HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE

PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK

DRAFT DOCUMENT FOR COMMENT

June 2002

FOREWORD

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) is the permanent committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) through which the CHE's quality assurance mandate is conducted. The HEQC has the statutory responsibility to carry out audits of higher education institutions and accredit programmes of higher education. It presents its proposals for an audit and accreditation system through which it will discharge its statutory responsibilities.

The proposals set out a common framework for universities, technikons, agricultural colleges, registered and accredited private providers and other providers whose programmes and qualifications fall under the jurisdiction of the HEQC. A number of common audit and accreditation requirements are applicable to all higher education institutions and providers and are intended to ensure consistency in the quality assurance system of the HEQC. The differentiated needs and circumstances of different sectors within higher education will be taken into account on the basis of a common framework.

The proposals seek to give effect to the accountability requirements which apply to higher education institutions and providers as well as to the HEQC – to demonstrate and attest to the quality and value of higher education provision. The proposals also seek to foster an improvement culture whose prime agents are higher education institutions and providers themselves, thereby encouraging as much institutional autonomy as is compatible with accountability.

Every attempt has been made to develop a coherent and integrated quality assurance system for the HEQC. This includes the proposal to link the audit and accreditation processes in a way that adds value to the work of the HEQC and provides an incentive for providers to develop and maintain strong internal quality assurance systems. It also includes proposals to conduct the quality assurance work of the HEQC in a partnership model with other ETQAs in higher education as well as in close co-operation with other role-players.

The proposals indicate the directions of what will eventually become the foundation of the quality assurance system of the HEQC. The implementation of the system will, however, seek to be flexible and realistic, given the emerging institutional and programme landscape in higher education. This will apply particularly to the first round of audits as well as to the first phase of the new accreditation system. Where possible, the finalisation of the HEQC audit and accreditation systems will take into account the outcomes of other initiatives which are still under discussion e.g. the new academic policy proposals and the proposals of the NQF Study Team.

The participation of key higher education stakeholders in the shaping of the audit and accreditation systems of the HEQC is a pre-requisite for building a strong and credible quality assurance system for higher education. Comments are invited on the principles, approach and processes set out in the HEQC proposals for audit and accreditation.

Executive Director
HEQC
June 2002

CONTENTS PAGE

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY iii
PREFACE vi
ACRONYMS vii

INTRODUCTION 1

PART 1: CONTEXT AND CURRENT SITUATION 3
1. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM 3
a) Legislative Context 3
b) Restructuring and transformative context 4
c) Responsibilities of higher education institutions 5

2. APPROACHES TO ACCREDITATION 5
a) International trends 5
b) Local approaches and arrangements 7
i) SAQA's definition of accreditation 7
ii) Other ETQA approaches 7
iii) The HEQC's current arrangements for accreditation 8

3. THE PURPOSES OF ACCREDITATION 8

PART 2: THE HEQC'S NEW SYSTEM OF ACCREDITATION 10
4. ACCOUNTABILITY, IMPROVEMENT AND CO-OPERATION: THE RATIONALE FOR THE MODEL 10

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE HEQC MODEL 11

6. THE HEQC'S MODEL FOR ACCREDITATION 12
a) New programmes 14
b) Existing programmes 16
i) Existing non-professional programmes 16
ii) Existing professional programmes 17

7. STANDARDS AND CRITERIA 18

8. HEQC CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER ETQAS 19

9. OPERATING PRINCIPLES FOR THE HEQC ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK 21

GLOSSARY 22

APPENDIX I 24
KEY ACCREDITATION PROCESSES 24
a) Decision-making and timeframes 24
b) Appeals procedure 24
c) Public statements 25

APPENDIX 2 26
ACCREDITATION PHASES FOR NEW PROGRAMMES 26
PHASE 1: CANDIDACY TO OFFER A PROGRAMME 26
PHASE 2: MID-TERM CHECK 27
PHASE 3: ACCREDITATION 28

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Purpose of Document

1. This document sets out for consultation and comment, proposals for an accreditation system for the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The proposals seek to give effect to the statutory quality assurance responsibility for the accreditation of the programmes of higher education institutions, assigned to the HEQC by the Higher Education Act of 1997 as well as by the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) regulations of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). The proposals outline an accreditation system for new and existing programmes offered by universities, technikons, agricultural colleges, registered and accredited private providers and other providers whose qualifications and programmes fall under the jurisdiction of the HEQC. The proposals for accreditation also indicate the relationship of the HEQC with other ETQAs in higher education. They further recommend a meaningful connection with the statutory audit responsibility of the HEQC, motivated by the intention to create a coherent and integrated approach to quality assurance in higher education.

Objectives of HEQC accreditation model

2. To identify and grant recognition status to programmes that can satisfy the HEQC's minimum standards for provision, or demonstrate their potential to do so in a stipulated period of time.

3. To protect students from poor quality programmes through accreditation and re-accreditation arrangements that build on reports from self-evaluation and external evaluation activities, including HEQC audits, and other relevant sources of information.

4. To encourage and support providers to institutionalise a culture of self-managed evaluation that builds on and surpasses minimum standards.

5. To utilise all available quality assurance capacity and experience in a co-operative approach to accreditation.

Key elements in the model

6. The model is based on a clear distinction between new and existing programmes and professional and non-professional programmes.

7. The HEQC and/or partner ETQA will require new programmes to undergo a three step process that includes a candidacy phase, a mid term check and a final accreditation phase. Site visits could occur in any or more than one phase of the process.

8. Accreditation for a new programme is a recognition status granted for a stipulated period of time depending on the duration of the programme, after a three-step evaluation process indicates that the programme meets or exceeds minimum thresholds of educational quality. The third phase (finalisation of accreditation) must be completed within one year of the first cohort of learners graduating from a new programme.

9. Existing programmes will be re-accredited in the following way.

- Non professional programmes
    - By provider if granted self-accreditation status for a six-year period by the HEQC, depending on the effectiveness of internal quality assurance mechanisms demonstrated during an audit visit, and other quality assurance related information.
    - By the HEQC if self-accreditation status is not achieved by the provider.
- Professional programmes
    - By the HEQC in partnership with other relevant ETQAs in a range of co-operation modalities.

Principles of accreditation

10. The model presumes strong accountability and requires the observance of minimum standards and requirements before

- The provider can begin to offer a programme.
- The programme has final accreditation status.

11. The stipulation of minimum standards is intended to protect students from poor quality programmes, safeguard the credibility of qualifications and facilitate articulation between programmes and providers.

12. External expert evaluations form a fundamental component of the accountability requirements of the model.

13. The achievement of self-accreditation status by a provider on the basis of the demonstration of effective internal quality assurance systems will lessen HEQC scrutiny for existing programmes where no other ETQA is involved, and place quality assurance responsibility for the re-accreditation of existing programmes with the institution itself.

14. Co-operation with other ETQAs in the case of professional and work-related programmes will be based on a range of partnership models, depending on the nature of the provider and the level of the programme or qualification.

Criteria for HEQC accreditation judgements

15. The HEQC will make judgements based on minimum standards set at different levels:
    - General provider standards (e.g. infrastructural capacity) will be linked to the institutional efficiency requirements of the Department of Education (DoE) and the institution's own governance structures.
    - General programme standards relating to, for example, compliance with the level descriptors in the proposed New Academic Policy (NAP).
    - Specific programme standards relating to standards registered on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and/or the requirements of relevant ETQAs.

16. A more detailed specification of criteria and standards will be finalised in consultation with providers in time to be used for the new accreditation system in 2003.

Consequences of accreditation judgements

17. A range of decisions with positive and negative consequences for the provider are possible, depending on the outcomes of the evaluation processes used by the HEQC.
    - Candidature status for a new programme enabling the provider to begin offering the programme to the first cohort of students.
    - Conditional accreditation for a stipulated period of time with the requirement for the provider to attend to specified problem areas.
    - Full accreditation for a stipulated period of time.
    - Withdrawal of accreditation.
    - Re-accreditation of existing programmes for an additional period of time by the HEQC or the provider itself depending on the nature of the programme.

Accreditation process

18. Proposals in the document encompass details of various aspects of the accreditation process, including provider requirements for each phase of the three-step accreditation process for new programmes, decision-making and timeframes, appeals procedures and other relevant issues.

PREFACE

This document sets out proposals for a programme accreditation system for the HEQC. The proposals have been developed in an iterative process, based on a first draft produced by an Accreditation Working Group set up by the HEQC. After extensive reworking by the HEQC Secretariat, the document was submitted to:

- International experts from different country contexts.
- A reference group consisting of members nominated by the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA), the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP), the Alliance of Private Providers of Education, Training and Development (APPETD), a cross section of ETQAs, and other experts.
- The Policy Development Committee of the HEQC which recommended it for consideration by the full HEQC after specified modifications.
- The full HEQC which approved the document for consultation on 4 June 2002.

The proposals were developed taking into account local and international systems and approaches to accreditation as well as the requirements of the HEQC's statutory quality assurance responsibilities in the current national higher education context.

After the consultation phase, the document will be finalised and submitted for approval to the full HEQC on 6 September 2002. The new accreditation system will be operational in mid 2003.

The closing date for the submission of comments on the Accreditation Framework is **9 August 2002**. All enquiries and comments should be directed to:

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ACRONYMS

APPETD	Alliance of Private Providers of Education, Training and Development
CESM	Classification of Educational Subject Matter
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
DoE	Department of Education
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
FTE	Full-time equivalent
HE	Higher Education
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSB	National Standards Body
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAUVCA	South African Universities Vice- Chancellors' Association
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority

INTRODUCTION

Higher education in South Africa is facing many complex challenges in an era of restructuring. The development, maintenance and enhancement of quality in a period of volatility and uncertainty will remain a key challenge that must be successfully addressed in order to realise the transformatory objectives of the restructuring of higher education. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) is preparing to introduce a national system of quality assurance that encompasses institutional audit, programme evaluation and accreditation, in order to discharge the statutory responsibilities accorded to it by the Higher Education Act of 1997 and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) regulations for accredited Education and Training Quality Assurers (ETQAs). The HEQC quality assurance system seeks to be responsive as well as proactive in advancing the objectives of higher education transformation, which include equitable access to high quality education and training, effective higher education provision within a reconfigured landscape, and intellectual innovation for social and economic development. However, the benefits of a restructured higher education system cannot be achieved solely though the implementation of the HEQC's accreditation and audit frameworks; it is necessary that they are aligned with and supported by other national and institutional initiatives related to planning, funding, standard setting and quality assurance.

The purposes of the *Programme Accreditation Framework* are to:

- Indicate the HEQC's approach to and requirements for the accreditation of higher education programmes of public and private institutions.

- Indicate how the relationships between the HEQC and other ETQAs will ensure the alignment of accreditation activities.

- Indicate how the HEQC's programme accreditation practices resonate with international and local trends and needs.

- Articulate a credible framework for programme accreditation, the requirements of which are clear, easy to implement, manageable and responsive to the specific needs of institutions offering different types and levels of qualifications.

The framework first situates accreditation within the broader mission of the HEQC and explains it in the context of the legislative requirements that regulate the provision of higher education in South Africa. Second, it defines accreditation against the backdrop of international and local conceptualisations and practices. Third, it presents a rationale and purpose for accreditation, focusing on the imperatives of accountability and improvement. Finally, the framework presents the methodology and approach that the HEQC intends to use to discharge its responsibilities in relation to the accreditation of higher education programmes, and indicates the criteria and processes for accreditation as well as their implications for institutions.

Based on the *Accreditation Framework*, the HEQC will develop:

- Guidelines to inform institutions about the accreditation process.
- A manual that will clearly specify the HEQC requirements for accreditation of programmes.

The HEQC will also use these documents to design training programmes for accreditors and evaluators.

PART 1: CONTEXT AND CURRENT SITUATION

1. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

a) Legislative Context

The HEQC is a permanent committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), established by Act No. 101 of 1997. The CHE's responsibilities are to:

- Advise the Minister at his/her request or proactively on all matters related to higher education.
- Assume executive responsibility for quality assurance within higher education and training.
- Monitor and evaluate whether the policy goals and objectives for higher education are being realised.
- Contribute to developing higher education through publications and conferences.
- Report to parliament on higher education.
- Consult with stakeholders around higher education.

The specific functions of the HEQC are to:

- Promote quality assurance in higher education.
- Audit the quality assurance mechanisms of institutions of higher education.
- Accredit programmes of higher education.

These functions are performed within the broader legislative and policy context that shapes and regulates the provision of higher education in South Africa - in particular, the Higher Education Act as amended, and *White Paper* 3: *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. The HEQC further operates within the policies and regulations of the Department of Education (DoE), including the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE), which has assigned specific quality assurance tasks to the HEQC. Thus, the nature, purpose and scope of the HEQC's work derive from a range of policy documents and legislation as stated in its Founding Document.[1]

As the ETQA for the Higher Education and Training Band of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF),[2] the HEQC also operates in the context of the South African Qualifications Authority Act and its regulations.[3] According to the SAQA regulations, the functions of ETQAs are to:

- Accredit constituent institutions for specific standards or qualifications registered on the NQF.

[1] *Higher Education Quality Committee Founding Document*, Pretoria 2001, pp.3-8
[2] South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995 (Act no 58 of 1995), Section 5 (1)(a)(ii)
[3] Regulations under the South African Qualifications Authority Act, 1995 (Act No 58 of 1995)

- Promote the quality of constituent institutions, and monitor their provision.
- Evaluate, assess and facilitate moderation amongst constituent institutions, register constituent assessors for specified registered standards or qualifications in terms of the criteria established for this purpose, and take responsibility for the certification of constituent learners.
- Co-operate with the relevant body or bodies appointed to moderate across ETQAs including, but not limited to, moderating the quality assurance on specific standards or qualifications for which one or more ETQAs are accredited.
- Recommend new standards or qualifications, or modifications to existing standards or qualifications, to the National Standards Bodies (NSBs) for consideration.
- Maintain a database acceptable to SAQA.
- Submit reports to SAQA in accordance with its requirements.
- Perform such other functions as may from time-to-time be assigned to it by SAQA.[4]

In terms of its accreditation function, the work of the HEQC is integrally related to specific DoE and SAQA activities. The DoE registers all private institutions before they are allowed to operate. It approves the programme and qualification mixes of public institutions and funds them if they are accredited by the HEQC. SAQA registers each learning programme offered by an institution of higher education that leads to a qualification on the NQF. The HEQC accredits institutions of higher education to offer programmes leading to particular NQF-registered qualifications by certifying that they have the systems, processes and capacity to do so. In relevant cases, this is done co-operatively with professional councils and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).[5]

Table l: The respective roles of the DoE, SAQA and the HEQC

Body	Public institutions	Private institutions
DoE	Approves offering and funding of programmes	Registers institution
SAQA	Registers each qualification offered by each institution on the NQF	
HEQC	Accredits institution to offer a programme leading to a qualification registered on the NQF	

b) Restructuring and transformative context

In South Africa, where the higher education system has been characterised by fragmentation, uneven provision and decades of racial segregation, the challenges of higher education transformation co-exist with demands for social and economic justice that are at the core of the agenda of democratic change in South African society. The restructuring of higher education in South Africa to produce a more just, effective, efficient and responsive system has been a systemic and institutional focus for a number of years. The work of the HEQC, including its

[4] *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs*, SAQA Policy Document, p27. 5 HEQC Founding p27
[5] *HEQC Founding Document*, 2001, paragraphs 4.1-4.3

accreditation responsibility, will be conducted within the context of the ongoing restructuring to produce a transformed higher education system.

In South Africa, quality assurance becomes a fundamental tool in ensuring that increased access, equity, differentiated missions, new qualifications and curricula and other changes in higher education are accompanied by adequate standards of provision, and that the interests and needs of multiple stakeholders including the state and society at large, parents, students and employers are taken into account. This context, together with the increasing internationalisation of higher education, has led the HEQC to shape an approach to quality based on fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation in relation to individual learners as well as social development. The accreditation responsibility of the HEQC will be conducted within the requirements of such an approach to quality in an environment of radical system and institutional level changes.

c) Responsibilities of higher education institutions

The responsibilities of public and private higher education institutions with respect to accreditation and the nature of their relationships to specific bodies are illustrated in the table below.

Table 2: Responsibilities of higher education institutions

Body	Public institutions	Private Institutions
DoE	Obtain approval for offering and funding of programme from DoE	Register with the DoE
SAQA	Seek registration with SAQA for each qualification on the NQF	
HEQC	Obtain accreditation for each learning programme leading to a qualification- registered on the NQF	

Over and above this, institutions have the responsibility to establish quality assurance systems in order to constantly improve the quality of provision as well as demonstrate quality in processes of external scrutiny. At the same time institutions have the responsibility of informing all learners about the accreditation status of all the programmes which they offer.

2. APPROACHES TO ACCREDITATION

a) International trends

Accreditation is a term that is applied to the approval of institutions as well as programmes and has become an internationally recognised form of quality assurance. Although a feature of external quality assurance systems in many countries, the definition and practice of accreditation,

the agency that conducts it, as well as its relation to funding and other consequences for higher education institutions, differ from country to country as well as from agency to agency.

The HEQC conducted an international comparative study of accreditation in a cross section of developed and developing countries to inform its own approach. The study indicated the existence of a variety of models characterised by different approaches by national agencies.

One country's approach is to prioritise institutional over programme accreditation and to leave institutional accreditation as a voluntary process. Here, a national accreditation council assesses and accredits institutions of higher education that voluntarily request accreditation. Due to the difficulty of assessing large numbers of general programmes at a large number of institutions, the national council has prioritised institutional accreditation over programme accreditation as a first step. In relation to the professions, the national council is exploring collaborative arrangements with professional bodies in fields such as law, engineering, medicine and agriculture. Even though accreditation is voluntary, accreditation status enables institutions to access development funding from the national funding body.

Another model combines the accreditation of both institutions and programmes in the first round of accreditation. A national accreditation council evaluates every degree programme offered by an institution and the positive evaluation of a sufficient number of programmes results in its accreditation. The next round of accreditation evaluates a more select number of programmes. Accreditation enables institutions and programmes to access federal initiatives such as student aid.

In another country, recognition of higher education institutions by law automatically confers institutional accreditation. A long-standing system of programme assessment conducted on a collegial basis is being revised to prepare for a system of programme accreditation. Details of the new dispensation are still emerging but it is likely that a new national accreditation organisation will assume the role currently played by an inspectorate that oversees the whole quality assurance system and reports to the ministry.

A further approach is where universities are accredited through their establishment by an act of legislation and can thereafter self-accredit their own learning programmes. In this process, universities utilise leading practitioners in particular fields as well as interaction with professional associations, some of which also undertake independent professional accreditation. External scrutiny of the institutional self-accreditation system is provided by a national agency through regular audits.

In yet another country, a variety of national, regional, specialised and professional accreditation agencies conduct institutional and/or programme accreditation. A federal body which has established requirements for the recognition of a range of accreditation agencies, exercises oversight over the standards and processes of the accreditation agencies. Again, accreditation enables institutions to access federal support for issues like student aid schemes.

Given the variety of approaches to accreditation, it becomes clear that accreditation should be defined contextually and its purposes, nature, scope and mechanisms be tailored to local histories, goals and needs.

b) Local approaches and arrangements

In the South African context, the HEQC has to take account of local requirements and existing practices of accreditation.

i) SAQA's definition of accreditation

In the ETQA regulations, SAQA defines accreditation as "the certification, usually for a particular period of time, of a person, a body or an institution as having the capacity to fulfill a particular function in the quality assurance system set up by SAQA in terms of the Act".[6] A number of requirements are specified for what is essentially institutional accreditation, including quality management systems and procedures, capacity to develop, deliver and evaluate learning programmes, and the necessary financial, administrative and physical resources.

ii) Other ETQA approaches

The approaches of other current and potential ETQAs were examined. Two models, one of a SETA and another of a professional body, are highlighted.

A particular SETA draws a distinction between the 'accreditation' of an institution and the 'approval' of a learning programme. This means that an institution could be accredited by the SETA before the learning programme is approved. Only accredited institutions are allowed to deliver education and training that lead to nationally registered standards and qualifications. Accreditation facilitates training under the auspices of the Skills Development Act and enables employers to access levy payments for employee skills training. Accreditation is granted for a period of three years upon satisfying a list of minimum programme and institutional criteria. The SETA follows a developmental approach, including the use of accreditation agents to assist institutions in meeting accreditation requirements.

The professional body operates in terms of its own legislation, primarily to register professionals in its field. It conducts visits to universities and technikons, and focuses on programme accreditation. It conducts its accreditation responsibility subject to the provisions of sections 5 and 7 of the Higher Education Act and is empowered to grant, refuse or withdraw accreditation for all education programmes in its field. By accreditation, the professional body refers to the process whereby programmes are evaluated and recognised for a defined period. Graduates from accredited programmes are eligible for registration as professionals. This body uses peer review and benchmarking against international standards and best practice as the basis of the accreditation system. The accreditation process tests the achievement of the prescribed outcomes of a qualification.

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[6] *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs*, SAQA Policy Document, p. 46.

The professional body deals in a different way with new or substantially revised programmes/qualifications[7] that have not produced graduates yet. Midway through the implementation of such a programme/qualification there is an assessment of those parts of the programme that have been implemented; provisional accreditation, which is valid for three years, is given if these are satisfactory.

The professional body does not commit itself to accredit the programme/qualification at this stage. Moreover, if full accreditation does not follow, the professional body is not liable to recognise a programme/qualification at all.

Provisional accreditation may be converted to accreditation on the basis of a site visit that must take place in the year after the first cohort has graduated, and graduates are granted recognition retroactively if the programme is accredited.

iii) The HEQC's current arrangements for accreditation

At present, the HEQC processes applications from public and private institutions to offer new programmes leading to NQF registered qualifications. In relation to universities and technikons, the applications are processed by the HEQC Secretariat and recommended to the Interim Joint Committee (IJC) which then forwards it to the HEQC for approval. No site visits are conducted. The IJC consists of representatives from the HEQC, the DoE, SAQA, the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors' Association (SAUVCA) and the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP). This was intended as a "one stop shop" to cover public institution applications for registration of qualifications on the NQF by SAQA, accreditation by the HEQC, and approval for funding by the DoE. The accreditation system is based on a combination of appropriate criteria and procedures that have been inherited from previous systems and new criteria and procedures that are congruent with new policy goals. These will be replaced by the HEQC's new accreditation system.

In relation to private institutions, applications are processed by the HEQC Secretariat and sent to external evaluators for comment. The reports are furnished to the Accreditation Committee of the HEQC for recommendation that is then forwarded to the HEQC Board. The HEQC reserves the right to undertake a site visit. The Accreditation Committee is chaired by the HEQC chairperson and has representatives from the Alliance of Private Providers of Education, Training and Development (APPETD), SAQA and the DoE. Recently, criteria and systems for the accreditation of private institutions have been streamlined but they will also be replaced by the HEQC's new accreditation system.

3. THE PURPOSES OF ACCREDITATION

Determined by the historical, legislative and developmental contexts of specific countries, the purposes of accreditation are manifold.

[7] Please note that although sometimes programmes and qualifications coincide, programmes are not always synonymous with qualifications

- Accreditation signifies approval of a programme, institution or part of an institution for a defined period as being able to prepare students for specified education and training outcomes resulting in a qualification. Such a judgement rests on processes of assessment conducted by the programme or institution and is confirmed by an external process of peer review by an accreditation agency. The consequences of a positive judgement include the right to operate as a higher education institution, the ability to access funding, and the possibility for holders of qualifications from accredited programmes to register with relevant professional bodies as competent practitioners and professionals.

- Accreditation signals that programmes that lead to registered qualifications achieve set standards, conduct their activities with integrity, deliver outcomes that justify public confidence and demonstrate accountability for the effective use of public or private funds. It allows government to invest public funds with confidence in programmes that demonstrate their ability to pass through a process of rigorous external scrutiny.

- Accreditation protects students, parents, professional associations, employers and the general public in a number of ways. In relation to students and parents, it enables them to make informed choices about officially recognised and approved programmes at the same time that it provides greater portability of credits across different parts of the higher education system. In relation to the professional associations, it safeguards the professions in forming the basis for registration of professionals in fields such as engineering, medicine, and law. Accreditation assures employers that the exit qualifications of graduates whom they employ are a credible basis for job performance.

- Accreditation by an external agency allows an institution to have external confirmation of the quality and standards of particular programmes. The specification of criteria and standards as part of accreditation requirements enables institutions and programmes to identify and embark on improvement measures to achieve the required standards for full accreditation, as well as the maintenance and continuous enhancement of quality and standards in order to retain accreditation status.

It is clear from the above that accreditation as a key quality assurance measure encompasses both the accountability and improvement dimensions of quality assurance. However, purposes linked to accountability predominate insofar as accreditation decisions impact directly or indirectly on whether an institution can operate, whether a programme is funded or whether graduates can attain registration or licensing to practise a profession.

PART 2: THE HEQC'S NEW SYSTEM OF ACCREDITATION

4. ACCOUNTABILITY, IMPROVEMENT AND CO-OPERATION: THE RATIONALE FOR THE MODEL

An appropriate model of accreditation for the HEQC must address the requirements of accountability, improvement and co-operation with other ETQAs. The proposed model seeks to address these requirements premised on the assumptions spelt out below.

In relation to the accreditation of new programmes, the protection of the student against poor quality qualifications and maintaining the credibility of qualifications are non-negotiable for the HEQC. This requires the stipulation of minimum standards and requirements before any institution can offer a programme leading to a qualification. Demonstrating the capacity to meet these minimum standards either before a programme is offered, or demonstrating the potential to meet these standards in a short stipulated period of time, is a fundamental accountability requirement for all institutions. The HEQC proposes a rigorous three-step accreditation process that will give accreditation status only to those programmes that can meet their accountability requirements.

Institutions will have an opportunity and appropriate assistance to demonstrate their capacity to meet minimum standards within a timeframe that produces one cohort of graduates from any qualification. All subsequent improvement activities must be from minimum standards and above. An approach that encourages the education and training responsiveness of institutions in developing new programmes and the need to build institution and programme capacity (particularly at historically disadvantaged institutions and new institutions) must be balanced by a commitment to protect students from poor quality programmes that run indefinitely once they are licensed on the basis of a paper application and without site visits. The production of large numbers of diplomates and graduates with poor quality qualifications that have no or little currency is damaging to higher education as well as to social development in general.

In relation to the re-accreditation of existing programmes, increasing institutional responsibility for ongoing evaluation and accreditation of programmes will form the basis of the system of institutional self-accreditation. This will allow for institutions which can clearly demonstrate reasonably effective internal quality management systems to take the initiative and responsibility for programme re-accreditation on the basis of trust in their commitment to continuous quality maintenance and improvement. External accountability will be satisfied through periodic HEQC scrutiny linked to the institutional audit and other quality assurance information sources. Within the audit cycle, institutions will be free to arrange the timeframes and approaches to programme evaluation and accreditation activities, subject to HEQC guidelines.

In the case of institutions that are still developing effective internal quality management systems, the achievement of self-accreditation status becomes the target of quality assurance capacity development, both for the institution and the HEQC. The emphasis on quality assurance

capacity development will not only be on the basis of strengthening internal evaluation capacity but also, and more fundamentally, on increasing the capacity of institutions to take responsibility for programme evaluation and accreditation using both self-evaluation and external peer review. Until an institution achieves self-accreditation status the HEQC will conduct its own programme evaluation and accreditation activities through different modalities. These will be outlined further in the guidelines that will follow this *Accreditation Framework*. A credible system of institutional self-accreditation for existing programmes will eventually lessen the amount of direct external HEQC scrutiny and restore the responsibility for quality assurance of programmes to the institution, where it belongs.

In relation to co-operation with other ETQAs it is clear that in giving effect to the accreditation model, the HEQC needs to work and co-operate with other ETQAs operating in higher education. This is particularly true in the case of professional and work-related programmes. The HEQC model encompasses a number of types and levels of co-operation, the details of which will become clearer and more streamlined as agreements are concluded and implemented between the HEQC and other ETQAs.

The HEQC is committed to using all available expertise and experience in the system, and proceeds from the premise that all ETQAs have a common commitment to continuous quality improvement and the elimination of poor quality provision. In forging co-operation agreements, the HEQC will ensure that its partnership and delegation agreements allow it to discharge its legal obligations for quality assurance in higher education. As the band ETQA, it also has overall responsibility for quality assurance across particular programmes and qualifications areas that are of interest to particular ETQAs. Hence the integrated judgement of general institutional quality assurance information with programme quality assurance information will be a primary concern of the HEQC in all its co-operative agreements.

5. OBJECTIVES OF THE HEQC MODEL

The objectives of the HEQC model for accreditation are to:

- Identify and grant recognition status to programmes that can satisfy the HEQC's minimum standards for provision, or demonstrate their potential to do so in a stipulated period of time.
- Protect students from poor quality programmes through accreditation and re-accreditation arrangements that build on reports from self-evaluation and external evaluation activities, including HEQC audits, and other relevant sources of information.
- Encourage and support institutions to institutionalise a culture of self-managed evaluation that builds on and surpasses minimum standards.
- Utilise all available quality assurance capacity and experience in a co-operative approach to accreditation.

6. THE HEQC'S MODEL FOR ACCREDITATION

In its *Founding Document*, the HEQC indicates its commitment to a system where the primary responsibility for quality assurance rests with institutions themselves. In relation to accreditation, a model where universities are first accredited through some legislative act and then become self-accrediting for all their own qualifications, is probably the one that gives best expression to this kind of commitment to institutional responsibility for quality assurance. Self-accreditation (with periodic checks by an external agency) allows for a high level of institutional autonomy and initiative in developing and implementing strong and reliable internal quality assurance systems. Self-accreditation, however, requires stability both at the system and institutional level, efficient planning and data support systems, relatively consistent capacity across programmes and qualifications, and well established internal quality assurance systems to undertake and act on programme evaluations. In South Africa, much remains to be done to achieve the preconditions for institution self-accreditation. Institutional mixes and niches are still being finalised. Many institutions have entered the higher education scene only recently. The internal quality assurance systems of institutions are far from evenly developed. Current legislation also does not allow for self-accreditation by institutions themselves.

In a context of grossly differentiated capacity and huge discrepancies in the quality of provision, external accreditation can play an important role in establishing a set of minimum standards and criteria for all programmes as well as encouraging the achievement of standards that rise above the required minimum. If self-evaluation capabilities of institutions are proven to be reliable, external accreditation can take the form of external monitoring in a "light touch" approach that relies heavily on the programme approval and recognition mechanisms of institutions themselves. In this way one can move towards a system that embodies many of the advantages of a self-accreditation philosophy.

The HEQC definition of accreditation is based on a clear distinction between new programmes and existing programmes. In the case of new programmes the HEQC definition of accreditation is

> recognition status granted for a stipulated period of time to a programme after an evaluation indicates that it meets or exceeds minimum thresholds of educational quality.

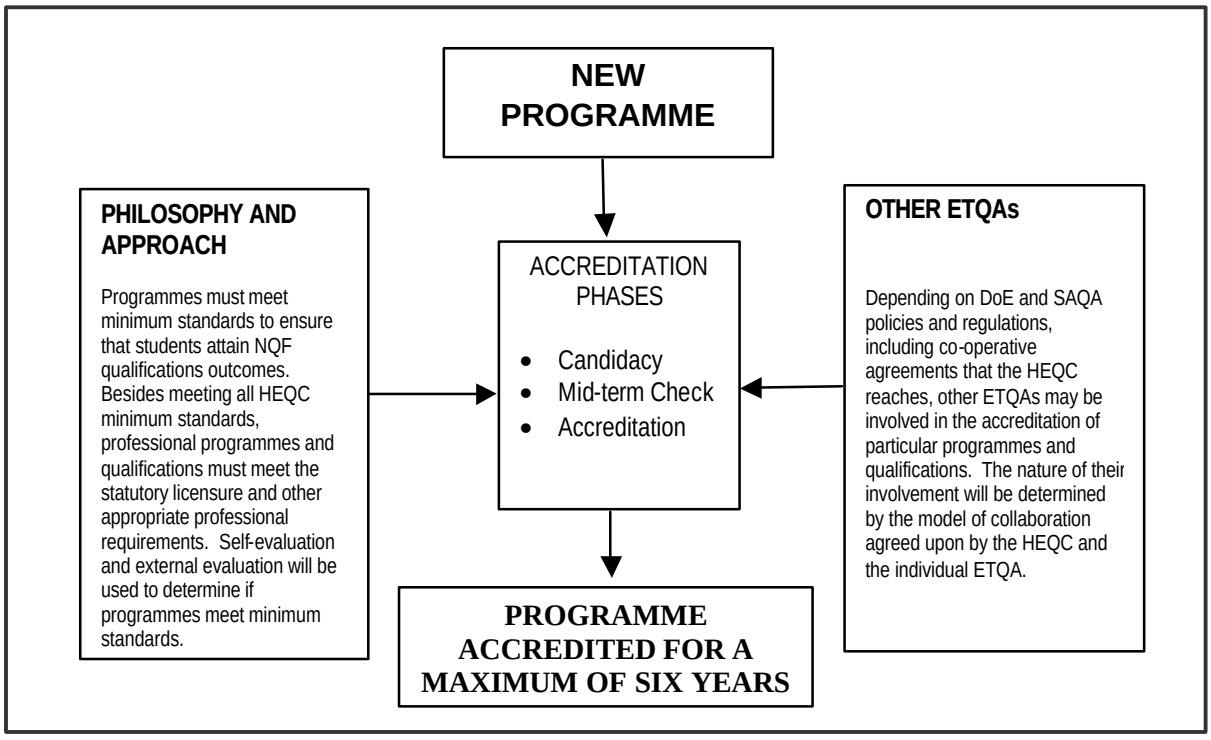
In the case of existing programmes the HEQC may grant an institution the right to re-accredit certain of its programmes for a six-year period after evaluation. Within this period the institutions will have to accredit its programmes for different lengths of time depending on their duration.

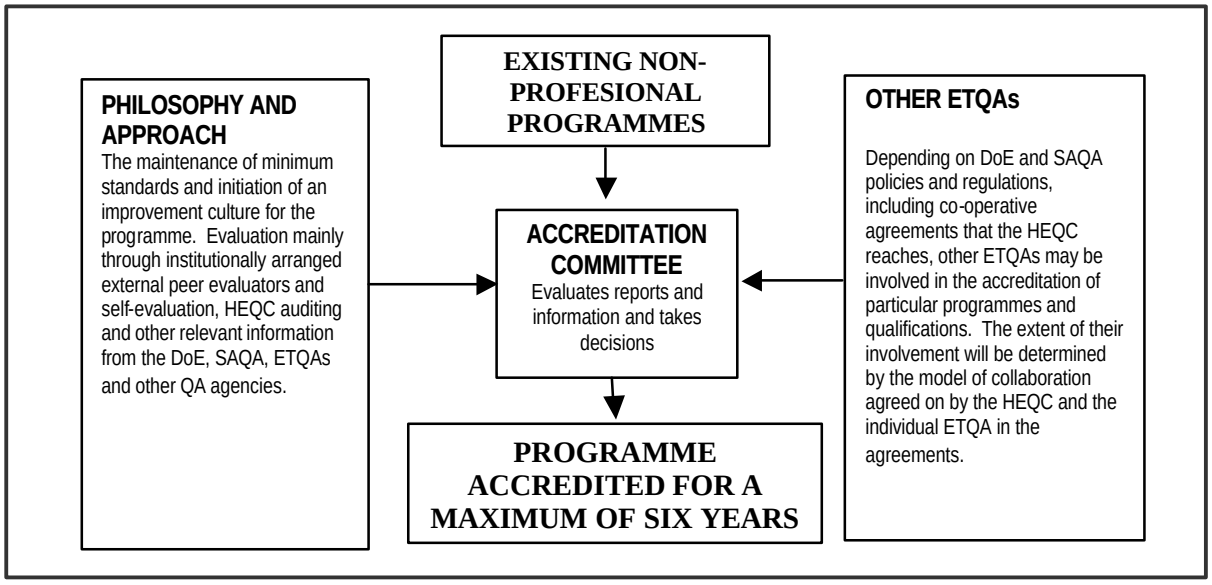
The HEQC has adopted the definition of programme as used in the draft New Academic Policy (NAP). A programme is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to one or more qualifications; in an outcomes-based system, a programme is designed to enable learners to achieve pre-specified exit level outcomes. A qualification is the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by an accredited institution. In the outcomes-based approach intrinsic to the NQF, a qualification signifies and formally certifies the demonstrated

achievement by a learner of a planned and purposeful combination of learning outcomes, at a specified level of performance.

A **new** programme is one which has not existed before or is a programme that has been **significantly changed**, i.e. when its purpose, outcomes and field of study have been changed to such an extent that they result in a change of 50% or more of the credits of the programme. A more detailed description of the accreditation process for new programmes and institutions is given in Appendix 2. Existing programmes are those programmes that have interim registration on the NQF and those new programmes that complete their first accreditation cycle.

The HEQC model for accreditation seeks to move in a trajectory that starts with clear accountability requirements for minimum standards and external evaluation. It intends to move the system towards a self-accreditation philosophy that strongly embraces an institutionally managed evaluation system. The model proposes a clear distinction between **new programmes**, where the accreditation process puts an emphasis on **accountability** through evaluation activities that are mainly external; and **existing programmes** where the emphasis is on **sustained improvement** mainly through institutionally managed evaluation and HEQC institutional auditing. New programmes and existing programmes will follow different accreditation arrangements and cycles. These are spelt out below.





a) New programmes

To attain accreditation status, new programmes must satisfy minimum standards to ensure that students develop the required levels of competence specified for the qualification or programme. Besides meeting all HEQC minimum standards, new professional or specialised programmes must meet the statutory licensure and other appropriate professional and work-based requirements. These measures are intended to protect students as well as the credibility of higher education qualifications on the NQF and to ensure national and international confidence in the quality of South African higher education. The accreditation of new programmes will be premised on strong accountability demands to ensure that only those programmes that can clearly demonstrate capacity or potential capacity are allowed to enter the system.

New programmes will be accredited for a maximum of six years depending on the duration of a programme. In the main the accreditation process for new programmes will depend on external evaluation. In accordance with DoE and SAQA policies and regulations, including the co-operation agreements that the HEQC signs, other ETQAs may be involved in the accreditation of a particular qualification. The model of collaboration agreed upon by the HEQC and individual ETQAs in the co-operation agreement will determine the nature of their involvement.

The process of accreditation of new programmes will consist of three phases, all of which are mandatory for new private institutions which want to offer new programmes. (See Appendix 2 for more details.) Existing public and private institutions may not be required to undertake all the elements of HEQC accreditation requirements. At least one site visit is mandatory for accreditation but such site visits may occur in any or more than one phase of the process.

The three phases of accreditation are:

Phase l: Candidacy to offer a programme
In this phase, the HEQC or other co-operating ETQA will focus on evaluating the evidence (policies, plans and implementation schedules) submitted by an institution on its programme capacity and institutional support to start offering a programme. The evidence presented on the arrangements for the quality of teaching and learning for a specific programme will also be scrutinised.

The institution is required to submit an application that includes the following:

a) A document with detailed plans and information on its capacity to meet the required minimum standards to offer the programme.
b) Confirmation that the qualification has been registered by SAQA on the NQF.
c) Confirmation that a private institution has applied to the DoE for registration to operate.

Phase 2: Mid-term check
This phase constitutes a performance and compliance check midway through the implementation of the programme to ensure that the institution has implemented the stated programme plan and has identified areas for urgent attention. This step provides an opportunity for an early warning about problem areas (to the institution and to the HEQC) as well as for appropriate developmental support where necessary. This step will scrutinise the implementation of the institutional plans and policies provided in the first phase in relation to the specific programmes submitted for accreditation.

Phase 3: Accreditation
Within one year of the first cohort of learners having graduated from a new programme, the institution must provide the HEQC with the following information:

a) A compliance with conditions report (where applicable). If these conditions have not been met, the HEQC may withdraw accreditation.
b) The success rates at the different levels (Year 1, 2 and so on) and throughput rates for the whole programme.
c) A self-analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of the programme.
d) An improvement plan in terms of (c).

In submitting the above information to the HEQC, the institution must follow the process outlined in Appendix 2 to determine the accreditation status of the new programme. The HEQC reserves the right to implement all or only some of the steps of the accreditation process. The award of accreditation will be valid for a maximum of six years depending on the duration of the new programme. Until a successful outcome in the third phase of the accreditation process, programmes may be designated as having “provisional accreditation”.

In addition to the accreditation process of the HEQC, new programmes will have to satisfy:

- Registration requirements by the DoE for private institutions offering specific learning programmes leading to qualifications.
- Approval requirements for funding purposes by the DoE for public institutions for activities in specified CESM fields and at specified levels as well as the need to obtain funding approval for any new qualifications.
- SAQA requirements for the registration of qualifications on the NQF.

b) Existing programmes

Existing programmes include those that have interim registration on the NQF and those new programmes that complete their first accreditation cycle. Because of statutory and other professional requirements, two types of existing programmes are further distinguished: existing non-professional programmes and existing professional programmes.

i) Existing non-professional programmes

The re-accreditation of existing non-professional programmes will be linked to an institutional self-accreditation process. The process entails evaluation of the institution's ability to maintain and improve existing programme quality above minimum standards. Obtaining self-accreditation status depends on the assessment made by the HEQC accreditation committee of the reports of both the institution's self-evaluation and external evaluation of programmes and departments, the results of the HEQC institutional audit reports, a sample of the HEQC programme evaluations, information provided by the DoE, SAQA, other ETQAs and any other related reports.

To attain institutional self-accreditation status for six years, institutions must ensure that programmes maintain minimum standards and initiate an improvement orientation. Having gained institutional self-accreditation status, the institution must set up an internal process to re-accredit all its existing programmes. These existing programmes need to satisfy the HEQC's generic and subject minimum threshold standards for programmes, to have a plan for the implementation of improvements above minimum standards, and to demonstrate an ability to implement and monitor the improvement plan. During the course of the six years, if institutions or programmes experience any changes that affect the programmes' ability to satisfy minimum standards, they must immediately report this to the HEQC.

After six years, when the validity of the self-accreditation status is over, the institution will have to undergo a second institutional self-accreditation process to be accredited for another six years. The ongoing re-accreditation of existing programmes will be dependent on judgements on the institution's self-accreditation capacity.

a) A programme achieves the status of existing programme after it has been accredited or has interim registration on the NQF.
b) Institutions will be asked to evaluate existing programmes on a six-year cycle.

c) The evaluation of existing programmes must include at minimum a self-evaluation of the programme, ideally followed by an external review. External evaluation need not focus on the programme level but at least on the department or school level in which the programme is located. In this way the financial and other burdens on institutions can be minimised on the basis of appropriate clustering of evaluation units.

d) The processes of self-evaluation and external reviews of programmes are initiated, organised and funded by institutions according to the HEQC guidelines.

e) Reports from the processes of self-evaluation and external review form part of the documentation to be submitted by an institution during an institutional audit.

f) Institutions gain self-accreditation status for six years after the HEQC accreditation committee assesses the information provided by: the HEQC institutional audit reports, a sample of HEQC and/or institutionally managed programme evaluations; and relevant reports from the DoE, SAQA, and other ETQAs.

g) On expiry of institutional self-accreditation status after the first cycle, the institution will undergo a second institutional self-accreditation process for another six years.

h) In addition to programme evaluations conducted by institutions and the normal cycle of HEQC institutional audits, the HEQC reserves the right to undertake its own external programme reviews.

i) An unfavourable evaluation by the HEQC will result in a range of decisions that can go from conditional accreditation of the affected programme(s) to the withdrawal of the accreditation of the affected programme(s). In the case where institutions are not given self-accreditation status, the HEQC will initiate alternative arrangements to determine which programmes could be re-accredited.

j) An institution is obliged to share its accreditation status and the accreditation status of its programmes with prospective and current learners.

ii) Existing professional programmes

Existing professional programmes will not follow the above process for their re-accreditation but will have to satisfy all the statutory and other professional requirements for licensure and professional practice. Moreover, depending on DoE and SAQA policies and regulations, including co-operation agreements entered into by the HEQC with other ETQAs, other ETQAs may be involved in the re-accreditation of an existing programme or qualification. The model of collaboration agreed upon by the HEQC and individual ETQA will determine the nature of their involvement.

a) Re-accreditation of existing professional programmes or other programmes linked to ETQAs recognised by the HEQC takes place in co-operation with the recognised ETQAs or accrediting bodies.

b) An external accrediting agency is recognised by the HEQC following the signing of a formal agreement specifying the nature of co-operation between the agency and the HEQC.

c) The process of re-accreditation is initiated, organised and funded in accordance with the agreements between the HEQC, the other external accrediting agency and the institution.

d) A favourable report by an external agency recognised by the HEQC results in the re-accreditation of the programme within that agency's focus, for a specified period of time.
e) In addition to the normal cycle of accreditation processes conducted by recognised external accrediting agencies, the HEQC reserves the right to undertake its own external programme reviews of any programme within the focus of any other recognised agency.
f) An unfavourable report from an accreditation procedure conducted by a recognised external agency leads to consequences ranging from conditional accreditation to the withdrawal of accreditation of the affected programmes.
g) An institution is obliged to share its accreditation status and the accreditation status of its programmes with current and prospective learners.

7. STANDARDS AND CRITERIA

In its *Founding Document,* the HEQC indicated that it would focus on and ensure threshold or minimum standards for public and private institutions within a common national framework.

The HEQC sees minimum standards as a necessary measure

> to instill public confidence in the quality of higher education provision, facilitate articulation between higher education institutions and programmes, and provide the foundations for the development and support of excellence at all levels of higher education and training. (*Founding Document,* 2001, p. 8)

The case for minimum standards is informed by a need to:

a) Determine the level at which provision is acceptable with regard to higher education.
b) Determine progress in moving towards goals and mission.
c) Identify problem areas.
d) Contribute to continuous improvement.
e) Protect learners.

When conducting an evaluation the HEQC will make judgements based on minimum standards that will be set for the different phases within the accreditation process in relation to the following areas:

General provider standards (HEQC)	(e.g. infrastructural capacity) Will be linked to the institutional efficiency requirements of the DoE and the institution's own governance structures
General programme standards (HEQC)	Relating to, for example, compliance with the level descriptors in the proposed New Academic Policy.
Specific programme/qualification standards	Relating to standards registered on the NQF or the requirements of the relevant ETQAs

The fact that the HEQC will require minimum standards in relation to these three areas does not mean that they are the only areas on which the HEQC accreditation process will focus. The quality assurance system proposed by the HEQC has a focus on teaching and learning and consequently the accreditation process will emphasise all those elements that relate to student achievement. Thus, the HEQC will evaluate teaching and learning in relation to: inputs (e.g. staff qualifications); processes (e.g. effective provision for experiential learning); and, outputs (e.g. student achievement). The HEQC will look into the ways in which teaching and learning inputs, processes and outputs were used by the provider during the planning, implementing and monitoring of new programmes at institutional, faculty, departmental and programme levels. A more detailed description of the standards will be developed in the various protocols to be designed by the HEQC.

A set of institutional and general programme criteria and standards will be defined by the HEQC and tested for consistency against international and local current practices in the field of accreditation and external quality assessment. The development of standards in relation to these areas will be monitored constantly by the HEQC with a view to raising the threshold. In establishing minimum standards the HEQC will take into account the benchmarks on institutional performance established by the DoE, and on which institutions have to report to the DoE. The link between quality assurance and standards setting can be enriched by a feedback loop when the HEQC reports on programmes and qualifications within its jurisdiction.

8. HEQC CO-OPERATION WITH OTHER ETQAS

The HEQC, although accredited by SAQA as the band ETQA for HE, has to operate alongside other ETQAs in HE. SAQA has recognised the co-ordinating role of the HEQC in this regard, and the HEQC itself has indicated its willingness to engage in co-operation agreements with other ETQAs in a search for coherence, lack of duplication and a tolerable accountability regime for HE institutions.[8]

As the HEQC is the band ETQA for HE, it has a broad jurisdiction for quality assurance across different provider sectors and programme areas. The DoE requires that the learning programmes offered by public providers be accredited by the HEQC as a precondition to make funding decisions. Similarly, accreditation of learning programmes is a precondition for the registration of private providers with the DoE.

In keeping with the SAQA requirement of one provider: one ETQA, the HEQC will enter into agreements with professional councils[9] and SETA ETQAs[10] in order to co-ordinate quality assurance activities. These agreements will take into account the criteria stipulated below within the context of a co-operation model. Letters of Agreement will cover specific qualifications and institutions. It is possible that a particular body could have agreements that encompass a

[8] *Council on Higher Education Annual Report* 2000/2001, page 11
[9] Professional bodies have a statutory responsibility to quality assure specific qualifications that lead to registration or licensing.
[10] ETQAs are accredited by SAQA for specific qualifications.

combination of the proposed models. The following issues will primarily determine the choice of model:

- Convergence of interests and objectives in relation to qualifications.
- Level of qualification or qualifications.
- Single purpose or multipurpose institutions.
- New institution plus new programme.
- Existing institution plus new programme.
- Public or private institutions.
- Re-accreditation of existing programme(s).
- Due attention to the legal responsibilities and requirements of the relevant bodies.

Principles underpinning the selection of a model of co-operation include:

- A lack of ambiguity in recording objectives, division of costs, operational details and conformity to agreed criteria regarding processes, delineation of responsibilities and authorities.
- Mechanisms for resolution of conflicts.
- Respect for legal jurisdictions and requirements.
- Protection of third parties' (learners'/institutions') interests and rights.
- Co-ordination of modalities agreed beforehand.
- Clarification of values, goals and objectives of both parties.
- Agreement on outcomes of processes.
- Agreement on monitoring of goal performance.

Model	Description
Delegation	❑ Agreement on nature of and criteria for delegation. ❑ HEQC delegates decision-making on accreditation outcomes. ❑ Protocols established for information sharing. ❑ Provider interacts primarily with the delegated body. ❑ Reporting, procedures, processes and manuals of the professional body/ETQA used. ❑ Provider will follow accreditation cycles of delegated body.
Partial delegation	❑ With due consultation, the HEQC reserves decision-making on accreditation outcomes. ❑ Roles and responsibilities outlined in relation to specific processes. ❑ A combination of procedures, processes and manuals. ❑ Reporting to the HEQC can be via the relevant ETQA or body. ❑ Provider interacts primarily with the HEQC. ❑ Agreed upon cycles of accreditation.
Partnership	❑ The HEQC and the relevant ETQA or body jointly discharge functions relating to accreditation. ❑ Decision-making rights on accreditation outcomes by mutual agreement between the HEQC and partner body. ❑ Provider follows policies, procedures and manuals of the HEQC. ❑ HEQC cycles of accreditation.
Association	❑ Information sharing and possible involvement by the HEQC in activities of other ETQAs and vice versa.

The selection of a model will depend on the criteria identified in the previous section and should enable both parties to discharge their mandates effectively. The table above provides a description of possible models, focusing on the location of decision-making and the reporting lines for the provider.

9. OPERATING PRINCIPLES FOR THE HEQC ACCREDITATION FRAMEWORK

The further development and proposed implementation of this framework will be guided by the following operating principles:

- The HEQC *Accreditation Framework* will be intelligible to all stakeholders.
- The operationalisation of the HEQC *Accreditation Framework* will take into account the requirements of both education and training within higher education.
- The operationalisation of the HEQC *Accreditation Framework* will have a developmental orientation without sacrificing accountability.
- The HEQC will realise the developmental orientation of its *Accreditation Framework* through the institution of feedback loops that provide opportunity for the improvement of quality provision.
- The operationalisation of the HEQC *Accreditation Framework* will be simple, manageable and adaptable as well as efficient and effective.
- The operationalisation of the HEQC *Accreditation Framework* will be subject to ongoing monitoring in relation to its own efficiency and effectiveness.

GLOSSARY

Accreditation - recognition status granted for a stipulated period of time to a new programme after an HEQC evaluation indicates that it meets or exceeds minimum thresholds of educational quality.

Programme - is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to one or more qualifications; in an outcomes-based system, a programme is designed to enable learners to achieve pre-specified exit level outcomes.

Qualification - is the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by an accredited provider. It also signifies and formally certifies the demonstrated achievement by a learner of a planned and purposeful combination of learning outcomes, at a specified level of performance.

New programmes - are programmes offered for the first time at an institution or an institutional site, or are programmes which have changed more than 50% of their contents or have changed their mode of delivery or changed their learning outcomes or their NQF level.

Existing programmes - are those programmes that have interim registration on the NQF and those new programmes that complete their first accreditation cycle.

Professional programmes - are those that must meet statutory licensure and other appropriate professional and work-based requirements.

Candidacy – a status granted to a provider that demonstrates potential to meet the minimum standards of provision determined by the HEQC for the intended programme and qualification. The provider can begin to offer the programme to the first cohort of students.

Mid-Term Check – an HEQC check to assess the progress made by the institution in achieving the objectives of the plans submitted in implementing the actual programme, and in improving the areas pointed out by the HEQC as not meeting the required minimum standards.

Minimum standards – stipulations benchmarks of minimum necessary conditions of provision by higher education institutions in order to have a programme accredited by the HEQC. They are necessary to instill public confidence in the quality of higher education provision, to facilitate articulation between higher education institutions and programmes, and to provide the foundations for the development and support of excellence at all levels of higher education and training.

Re-accreditation - the re-submission of a programme for accreditation after six years of its first accreditation by the HEQC. It entails the examination by the HEQC of the institution's ability to maintain and improve existing programme quality above minimum standards.

Institutional self-accreditation - status attained for six years after a HEQC evaluation has found the institution to satisfy its requirements for the reliability and effectiveness of institutional quality assurance systems and processes, institutionally managed programme evaluations and other relevant information. With this status, institutions establish an internally managed evaluation system to re-accredit their existing non-professional programmes.

Institutional accreditation - status attained after an HEQC evaluation has found that a new private higher education institution has the potential and capability to meet or exceed minimum thresholds of educational provision and quality for higher education.

Institutionally Managed Evaluation - includes self-evaluation and external evaluation of learning programmes. All evaluation activities are initiated, managed and financed by the institution itself.

APPENDIX I

KEY ACCREDITATION PROCESSES

a) Decision-making and timeframes

- The HEQC will establish an Accreditation Committee, which will be chaired by the chairperson of the HEQC and consist of experts together with sector representatives to consider accreditation submissions from public and private institutions. The Accreditation Committee will make recommendations to the HEQC on the quality assurance mechanisms of institutions and the accreditation of learning programmes, for ratification. Four meetings will be held per annum and scheduled to coincide with the HEQC meetings.

- Institutions must submit their applications for accreditation[11] at least three months prior to the date of a specific Accreditation Committee meeting. This will provide the HEQC Secretariat with sufficient time to process the application and present it at the Accreditation Committee meeting for recommendation. The Accreditation Committee's recommendations are tabled at the HEQC meeting for ratification.

- The HEQC will advise institutions of the requirements and timeframes for the submission of reports, during the mid-term check and accreditation phases. The accreditation decisions made by the HEQC on the various phases will be communicated to the institution in writing, within fourteen working days of the HEQC meeting.

b) Appeals procedure

- Institutions that have received an unsuccessful accreditation outcome from the HEQC may lodge an appeal with the CHE Appeals Committee. The institution must give the HEQC notice of its intention to appeal within ten working days of receipt of the accreditation outcome. Within a further thirty working days, a letter must be submitted with the appropriate fee (in the case of private institutions), which sets out the grounds for appeal against the reasons given by the HEQC for not awarding accreditation.

- The Appeals Committee will not consider any new information provided by the provider but will deliberate on the following documents:

    a) The original application
    b) Report from the evaluator(s)
    c) Letter of appeal

[11] This refers to applications for the Candidacy for Accreditation phase.

- The Appeals Committee will pay particular attention to the fairness and reasonableness of processes and procedures followed in the initial application submitted by the provider. The finding of the Appeals Committee will be referred to the Accreditation Committee, which will make a final recommendation for consideration by the HEQC. This outcome will be provided to the provider in writing within fourteen working days of the HEQC meeting.

c) Public statements

Given the timeframes involved in evaluating applications for accreditation, institutions should avoid making any public statements in this regard. Premature statements on the outcome may result in embarrassment for the provider or even provide cause for litigation by learners. These statements should therefore be confined to the status of the application with the HEQC at a specific time. The provider should not create any expectation that accreditation will be awarded or that it will be awarded at a specific time.

APPENDIX 2

ACCREDITATION PHASES FOR NEW PROGRAMMES

INTRODUCTION

The process of accreditation of new programmes will be done in three consecutive phases: candidacy to offer a programme; mid-term check; and accreditation. Each phase constitutes a different step in the process of accreditation, and has different purposes and different requirements for both the provider and the HEQC. What follows describes each of these three phases, explains their purposes and lists the procedural requirements necessary for each of them.

PHASE 1: CANDIDACY TO OFFER A PROGRAMME

Purpose

The purpose of phase one is to establish that a provider has the potential to meet the minimum standards of provision determined by the HEQC for the intended programme and qualification.

1.1 The provider is required to submit a letter of application accompanied by the following supporting documentation:

- A document providing information on:
  a) Programmes and qualifications it intends to offer.
  b) Its capacity to meet the required minimum standards to offer these.
  c) Detailed plans to attain them if minimum standards have not been achieved at the time of submitting the application.
- A statement from SAQA confirming that the qualification has been registered on the NQF.
- A statement from the DoE confirming that the private provider has applied for registration to operate. Public institutions must submit a letter from the DoE authorising the institution to offer the programme in terms of the accepted institutional mixes and niches.

1.2 Staff in the Accreditation Division of the HEQC will:

1.2.1 Screen the application for completeness and determine the overall accreditation process route.

1.2.2 Appoint at least two trained peer evaluators (subject specialists) to evaluate the application against the specified criteria.

1.2.3 Arrange for a site visit if necessary.

1.2.4 Table the evaluators' recommendations at the HEQC Accreditation Committee meeting for final decision.

1.2.5 Communicate to the applying institution the outcome of phase 1 of the accreditation process including the decision arrived at by the Accreditation Committee, suggestions for improvement, and other concerns.

1.2.6 Make the decision outcome public (to students, parents and other interested members of the public).

1.3 The institution has:

1.3.1 The right to appeal against the outcome within one month of the date of receipt of the decision from the HEQC.

1.3.2 The obligation to make the HEQC's decision known to all potential students.

1.4 The CHE Appeals Committee:

1.4.1 Will deal with the appeals submitted by institutions, focusing on the appropriateness and fairness of the process followed.

1.4.2 Will release its decision to the institution concerned. The decisions of the CHE Appeals Committee are final.

PHASE 2: MID-TERM CHECK

Purpose

The purpose of phase 2 is to assess the progress made by the institution in achieving the objectives of the plans submitted in phase 1, in implementing the actual programme, and in improving the areas pointed out by the HEQC as not meeting the required minimum standards.

In this phase:

2.1 The institution must submit a mid-term report that consists of a self-evaluation of the progress made in implementing the plans submitted in phase 1 and of the steps taken to meet the recommendations and suggestions made by the HEQC at the end of phase 1.

2.2 The HEQC staff will:

2.2.1 Appoint evaluators to assess the mid-term report and arrange a site visit if necessary.

2.2.2 Table the recommendations of the evaluators at the Accreditation Committee and, based on them, recommend to the HEQC whether the provider may proceed to the next phase of accreditation.

2.3 The HEQC will:

2.3.1 Make a decision on the recommendation of the Accreditation Committee. At this stage the HEQC may still require the provider to meet certain criteria, compliance with which will be evaluated in the next phase.

2.3.2 Communicate the decision to the provider.

2.3.3 Instruct the provider in the case of a negative outcome, to terminate the programme within a timeframe determined by the HEQC, putting in place appropriate measures to protect students already enrolled in the programme.

2.4 The institution has:

2.4.1 The right to appeal against the outcome within a month of the date of receipt of the decision from the HEQC.

2.4.2 The obligation to make the HEQC's decision known to all enrolled students.

2.5 The CHE Appeals Committee:

2.5.1 Will deal with the appeals submitted by institutions, focusing on the appropriateness and fairness of the process followed.

2.5.2 Will release its decision to the institution concerned. The decisions of the CHE Appeals Committee are final.

PHASE 3: ACCREDITATION

Purpose

The purpose of phase 3 is to ascertain whether the provider has achieved the required minimum standards of provision established by the HEQC and has developed appropriate institutional mechanisms to monitor and improve the quality of the programme.

3.1 In order to proceed with phase 3 of the process of accreditation, within a year of the graduation of the first cohort of learners the provider must submit a Self-Evaluation Report to the HEQC containing the following information:

3.1.1 The degree of compliance with the conditions stipulated by the HEQC in phase 2 (if applicable). If these conditions have not been met, the HEQC may decline to accredit the programme in question.

3.1.2 The success rates obtained at the different levels (Year 1, 2 and so on) of study of the programme, and the overall throughput rates for the whole programme.

3.1.3 A self-analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of the programme.

3.1.4 An improvement plan in terms of 3.1.3.

3.2 The HEQC will:

3.2.1 Appoint evaluators to assess the self-evaluation report and undertake a site visit where applicable.

3.2.2 Based on the Accreditation Committee analysis of the self-evaluation report and of the site visit report (where applicable), recommend whether the provider may be awarded institutional and programme accreditation.

3.2.3 Require, when necessary, that the provider comply with conditions stipulated by the Accreditation Committee, which will be evaluated within a timeframe determined by the HEQC.

3.2.4 Communicate its decision to the provider:

a) If the accreditation is awarded, it will be valid for a period determined by the HEQC. Once the accreditation of a programme has expired it must be submitted for re-accreditation.

b) A negative outcome means that the provider must terminate the programme within a timeframe determined by the HEQC.

Note: Until a programme has successfully completed the process of accreditation in phase 3, it may be referred to as having "provisional accreditation".

3.3 The institution has:

3.3.1 The right to appeal against the outcome within one month of the date of receipt of the decision from HEQC.

3.3.2 The obligation to make the HEQC's decision known to all enrolled and potential students.

3.4 The CHE Appeals Committee:

3.4.1 Will deal with the appeals submitted by institutions focusing on the appropriateness and fairness of the administrative procedure.

3.4.2 Will release its decision to the institution concerned. The decisions of the CHE Appeals Committee are final.