

Frequently Asked Questions and Answers for the Teacher Education Review MEd (Structured/Dissertation)

1. What does 'accreditation' mean?

Accreditation is the recognition status granted to a programme for a stipulated period of time after an HEQC evaluation indicates that it meets the required minimum standards of quality.

2. What is a National Review?

A national review is a particular form of accreditation that focuses on the re-accreditation of existing programmes offered by higher education institutions in a specific discipline area. This re-accreditation exercise is carried out using criteria developed by specialists and peers, commented on by stakeholders and institutions offering programmes in those areas, and approved by the HEQC. The Higher Education Quality Committee's *Criteria and Minimum Standards for the M Ed Structured and by Dissertation only*, are available on our website <http://che.ac.za/reviews/teacher.php>

The national reviews by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) have three stages.

- Self-evaluation: institutions submit their self-evaluation on the extent to which their programmes meet the stipulated criteria and minimum standards;
- External-evaluation: panels of peers and experts (from higher education institutions, and other stakeholders where possible) visit the different institutions and interview representatives from management, academic staff, students, advisory bodies and alumni. Taking into account the self-evaluation and the site visit to the institution, panels make accreditation recommendations on each programme to a specialist Accreditation Committee established by the HEQC. This specialist Accreditation Committee in turn submits its recommendations to the HEQC Board which makes the final decisions on the accreditation status of the programmes.
- Analytical Report: the CHE prepares a report which contextualises the specific programme offerings within the context of South African higher education and

international trends in that particular discipline/programme. The results of the re-accreditation process are analysed in order to identify trends in the quality of provision of a discipline/programme and suggest areas in need of attention by different stakeholders. The report on the state of the quality of provision of academic and professional programmes in education will be available at the end of 2007 and will focus on the MEd, BEd, PGCE and ACE.

3. How does the HEQC choose the programmes where it conducts a national review?

National Reviews take into account and are informed by stakeholder and practitioner interests in the training of students or professionals in a particular area and concerns about the quality of provision in particular programme areas. These concerns may include issues such as the articulation between programmes and industry in terms of the skills required from graduates, sudden expansion in enrolments in a particular programme, persistently low throughput and graduation rates, etc.

4. Why did the HEQC choose the MEd to be the focus of a national review?

The re-accreditation of the MEd is part of a larger re-accreditation exercise which focuses on a selection of professional and academic programmes in education. The programmes selected for the national review, which is organized in phases, are: MEd, (completed) BEd, PGCE and ACE (in progress)

In choosing these programmes as the focus of a national review, the HEQC took into account that:

- The quality of school leavers depends, among other things, on the quality of the teachers responsible for their education.
- The success of school reform depends, to a large extent on the capacity and ability of teachers to implement it.
- The Department of Education and other stakeholders had expressed concerns about the quality of teacher education provision in South Africa
- The process of restructuring has forced merged institutions and universities of technology to rethink their programme offerings in the area of education.

In the specific case of the MEd and the PGCE, the national review also took into account the request made in the Department of Education's National Plan for Higher Education, for the HEQC to prioritise the review of the quality of postgraduate programmes.

5. What does the 'accreditation status' of an MEd programme mean?

'Accreditation status' refers to the outcome of the re-accreditation process of a particular programme. The following are possible outcomes of the process of reaccreditation of programmes according to the HEQC criteria:

- **Provisional accreditation:** is awarded to programmes that have not produced the first cohort of graduates. Certain conditions may be attached to provisionally accredited programmes.
- **Full accreditation:** is awarded to programmes that meet all minimum standards in the specified criteria and, in addition, display examples of good practice and innovation in relation to several criteria.
- **Accreditation with Conditions:** is awarded to programmes which do not meet all the minimum standards in the specified criteria. The weaknesses identified in these programmes could be addressed in a short period of time.
- **Withdrawal of Accreditation:** is awarded to programmes that do not meet the majority of the minimum standards specified in the criteria.

6. Who made the accreditation decisions and on what basis?

The HEQC uses a peer review system in the national review. Experts and peers from higher education institutions were involved in the development of instruments for the evaluation of the programmes as well as in the site visits. The evaluation reports from peers and experts served as recommendations to the M Ed Accreditation Committee. The M Ed Accreditation Committee analysed the recommendations of the review panels and arrived at a judgement on the accreditation status of each programme. After this step, accreditation reports were sent to the institutions who were provided with a time-frame within which to make representations in relation to the reports received by them. Recommendations from the M Ed Accreditation Committee together with the institutions' representations were tabled at a special meeting of the HEQC Board.

7. What happen to students who have already graduated from programmes which have had their accreditation withdrawn?

Students who have already graduated from a programme that had its accreditation withdrawn still have a valid qualification recognised as accredited. Past students will have a valid M Ed qualification that would have been captured on the National Learner Record Database (NLRD) by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The NLRD will provide employers, the general public and students with information regarding qualifications, registration status, and the accreditation status of qualifications completed by students on a case by case basis for the period in which such qualifications were attained. This information will serve as proof of the status of qualifications awarded to students.

8. What are the implications for current students if accreditation is withdrawn?

Institutions whose programmes have had their accreditation withdrawn will not be allowed to take new students into those programmes. Institutions have to inform current students about the withdrawal of accreditation, teach out pipeline students and eventually phase out the programme. The HEQC will discuss with each institution in this situation the actual processes that will be put in place to ensure that students already in the system can complete their programmes.

Withdrawal of accreditation decisions will only be effective from the date of communication of outcomes to the institution and will only apply to any new intake of students.

9. What is the responsibility of higher education institutions in terms of making accreditation decisions available?

Higher education institutions are responsible for making the accreditation outcomes known to current and prospective students, their parents, and staff involved in the programme as well as to the general public. The HEQC will re-direct all queries from the public about re-accreditation to the institutions.

10. Can an institution re-apply to offer the M. Ed programme after an HEQC decision to withdraw accreditation?

Institutions that have had accreditation withdrawn from their MEd programmes can submit an application for the accreditation of this programme only after 24 months from the date of withdrawal of accreditation. This allows institutions enough time to address the weaknesses and problem areas identified during the national review.