate; and
 - work-in-progress thinking, as captured in the draft QPCD framework document.
- preparatory to the completion of a QPCD framework that will be consulted and ultimately published as a policy document of the HEQC; and
- integrative and convergent, in its endeavour to draw within one frame a relatively disparate set of information: conceptual material from a range of contexts; QPCD Directorate views, understandings and perceptions derived from praxis; HEQC policies and frameworks; and anticipated future needs of a QA system that is still in its early stages of implementation and typically in its early stages of adoption at institutional level.

The research methodology comprised three principal components:

- literature review:
 - detailed perusal of reference material located through internet, journal and library searches; and
 - consideration of reference material of both immediate relevance (QPCD in QA in higher education) and wider contextual relevance (international development and development aid organisations, funding organisations for research, selected other fields e.g. QP in public health, advocacy and CD in environmental development, etc.).
- inventory and review of QPCD Directorate activities, experiences and learnings:
 - detailed review of HEQC and QPCD Directorate documentation (project

- proposals, project reports (progress and final reports), template plans and detailed plans for QPCD initiatives, reports of QAMF meetings, etc.); and
- interviews with HEQC and QPCD Directorate members in a mix of individual and joint sessions.¹¹
 - analysis and compilation of findings:
 - collation of findings of literature review, and QPCD inventory and review;
 - recapitulation of relevant findings of prior research (2003 impact study; 2004 one-day-visits research);
 - development of an analytical framework with reference to the above and to HEQC policies and frameworks, including the draft QPCD framework document; and
 - synthesis of findings, analysis and conclusions in a report.

A broad framework of questions was used to guide the research at the outset, namely:

- How can 'quality promotion' and 'capacity development' be defined in the QA context?
- To what extent are 'quality promotion' and 'capacity development' separate or interrelated concepts and activities? How can various distinctions/interrelationships be conceptualised?
- What range of QPCD models and activities are highlighted in the literature? Which of these are most applicable to the QA context in South African higher education and why?
- What range of QPCD models and activities have emerged from the HEQC's own experience to date?
- What patterns of future need can be anticipated given the state of development of South African higher education and its QA environment?
- How does the QPCD Directorate's current thinking (as reflected in its draft QPCD framework document) match up against findings and what suggestions might be made for enriching the framework?

Specific questions asked of interview respondents included:

1. In your view, have QPCD activities to date been fully consistent with, and supportive

11 The following members of the HEQC were interviewed: Dr Mala Singh, Executive Director; QPCD Directorate: Dr Prem Naidoo, Dr John Carneson, Ms Thabisile Dlomo, Dr Herman du Toit, Ms Barbara Morrow; Audit and Evaluation Directorate: Dr Rob Moore, Dr Mark Hay; Accreditation and Co-ordination Directorate: Mr Tshepo Magabane, Mr Theo Bhengu. Dr Lis Lange, of the CHE's Monitoring and Evaluation Directorate, was also interviewed.

of, the HEQC's mission and conceptualisation of quality, and QA; and with the HEQC's other core functions (i.e. audit and accreditation)? Are there any particular areas you think could be strengthened? Why and how?

2. Has your experience determined a clear distinction between, or an integration of, QP and CD objectives/activities, and if so, how would you describe this?
3. Could you cite key insights from your experience that will aid the conceptualisation of the QPCD programme going forward 'positive' and 'negative' aspects are equally welcome.
4. What aspects of QPCD work do you believe have worked well to date, and what not so well why?
5. What aspects of the developing QPCD programme do you believe augur well for the future, and where do you believe more conceptual clarity is needed in future?
6. Is there a 'good practice model' that you have in mind for the HEQC's QPCD functions? Please describe it.

1.3 THE HEQC'S QPCD FRAMEWORK DOCUMENT: WORK IN PROGRESS

This research is intended to facilitate preparation of a QPCD framework document, i.e. a policy framework that guides and outlines the HEQC's QPCD approach and programme in the same way that the accreditation and audit frameworks do in their respective areas.

For a range of reasons substantive (e.g. the QPCD framework needed to take account of final accreditation and audit frameworks) and practical (e.g. capacity constraints), the preparation and consultation of a QPCD framework has been relatively delayed. However, a draft framework document¹² (which will be referred to as Draft QPCD Framework #5) was developed during the course of 2003. This provides a reference point in the current research, which can use the draft, for example, to compare similar or dissimilar concepts highlighted in relevant literature, or 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.

Key themes, issues and arguments raised by Draft QPCD Framework #5 are outlined below. The outline is reasonably comprehensive, in order to provide a clear picture of emerging thinking in the HEQC, and to serve as a reference point for comparative information in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. To this extent, the outline serves as key background and introductory material for the rest of this report.

12 HEQC October 2003 (Draft QPCD Framework #5).

1. In establishing a **conceptual and programmatic relationship between quality promotion and the development of capacity for QA**, the HEQC takes three fundamental issues as points of departure:
 - that the South African higher education system is characterised by unevenness of provision as well as by uneven capacity in terms of the development of institutional QMS;
 - that capacity development in general, and in relation to QA in particular, is not new to South African HEIs; and
 - that it is a function of HEIs to conceptualise and implement institutional programmes to develop capacity in QA. The HEQC, however, intends to work collaboratively with HEIs and other stakeholder organisations in order to help to improve QMS and actual quality at institutional level.¹³

2. QPCD responsibilities will be conducted in line with the requirements of the HEQC's approach to quality, in an environment of ongoing system- and institutional-level changes (including ongoing higher education restructuring to produce a transformed higher education system). **Thus the QPCD approach will be based in a conception of quality as: fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation in relation to individual learners as well as social development, all of this within a fitness-of-purpose framework.**¹⁴

3. The HEQC aims to move HEIs to a greater level of self-regulation within a framework of external validation, i.e. to combine institutional accountability with a developmental philosophy that relies on improvement plans. **The QPCD programme supports the improvement dimension by:**
 - preparing the higher education system for the full implementation of the QA dispensation;
 - supporting the development of an ethos of quality by enhancing the quality of provision as well as HEIs' accountability; and
 - enhancing the HEQC's internal capacity (staff skills, knowledge and competencies).¹⁵

4. Although different forms of QA were in place for universities and technikons before the creation of the HEQC, a centrally driven, QA system combining audit and accreditation and serving as a steering mechanism for higher education transformation is a new model and poses **fundamental challenges for HEIs and**

13 HEQC October 2003 (Draft QPCD Framework #5): 2.

14 *Op. cit.*, 3.

15 *Op. cit.*, 3-4.

for the implementing agency.¹⁶

5. **Quality promotion can be understood as** the set of advocacy, dissemination and research activities that have as their main goal the infusion of a quality ethos in HEIs through the successful implementation of QA systems and the actual improvement of the quality of provision.¹⁷

6. **Capacity development can be understood as** a process that involves building and enhancing individual and systemic knowledge, skills and techniques in QA to enable individual HEIs and the system as a whole to use relevant resources effectively, and to maintain and renew necessary skills and knowledge in order to improve processes and outputs integral to QA and quality management (QM). Capacity development thus understood has as a key objective enabling HEIs to respond to the policy requirements of the HEQC.¹⁸

7. **Capacity development has three key characteristics.** It must be:
 - Sustainable, i.e. focused on regenerating and reproducing the skills and practices necessary to implement a workable system of quality management and to improve quality of provision;
 - Institutionalised, i.e. owned by HEIs who engage actively with QA objectives and methodologies, adapt practices to specific institutional and societal contexts, and utilise context-specific opportunities to effect change; and
 - Transformative, i.e. linking knowledge and practice of QA to a notion of quality in the provision of higher education that takes into account broader societal needs.¹⁹

8. The HEQC's conceptualisation of capacity development has continuous improvement and development of an institutional and systemic ethos of quality as its final objectives. Accordingly it does not only rely exclusively on production and reproduction of skills and practices, but also focuses on fostering an understanding of the meanings and techniques of improvement in order to enhance practice. **This notion of capacity development acquires its full meaning when the implementation of a programme and activities encourage the production of new knowledge about development and improvement, and therefore generate innovation** in the practice of QA.²⁰

16 HEQC, 2005: 5.

17 *Ibid.*

18 *Ibid.*

19 *Op. cit.*, 5-6.

20 *Op. cit.*, 6.

9. The HEQC programme has **two main interrelated purposes**:
 - helping to prepare the South African higher education system for the implementation of the QA dispensation and its elements, specifically by building and enhancing particular QA-related skills, competences, knowledge and techniques; and
 - building and enhancing a culture of self-improvement that sees QA mechanisms as instruments to achieve better provision and outcomes of higher education.²¹

10. Accordingly, the **objectives of the HEQC programme** are to:
 - disseminate information relative to QA systems and their effect on the improvement of provision;
 - initiate studies that investigate the impact of QA systems, their strengths and weaknesses in different national contexts and in relation to specific aspects of higher education;
 - set up formal structures to communicate developments in the HEQC QA system to South African HEIs;
 - institute training and induction workshops in the use of HEQC accreditation and audit criteria and instruments;
 - develop and maintain a pool of potential evaluators and auditors to take part, respectively in accreditation of institutions and learning programmes and in institutional audits;
 - maintain a database of expertise in evaluation and audit;
 - disseminate and stimulate debate on good practice and facilitate exchange of information on QA issues; and
 - build and enhance the skills and knowledge of HEQC staff in relation to QA systems, their conceptualisation and implementation.²²

11. The **focus of the HEQC programme is systemic, institutional and internal**
 - At the systemic level, key activities include: the development and maintenance of a pool of auditors and evaluators, using training modules and materials that are customised to the South African context; and the creation of a database of expertise.
 - At the institutional level, the key focus is on the institutions' QA managers: keeping them abreast of developments in the HEQC's QA system implementation; and involving them in quality promotion activities, such as research projects and seminars that enhance their own understanding and

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² HEQC, 2003: 6-7.

practice of QA;. Internally, the focus is on developing the technical expertise and experience of professional and support staff, and on deepening understanding of the philosophy and principles that underpin the HEQC's and other QA systems.²³

12. Taking into account legitimate limits and resource constraints upon the agency's level of intervention, **the HEQC has chosen a strategy of local and international partnerships to deal with the needs of capacity development**
 - Locally, HEIs and their stakeholder organisations are the obvious partners of the HEQC in the systemic development, facilitation and implementation of capacity development.
 - Internationally, partnership activities could include the signing of memoranda of understanding (MOUs) or agreements of cooperation with other QA agencies, specifically in order to support the training and development of evaluators and auditors, and to participate in audit panels; as well as to assist internal capacity development through staff exchanges.²⁴

13. A second key strategy identified by the HEQC for capacity development is the identification of **structured feedback situations** which operate as part of the overall QA system, as well as part of the QPCD programme. At the system level, audit and accreditation processes will provide feedback as to the effectiveness of institutional QMS, as well as needs and gaps. This feedback can be translated into responsive capacity development in specific cases, or may fall within the scope of the planned capacity development programme. A third form of structured feedback is internal: providing feedback on the effectiveness of evaluator and auditor training and indicating where the HEQC may need, for example, to make adjustments or refocus planned institutional development strategies.²⁵

14. The HEQC's **QPCD programme has three main features** – it is
 - participative, i.e. it builds and enhances knowledge, skills and techniques in a dialogical mode that is open to critique and questioning (this links critically to the purposes of continuous improvement, in that capacity development is not about the transmission of knowledge or competences, but about the transformation of concepts and techniques into platforms for new questions and better practices);

23 *Ibid*, 7-8.

24 *Ibid*, 8-9.

25 HEQC, 2003:9.

- dynamic, i.e. it encourages participants and trainers in capacity development activities to look for forms of adapting practices and instruments to specific contexts, and to reflect on the broader socio-political objectives of higher education reform in relation to the appropriate utilisation of QA instruments and techniques; and
- critical, i.e. it is based in self-reflection and intellectual engagement with the philosophical and conceptual underpinnings of QA and capacity development both locally and internationally, especially with a view to eliciting new practices and identifying areas for research and new knowledge production.²⁶

15. The objective of **capacity development initiatives** is to build and enhance the capacity of QA systems at higher education institutions in order to improve the quality of provision at system, institutional, programme and individual levels. Initiatives include:

- training of auditors, which entails:
 - the recruitment and training of auditors;
 - maintaining a database of trained auditors whose expertise can be used at different stages of each audit cycle; and
 - the development of training workshops that respond to national and institutional priorities and histories.
- training of evaluators, which entails:
 - maintaining a database of evaluators, taking into account subject expertise and professional experience; and
 - developing appropriate training for subject evaluators so that they apply consistently HEQC criteria and instruments.²⁷

16. The objective of **quality promotion initiatives** is to institutionalise a quality culture in higher education and a commitment to continuous improvement. Initiatives include:

- dissemination and information flow through:
 - the QA Managers Forum, as a point of entry to, and feedback on, the implementation of QA systems in all HEIs;
 - a high quality literacy programme for students, to promote the provision of quality education as a known right;
 - quality on the Internet/Intranet, as a medium to disseminate information, research and good practice, to conduct advocacy campaigns, to generate debate and communicate with stakeholders; and

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 9-10.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 11.

- possibly, exchange of information with professional councils and Education and Training Quality Assurors (ETQAs) [co-ordination and co-operation with these bodies are functions of the Accreditation Directorate²⁸].
- research embracing:
 - impact studies, with a national and/or an international comparative focus; and
 - disciplinary studies, to support national reviews of programmes informed by a re-accreditation process [although it can be noted that, in practice, this activity is located in the Accreditation Directorate].
- focus on quality management, comprising:
 - good practice guides to support QM of teaching and learning, research and community engagement; and
 - a programme to showcase successful and/or innovative approaches to quality development.
- advocacy, in the form of:
 - a campaign (media-based) to advocate institutional registration and programme accreditation.
- international liaison, involving:
 - membership of international organisations, geared to keep South Africa abreast of international developments and to facilitate participation in international quality debates;
 - collaborative relationships with countries within the Southern African Development Community (SADC) Education and Training Protocol; and
 - MOUs or protocols of collaboration with other national QA agencies, to facilitate staff exchanges and study visits; sharing of information on systems implementation; and development of research projects on issues of common interest.
- staff capacity development [this section has not yet been not developed].²⁹

28 The HEQC, as the 'band ETQA' for higher education in South Africa, is mandated to be responsible for quality co-ordination in higher education. This entails delegating QA functions to, and concluding MOUs with, other professional councils and ETQAs operating in the band. It also means supporting the convergence of QA approaches and practices through such developmental steps as are necessary and appropriate.

29 *Op. cit.*, 12-15.