

CONCLUSIONS

5.1 Context of Conclusions

This research set out 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.

The development of a QPCD framework has not followed the pattern typical for development of HEQC framework policy. It is, by and large, true to say that the audit and accreditation frameworks and criteria of the HEQC were developed prior to implementation of the systems they frame, delineate and guide.¹¹⁶ However, QPCD activities have been initiated in the absence of a framework – albeit with due purposefulness and receptiveness to need. The formulation of a QPCD framework can now take account of the learnings of practice, as well as overlaying these with a conceptual clarity that simultaneously frames, captures and advances experience.

The research itself has anchored on *conceptualisation* of QPCD, while trying to incorporate perspectives from both 'theory' and 'experience'. It is possible – flowing from its methodology – that the research has yielded a somewhat uneasy mix of broad conceptual insights and narrower concrete suggestions for tightening up an existing framework document. Certainly, there is a sense that an important next step will be an exercise to bridge the two kinds of content as they reflect within this research report, in order to apply them seamlessly within a revised QPCD framework document.

Accordingly, this final chapter organises the conclusions of the research in two sections. First, it recapitulates the most significant substantive conclusions of the research. Second, it recapitulates the most significant conclusions of the research with regard to developing the QPCD framework document. In each case, the chapter references and extracts from the concluding sections of Chapters 2, 3 and 4, where these conclusions were formulated more discursively or in more detail. The conclusions are consecutively numbered in the following two sections, for ease of reference.

116 This is perhaps less true in the case of accreditation, than in the case of audit. For example, re-accreditation exercises for private providers and MBA programmes were undertaken in parallel with the development of an overarching accreditation framework, and completed before the finalisation of accreditation framework and criteria.

5.2 Substantive Conclusions

From its review of concepts, models and terminologies associated with quality promotion and capacity development respectively, the research concluded (Section 2.3):

1. QP and CD have different conceptual histories, and it is important to recognise that concepts are time-bound and evolving.
2. Currently, QP and CD have some distinctive emphases. QP aims to institutionalise a quality culture through advocacy of a particularised idea of quality, and through involving all levels and actors within a system in quality improvement. CD aims to build human and institutional abilities for action and reflection, to support the co-construction of knowledge and new knowledge, and to ensure sustainable capacity outcomes.
3. QP and CD share significant conceptual elements in a contemporary understanding. The most significant conceptual overlaps (see Table 1) are that the effective promotion of quality and the effective development of capacity each require: a conceptual underpinning that is value-based and contextualised (i.e. with respect to the way in which quality, or the objectives of capacity development, are defined); interventions which are multi-level and multidimensional and engage whole systems; associated mechanisms and processes which are participative and empowering; and a focus on outcomes that are self-renewing (continuous improvement, sustainable development).
4. In the context of QA in higher education, conceptual links between QP and CD provide compatible opportunities for higher education renewal or transformation. They enable a conceptually-integrated approach and programme of activities for promoting quality/QA and building capacity for quality/QA in a higher education system, and hence for simultaneously institutionalising a culture of quality, and developing QA and QM knowledge and capacity.

From its review of the quality promotion, capacity development and quality enhancement aspects of national QA systems (summarised in Table 2), the research concluded (Section 3.2):

5. QP serves both accountability and improvement purposes in national QA systems, and both quality *per se*, and QA, are promoted. These dualities are typical, although QP may, in specific instances, initially be linked primarily to accountability, or to QE, concerns; or may initially be linked to a focus on quality, or on QA. The dualities seem

appropriate as the focus of QA systems crystallises around continuous improvement necessary to higher education in a globalising world.

6. While countries, higher education systems and their national QA systems vary in terms of their state of development, many national QA systems are oriented around QE, rather than CD. In such systems, although continuous quality improvement is a central concept, the achievement of higher education quality and effective QA are not 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.
7. QP, CD/QE approaches in national QA systems illustrate diversity and distinctiveness in context, rather than 'best practice' – i.e. they are contextualised by the higher education systems and QA systems in which they have evolved, and their conceptualisation appears to have grown richer over time.

From its review of the HEQC's QPCD experience, the research concluded (Section 4.3):

8. A high-level conceptual model for the QPCD framework can be suggested, with the following core elements –
 - 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;
 - an 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
 - a 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).

5.3 Conclusions on Developing the QPCD Framework Document

From its review of concepts, models and terminologies associated with quality promotion and capacity development respectively, the research concluded (Section 2.3):

9. The existing draft framework appears to be well synchronised with contemporary conceptualisation of QP and CD, emphasising as it does such themes as: continuous improvement, institutionalisation of quality ethos, sustainable capacity for QA, context-specific and value-based QPCD approaches, multi-level and multi-dimensional programme focus, participative and partnership QPCD approaches, orientation of QPCD programme around the fostering of reflective practice, new knowledge and innovation.
10. The existing draft framework is in a position to track and adapt to developments in the conceptualisation of QP and CD. Perhaps more importantly, as the framework is developed, it may be able to influence a stronger conceptualisation of QP and CD purposes and approaches in the specific field of QA in higher education.
11. Development of the framework could encompass attention to detailed issues emerging from this research. For example, the framework might benefit from profiling more prominently such themes as: the importance of co-constructing QA knowledge; self-regulation as a rational benefit of a QPCD programme; and the systemic benefits of a QPCD programme in the form of new knowledge and appropriate policy development in higher education.

From its review of the quality promotion, capacity development and quality enhancement aspects of national QA systems (summarised in Table 2), the research concluded (Section 3.2) that

12. QP, CD/QE approaches in national QA systems illustrate diversity and distinctiveness in context, rather than 'best practice'. Thus, the HEQC has every reason to tailor its own QPCD conceptual approach and programme design in line with 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.

From its review of the HEQC's QPCD experience, the research concluded (Section 4.3) that

13. Consistent with a suggested high-level conceptual model (see Figure 2), the existing QPCD framework can be developed in a number of concrete ways (itemised in Table 5). Importantly, some suggested areas of development in the framework require a prior process of more detailed conceptualisation and/or scoping by the HEQC. These areas include:
 - a fuller elaboration of how and why the HEQC believes QP and CD to be integrated in concept and practice;
 - development of a coherent framework of key tasks/overarching aims, which can serve to guide and define 'categories of purpose' of QPCD initiatives, and the desired balance of initiatives across categories;
 - development of particular initiatives, including strategies and initiatives linked to multi-level advocacy of quality and QA; and
 - a plan for internal capacity development.