External Evaluation Report

of the

Higher Education Quality Committee

(HEQC)

of the

Council on Higher Education,

South Africa

February 2009

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Acronyms

AUQA	Australian Universities Quality Agency
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
DST	Department of Science and Technology
EQAA	External Quality Assurance Agency
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
INQAAHE	International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education
MBA	Master of Business Administration
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
MRA	Mutual Recognition Agreement
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NRF	National Research Foundation
QA	Quality Assurance
QCTO	Quality Council for Trades and Occupations
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Assurer
Umalusi	Quality Assurance Council for General and Further Education

SECTION A: BACKGROUND TO THE REVIEW

1.   The Higher Education Quality Committee

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is an independent statutory body set up in 1998 according to the Higher Education Act of 1997. It advises the Minister of Education on all matters pertaining to higher education and has executive responsibility for quality assurance in higher education.

The CHE exercises its executive responsibility through a permanent committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The HEQC was officially launched in May 2001, with the appointment of its first Board and Executive Director and the release of its Founding Document. According to the Higher Education Act of 1997, the statutory responsibility of the HEQC is to:

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

To the above three areas of responsibility, the Board of the HEQC added capacity development for quality assurance.

In its Founding Document, published in January 2001, the HEQC identified as a critical success factor "the development of an analytical and self-reflective approach to quality assurance premised on continuous self-assessment", not only within the higher education institutions which it evaluates, but also within the HEQC (2001,25). The purpose of this report is to contribute to the process of continuous self-assessment within the HEQC.

The HEQC initially formed three directorates to undertake its work: Programme Accreditation and Co-ordination, Institutional Audits, and Quality Promotion and Capacity Development. A fourth directorate – the National Reviews Directorate – was established in 2006 to focus on reviews of specific national programmes and qualifications. In 2007, a portfolio of Co-ordination and Stakeholder Affairs was created within the office of the Deputy Executive Director.

The operational structure of the HEQC now consists of:
- The Programme Accreditation Directorate;
- The National Reviews Directorate;
- The Institutional Audits Directorate;
- The Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Directorate;
- The Co-ordination and Stakeholder Affairs Portfolio.

2.   Terms of Reference for the evaluation panel

An external evaluation of the HEQC was commissioned by the HEQC Board in terms of the Founding Document requirement that there be an external evaluation every five years. The Board

defined the goal of the external evaluation as formative, i.e. to improve the work of the HEQC in all its core functions. A précis from the Terms of Reference follows; while the complete document is attached as Appendix 1.

The panel was required to indicate whether, and to what extent, the HEQC had achieved its main objectives during the period 2001 to the present in terms of:

- Promoting quality and quality assurance in higher education in South Africa;
- Auditing quality assurance mechanisms at higher education institutions in South Africa;
- Accrediting programmes of higher education;
- Building capacity in the field of higher education quality assurance;
- Co-ordinating quality assurance initiatives in higher education in South Africa.

Using the following criteria, the evaluation panel was to assess the extent to which the HEQC had been able to discharge its mandate with reference to:

- Appropriateness and relevance i.e. the extent to which the HEQC system and its components are fit for their purpose and respond to the specific context in which they operate;
- Effectiveness i.e. the extent to which the system is able to achieve its objectives;
- Efficiency i.e. the competence and economy with which the system works.

The evaluation panel was requested to take into account good international practice. The HEQC itself had used the INQAAHE (International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education) guidelines for good practice as a benchmark.

3.   Methodology for the external evaluation

The HEQC wanted the evaluation to help improve its performance. In this context, the HEQC secretariat prepared a Self-Review Report, which was approved by the HEQC Board[1], to be followed by an external evaluation.

A panel for the external evaluation was appointed:

- Dr Maria Jose Lemaitre, Academic Director, International Institute for Quality, Chile (Chair);
- Professor Chrissie Boughey, Dean, Teaching and Learning, and Director, Centre for Higher Education Research, Teaching and Learning, Rhodes University;
- Professor Relebohile (Lebo) Moletsane, Director: Gender and Development Unit, Human Sciences Research Council;
- Professor Johan Muller, Director of the Graduate School of Humanities and Deputy Dean, Research and Post-graduate Affairs, University of Cape Town;

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[1] There had been several internal meetings to discuss initial reports put together by each director before these were consolidated into a single report. The HEQC Board also commented on drafts of the consolidated report.

- Dr Tembeka Mpako-Ntusi, Director: Research, Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Dr Lemaitre stepped in as chair after the original chair, who had also been an international expert, fell ill.

A series of interviews, including two site visits, was organised for the panel by the HEQC secretariat over a period of 6 days. The HEQC took care to include a range of stakeholders with different characteristics and different interests and relationships to the HEQC. The interviews included interviews with the CHE Council Chair, the HEQC Board Chair and a morning with the HEQC Board Executive Committee. The panel also interviewed members of the HEQC staff, in different combinations, on several occasions. For a list of all the interviews, consult the full interview schedule attached as Appendix 2.

Apart from the interviews, the panel had access to, and could request, any of the HEQC documents in order to gather evidence for any claims made in interviews. The panel consulted the published documents of the HEQC and its application forms, but also followed areas of concern through, for example, minutes of the HEQC Board and its committees, especially the Accreditation Committee, correspondence between the HEQC and institutions and evaluators' reports. Other documents consulted included selected audit reports, institutional Self-Evaluation Reports and institutional profiles.

The HEQC appointed Mr AB Heyns to take notes at all the interviews and panel discussions and Ms Erica Gillard to write the report for the panel. Ms Gillard was also present at all interviews and discussions. Ms Pam du Toit, Project Administrator in the office of the Executive Director, provided support for the panel.

An oral report was given to the CEO of the CHE, Dr Cheryl de la Rey and the Executive Director of the HEQC, Dr Lis Lange, as well as some other staff of the HEQC on the final morning of the review.

Members of the panel commented extensively on drafts of the report. A third draft of the report was sent to a critical reader – Professor Peter Vale, Nelson Mandela Professor of Politics at Rhodes University – for comment, after which it was revised for the final time.

4. Nature of the report

The report first discusses the context within which the HEQC works (Section B) because this sets the tone for evaluating the appropriateness of the HEQC's goals and how it has performed its functions. This section also identifies issues and problems which the panel thinks are beyond the HEQC's control, but which affect its effectiveness.

The report then proceeds to evaluate the HEQC's goals (Section C), its core functions (Section D) and its governance and resources (Section E). Each section attempts to give a flavour of the issues raised in interviews in addition to the panel's evaluation against the criteria of appropriateness, effectiveness and efficiency. Commendations and recommendations are highlighted within each section.

Section F evaluates the HEQC against the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice. Although much of the same ground is covered as in previous sections, the criteria are organised slightly differently. The panel thought that direct reference to each INQAAHE guideline in a separate section might be useful to the HEQC.

Section G concludes the report and lists commendations and recommendations made in the body of the report.

Throughout their deliberations, panel members were aware that many of the issues and concerns they noted had already been identified by the HEQC in its Self-Review Report.

5.   National context

The HEQC came into being in 2001 after an intense period of policy formulation following the 1994 democratic election. The Education White Paper 3 "A programme for the Transformation of Higher Education" identified quality as one of the principles on which to build a transformed higher education system.

The new national framework for South African higher education envisaged three policy instruments to steer the system towards improved quality: planning, funding and quality assurance. In their implementation, however, the links between these three levers are complex, with responsibility residing in different locations. The panel recognises the continuing evolution of the higher education system in South Africa wherein partners are still developing ways of working together. This is taking place in an environment where all elements of the higher education system were, and are still being, reformulated. For example, at the same time that the CHE and the HEQC were being established and were drafting framing and other documents, the Ministry of Education was also drafting a National Plan for Higher Education and establishing new planning and funding systems. Other bodies in higher education, such as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which has responsibility for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), and with its parallel links with the Department of Labour (DoL), were going through similar processes.

In listening to the concerns of people in higher education, however, the panel has not found evidence that the levers for steering the system are adequately coordinated. While recognising that the relationship between these levers and the various bodies involved is complex, the panel believes that the undeveloped nature of their co-ordination reduces the impact of quality assurance within higher education and makes progress towards quality in the terms defined by the HEQC Founding Document difficult to achieve.

One of the important disjunctures between steering levers identified by the panel is that between quality assurance frameworks and the funding formula. For example, the current funding formula for higher education tends to encourage similar developments within higher education institutions (providing incentives for post-graduate enrolments and research for example). This is at the same time as the HEQC frameworks encourage differentiation, through the distinctions of fitness for and of purpose. The panel was told by almost everyone that the debate about differentiation has to be re-opened, and hopes that this will occur and that one of the consequences will be to review the funding formula for higher education.

An improvement in the co-ordination of steering mechanisms requires clarity about policy priorities as well as implementation processes. Organised and explicit dedication to streamlining matters will be required. There are, however, some immediate improvements that could be made to co-ordinate the steering levers. For example, quality assurance insights could feed into higher education planning and priorities by providing input into the size and shape analysis of the system much more effectively than they appear to do so now, despite representatives of the Department of

Education (DoE) sitting on various committees of the CHE and the HEQC. These matters will be discussed in Sections C and D.

6.   Quality context

The panel heard that several bodies have responsibility for quality assurance matters in higher education; this includes the DoE, the SAQA, the National Research Foundation (NRF), professional bodies, Education and Training Quality Assurers (ETQAs) and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs). Following a long-awaited review of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), the SAQA will transfer standard setting to three Quality Councils (Umalusi for the schooling sector, the CHE for higher education and the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations for all qualifications falling within its jurisdiction).2 There is still some uncertainty about how standard setting will occur in the new situation and how the CHE will address its responsibilities.

The HEQC will have to find ways to prevent overlap and to co-ordinate responsibilities for qualifications in the higher education bands with the Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO) so that consistent criteria are used for similar qualifications. There are expectations that the new Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF) will provide some parameters within which to work, because the qualifications framework has been streamlined to some extent, but there are still some uncertainties within the HEQF3 that will have to be clarified and managed.

The panel understands that some coordinating practices are in place (regular meetings, seats on each other's boards) and that relationships between partners are collegial. Especially in the light of major uncertainties discussed above, however, coordination seems to have been insufficient, leading to overlap, duplication, and sometimes confusion for institutions.

The HEQC has been given overall responsibility for quality assurance; it is important that the co-ordination between the various bodies reflects this in a set of simplified processes and consistent criteria. The panel urges the HEQC, as the ETQA with primary responsibility for the Higher Education and Training Band of the NQF, to continue with its efforts to clarify responsibilities and processes.

Recommendation 1
The panel recommends that the HEQC continues with its efforts to clarify responsibilities and to streamline and simplify processes for quality assurance in higher education.

7.   Higher education context

The HEQC came into being in a higher education system which, in many cases, had been unregulated, where policy was being formulated, not always in a co-ordinated manner, and where many institutions were being merged. Other elements of the context included:

- Wide differentiation and contestation about whether or how this differentiation should be acknowledged.

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2 Umalusi has responsibility for levels 1 to 4 of the NQF; the CHE has responsibility for levels 5 to 10 and the QCTO for all qualifications falling in its jurisdiction from levels 1 to 10.

3 For example, about coursework masters degrees.

- Less funding for institutions that, at the same time, were enrolling a more diverse student body than ever before, requiring increased and new forms of support.
- The need to develop different approaches to teaching and learning strategies and practices.
- Insufficient funding from the National Students Financial Aid Scheme, which added to the pressures on students as well as on institutions.

There also does not appear to be any clear understanding about what is required from higher education to secure the future of the country and how quality matters should be located within this response. A view was expressed to the panel that higher education itself faces a struggle for legitimacy and is often not valued in public and political debate.

From the interviews, the panel noted a lack of clarity about the differences between universities and universities of technology, between public and private providers of higher education, and between universities and the Further Education and Training (FET) sector in the bands where there was overlap. The panel believes that clear expectations for the different institutional categories and the recognition that quality can be found in any of them could be a significant factor in the contribution of higher education to national development.

The panel recognises the constraints facing higher education in South Africa, but would like to highlight two main issues, which have not been sufficiently addressed. These are the need to deal with differentiation among institutions, and the need to address student diversity, particularly within a framework of transformation, as is clearly stated in the HEQC principles and documentation. These issues have not always been properly understood by institutions nor have issues of quality as fitness for and of purpose. The panel believes that lack of policy clarity on these matters affects all other levels of practice. This will be discussed further in Section 8.

In the following sections, the panel reviews the goals of the HEQC in a general way, drawing on their evaluations of the overall situation. The statutory responsibilities of the HEQC to:

- Promote quality assurance in higher education;
- Audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions;
- Accredit programmes of higher education;
- are discussed in the same order in the next sections, with the addition of the other areas of responsibility assigned to the HEQC by its Board, namely to:
- Build capacity in the field of higher education quality assurance, and
- Co-ordinate quality assurance activities in higher education.

8. Promoting quality assurance in higher education

The HEQC's Founding Document provides the following mission and vision:

> The HEQC is committed to a quality driven higher education system that contributes to socio-economic development, social justice and innovative scholarship in South Africa. To achieve this end, the HEQC will support the development, maintenance and enhancement of the quality of public and private higher education provision in order to enable a range of stakeholders to benefit from effective higher education and training. The central objective of the HEQC is to ensure that providers effectively and efficiently deliver education, training, research and community service which are of high quality and which produce socially useful and enriching knowledge as well as a relevant range of graduate skills and competencies necessary for social and economic progress. The policies and programmes of the HEQC will be guided by the above commitments and objectives.[4]

The HEQC chose to design a quality assurance system that was "fit for contextual purpose i.e., a system capable of dealing with issues such as the nexus between equity and quality in relation to educational provision, a system that could address the different ways in which institutional disadvantage was carried over into the new reconfigured higher education system, and, finally, a system which focuses on the quality of provision in the three core functions in a manner in which the link between social justice imperatives and academic standards could be made in an intellectually credible and socially responsive manner" (Mala Singh, quoted in Self-Review Report, 2008, 16). The Self-Review Report states further that the HEQC sought to "link quality and quality assurance to the socio-political objectives of higher education as much as to its intellectual purposes" (2008, 18).

From its inception, the HEQC started to develop a far more nuanced view of its brief than the statutory responsibilities of the Higher Education Act of 1997.

In reviewing the HEQC goals, the panel would like to differentiate between the promotion of quality assurance and that of quality.

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[4] Quoted in Self-Review Report, 2008, 16. Founding Document, 2004, 5.

With regard to the promotion of quality assurance, the panel believes that the HEQC has been successful in developing a credible quality assurance system for South African higher education and has worked well with institutions to develop their own quality assurance mechanisms, especially through the audit process. The developmental focus of the HEQC and its progressive and consultative way of working with institutions while developing frameworks has paid dividends. The panel was told consistently that institutions saw quality as their responsibility, but that the HEQC was a partner in their endeavours. The panel observes that monitoring and implementing quality assurance processes has been good in the present stage, but can be strengthened with regard to following up quality improvement plans in future quality assurance cycles (see later discussion).

Commendation 1
The panel commends the HEQC for the professionalism with which it has created a strong and reliable quality assurance system for South African higher education and for working with institutions to develop their own quality assurance mechanisms, especially through the audit process.

The panel understands quality promotion as all those actions that lead to the embedding of quality in the activities of an institution. This starts with the definition of quality, which encompasses fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose and this is explicit in HEQC goals.

The HEQC Founding Document relates fitness for purpose to a "specified mission within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity". Fitness of purpose can only be evaluated in relation to "national goals, priorities and targets" (The HEQC Founding Document, 2004, 14). To elaborate, the panel understands fitness for purpose as the requirement that an institution complies with its stated purposes, whatever they are. Recognising that there is value in institutions having different mission statements, a wide range of different purposes will be met by higher education institutions in any country. Fitness of purpose deals with the quality and relevance of the stated purpose of an institution. The panel argues that any country requires higher education institutions to have a wide range of purposes in order to meet the multiple needs of students, employers and other stakeholders. At the same time, it recognises that, in South Africa, it is essential that institutional purposes are attuned with national goals, priorities and targets, and therefore, they should be assessed against them.

The panel believes that full expression of quality as fitness for purpose is curtailed by several factors. These include limited recognition of institutional differentiation, limited definition of transformation in the HEQC criteria and limited understanding of transformation in institutions.

There are many instances in the HEQC documentation where transformation is understood in its broader sense. For example, the Criteria for Institutional Audits lists some of the transformational purposes and objectives for higher education as including "increased equity and access opportunities for previously marginalised groups, and greater responsiveness to local, regional and national needs in and through teaching and research" (2004, 3-4). The Framework for Institutional Audits notes that one of the elements of the HEQC's approach to quality is whether the institution addresses "transformational challenges for the development of individual students as well as the requirements of social and economic development" (2004, 5). The Self-Review Report quotes the

Founding Document and defines quality as "fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation within a fitness of purpose framework based on national goals, priorities and targets" (2008, 17). This is further reinforced on the same page of the report, when it explains the two-fold meaning of transformation: individual transformation, focusing on personal growth, and societal transformation, focused on the "requirements of social development and economic and employment growth".

Many institutions, however, appear to limit the understanding of transformation to demographics of staff and students, without linking the concept to teaching and learning practices, which are essential for the transformation of students entering higher education. Indeed, from some accounts, it appears that some audit panel members might also hold the more narrow view.

The panel believes that the HEQC has been successful in positioning quality assurance at the centre of debate within higher education, in creating awareness about quality and in helping institutions to develop self-regulatory processes. At the same time, however, the panel believes that the HEQC could pay more attention to developing an understanding of the nuances within the quality debate.

Recommendation 2
The panel recommends that the HEQC gives attention to promoting debate on, and to developing a better understanding of the links and differences between, fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose, and ways in which these lead to individual and social transformation.

In looking further at different areas of the HEQC's work, the panel suggests that, in order not to compromise the credibility it has already developed, the HEQC should clarify for itself and for institutions the differences between the following quality assurance mechanisms:
- Control /compliance: largely manifested in programme accreditation;
- Accountability: largely manifested in national reviews;
- Improvement: largely manifested in institutional audits.

Currently, these mechanisms seem to be dealt with in a similar manner. For the future, it seems important to differentiate the purposes they serve, since this has an impact on the types of criteria used, the procedures applied and the approach the HEQC takes.

In the case of the accreditation of new programmes, the main objective is quality control, that is, to make sure that each new approved programme meets pre-determined minimum requirements. The HEQC either approves or rejects the proposal, and the institution must abide with that decision[5].

National reviews deal with existing, rather than new, programmes. The objective is largely about accountability[6], and, therefore, the HEQC review is intended to ensure that programmes being

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[5] Accepting that there must be an appeal process.
[6] The panel recognises that the National Reviews also incorporate some of the features of an audit. This will be discussed more fully in sections 10 and 15.

offered are of an acceptable quality. The fact that the review covers all programmes of a kind in the country adds to it an important benchmarking effect.

Institutional audits are more focused on quality improvement and promotion. Based on the HEQC's principle of fitness for purpose, the audits are intended to help institutions evaluate how they use their core functions to achieve their vision and mission[7]. The institution's internal evaluation is supported by the view of an external panel. The objective is to help institutions learn about the way in which they do their work and to support the development of an improvement plan. The outcome should be a report that, on the basis of the institutional purposes, and within a framework of national priorities, indicates what the institution is doing well, and what areas need improvement.

The distinction between these different foci is important, because the purpose of quality assurance is closely linked to the criteria used and the procedures to be applied. In general, in most quality assurance systems, quality control mechanisms are applied against criteria determined externally[8] and the weight of the institutional objectives is relatively low. Since the outcome may be negative, the main assessment instrument is an external evaluation, which is compulsory. The decision normally spells out what the institution should do to get the programme approved. These processes are often called *licensing*, to underline the fact that what the institution gets is a license to begin operation or to offer a programme.

Accountability mechanisms assume that the quality control is already in place. Therefore, programmes or institutions are assessed against a mixture of external criteria and institutional purposes or priorities. Self-assessment and external evaluation have relatively equal weight and evaluation is normally voluntary, although it is possible to decide that, in some areas, accreditation is compulsory. Accreditation usually has a limited period of validity, and must be renewed every five to ten years, as defined by the accrediting agency.

Improvement mechanisms emphasise that institutions themselves are responsible for quality, and that the role of the quality assurance agency is to make this evident. The criteria are linked to the institution's own purposes. The main evaluation instrument is self-evaluation and the external evaluation has as its main function the validation of the self-evaluation. The evaluation looks at the institutional quality assurance policies and mechanisms, and the process is normally called an academic audit. Audits are repeated every five to ten years, and institutions are expected to show a significant improvement, particularly in those areas the first audit identified as needing work. Each institution decides how to deal with the weaker areas, and usually the quality assurance agency will stop at the identification of those weaker areas, without prescribing a specific course of action.

In the view of the panel, these distinctions are not clear enough, and that may explain why it becomes difficult to complete reports, or to explain to institutions the different approaches that

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[7] Accepting that the audits also help institutions evaluate their quality assurance mechanisms and procedures.
[8] These may be criteria set by the QA agency for minimum standards to be met before a programme may be offered or by a Ministry of Education for minimum outputs that have to be achieved in order to receive funding or by a professional body for requirements to be met before a graduate can be registered as a professional in that field.

should be taken. Clarity about this differentiation should help institutions to work with quality issues in all their manifestations more effectively (it might also make more acceptable to institutions the prescriptive way in which programme accreditation must be carried out).

Recommendation 3
The panel recommends that the HEQC clarifies the different criteria and procedures that apply for control and compliance (manifested in programme accreditation), accountability (manifested in national reviews) and improvement (manifested in institutional audits).

In returning to the question of the promotion of quality and the promotion of quality assurance, the panel believes that the HEQC has been effective, and that its goals have been appropriate, for promoting quality assurance. The panel believes that the HEQC has to give further attention to the promotion of quality in the system.

The panel learned that some institutions have integrated the outcomes of institutional audits into strategic planning. This shows how quality assurance processes can contribute to continuous quality advancement. The panel suggests that for the next cycle, the HEQC should promote this integrative approach to quality. This will move the discourse from quality assurance to fitness for purpose and, thus, to quality promotion. More generally, the basis for a future programme on quality promotion could be to facilitate a developmental cycle towards self-accreditation for institutions. Quality improvement plans could be one of the tools within this cycle, as well as developing capacity in significant areas, as will be discussed later.

Recommendation 4
The panel recommends that for the next cycle of audits the HEQC should promote a more integrated approach to quality, focusing on the implementation of self-regulatory processes.

9. Auditing the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions

The HEQC Self-Review Report reflects the primary goal of the audits as being to "facilitate systematic and continuous quality development and improvement in higher education and enhance institutional capacity to plan, act and report on quality-related objectives and achievements" (2008, 20). The Self-Review Report continues to say that audits "seek to assess the institution's capacity for quality management of its academic activities in a manner that meets its specified mission, goals and objectives and engages appropriately with the expectations and needs of various internal and external constituencies" (2008, 20).[9]

The panel considers that the development of institutional audits has been the most successful part of the HEQC's work. Institutional representatives unanimously recognised the strong impact audits have had, mostly through the development of self-evaluation processes, which provided them with the opportunity for self-reflection. In addition, most appreciated the external evaluations, which put the self-evaluation in perspective, as well as providing some new insights. The HEQC was

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[9] The Self-Review Report then lists specific objectives outlined in the Framework for Institutional Audits.

also congratulated on its efficiency and professionalism in the audit process and the support offered to institutions.

The panel believes that institutional audits have been a significant tool, well designed and well implemented, with a strong impact on the awareness of the need for quality.

Commendation 2
The panel commends the HEQC for the design and implementation of the institutional audits.

10. Accrediting programmes of higher education

There have been two areas of work for programme accreditation. The National Reviews focused on existing programmes in a particular discipline (see fuller discussion on this function in Section 15.1). The goal was to "develop an evaluation system which would have high impact on the improvement of quality as well as enhance the capacity of higher education institutions to undertake self-assessment at programme level" (The HEQC Self-Review Report, 2008, 26). The accreditation of new programmes "was aimed at ensuring that only programmes which met threshold quality levels could be offered, thus protecting students and employers from poor quality and unscrupulous providers" (The HEQC Self-Review Report 2008, 25).

Based on what it was told, the panel considers that, in addressing this goal, the National Reviews have had a high impact and have enhanced the HEQC's reputation.

Commendation 3
The panel commends the HEQC for the development and implementation of the National Reviews. These have been an appropriate focus for the HEQC's work and an important intervention in South African higher education.

While the goal for the accreditation of new programmes (as stated in the opening paragraph of this section) has been clear, expectations for how this goal should be met have varied. Accreditation decisions are always likely to be contested because of their intrusive nature for institutions. Nonetheless, the panel does not think that the compliance/quality control nature of accreditation has been made explicit, so many institutions tend to expect a more participatory and less prescriptive process, which is not in the nature of quality control mechanisms. Members of staff of the HEQC also sometimes seem uncomfortable with the compliance nature of this area, often manifesting a desire to focus more on quality promotion. This tendency could be one of the reasons for the extensive amount of information required from institutions. The panel agrees that the promotion of quality in this area is crucial, but it cannot interfere with the objective of accreditation, which is to approve only those programmes that meet minimum requirements.

The panel believes that the HEQC's current approach has been appropriate for this stage, but will become less important as institutions, albeit unevenly, develop their internal quality assurance mechanisms and their capacity for self-regulation. The outcomes of audit processes, of national reviews and of previous programme accreditation processes can be taken into account in order gradually to increase the degree of self-regulation. At the same time, a progression towards self-accreditation, through the definition of specific criteria, is likely to be a good incentive for improving institutional ability to develop and implement new programmes.

Recommendation 5
The panel recommends that the HEQC develops criteria for institutional self-accreditation for new programmes.

In addition to refining the way this goal is addressed, the panel believes that this area of the HEQC's work is problematic in its implementation, but recognises that it is receiving some attention (see section 15.2).

11.   Building capacity in the field of higher education quality assurance

The HEQC Board identified capacity development as a priority, given "a higher education system with no common experience of a comprehensive system of external quality assurance and in which institutional capacity to implement and participate in an evidence-based and peer driven system of quality assurance was uneven" (The HEQC Self-Review Report ,2008, 37).

The panel believes that building capacity for quality assurance has been effective at the institutional level (QA managers, academic staff involved in self-assessment), and in training auditors and evaluators (though there are some concerns about evaluators raised in sections 15 and 16). This is evident in the large numbers of people that have undergone some sort of training and have given time and energy to various activities of the HEQC. Debate about quality assurance matters among people interviewed by the panel was knowledgeable and often sophisticated.

Commendation 4
The panel commends the HEQC on the capacity development for quality assurance at institutional level.

The panel believes that capacity development has been less successful internally to the HEQC, as will be discussed in section 18.

12.   Co-ordinating quality assurance activities in higher education

The panel believes that this is a problematic area, as has been highlighted in the Self-Review Report and as discussed in Section 6 of this report. The panel acknowledges the HEQC's attempts in this area (Appendix 6 of the Self-Review Report), but observes that the HEQC will find it difficult to co-ordinate quality assurance initiatives in higher education because of overlapping mandates between the Ministries of Education and Labour and between the HEQC and the SAQA and other bodies with responsibilities for quality. Until these overlapping responsibilities and processes can be resolved, the work of the HEQC will remain hampered; there will continue to be repetition of quality assurance procedures for institutions and confusion over jurisdiction in the system.

SECTION D: EVALUATING CORE FUNCTIONS OF THE HEQC

Having evaluated the HEQC goals, the panel now evaluates the core functions of the HEQC in terms of their appropriateness, effectiveness and impact.

In summary, if the distinction between quality control (programme accreditation), accountability (programme reviews) and improvement (institutional audit) is taken into consideration, it is fair to say that the last two levels have been effectively implemented, but that there is work to be done at the first (programme accreditation). The panel also believes that the linkages between these levels are sometimes weak, especially with regard to the opportunities to have information from each flow into the others.

13. Promoting quality assurance in higher education

The Self-Review Report noted that, at the inception of the HEQC, the HEQC Board had identified capacity development as a priority (2008, 37). The Report continued to say that the HEQC "understands quality promotion as a set of advocacy, dissemination and research activities that have as their main goal the infusion of an ethos of quality in the three core functions of higher education. It also includes the development of a greater understanding of the different elements of quality among higher education stakeholders (2008, 37-38). The Report indicated that the HEQC had focussed its activities in three main areas (2008, 38 - 39):

- Promoting and improving quality in the core functions of institutions, which included:
    - o Developing good practice guides on various issues;
    - o Promoting programmes to improve teaching and learning;
- Promoting discussion and awareness of quality assurance issues among those who are formally responsible for this function at their institutions; this included a Quality Forum;
- Promoting student involvement in quality issues.

The HEQC also regards training as part of the promotion of quality assurance in institutions.

Much of the substance of this section has already been covered in the earlier evaluation of the HEQC goals where the panel distinguished between quality promotion and the promotion of quality assurance. The panel believes that the HEQC has largely met its goal of promoting quality assurance across higher education and that its work in this area has been effective and efficient.

People complimented the HEQC on the nature of the training sessions offered, including those for auditors. They referred to the overall benefit of training and subsequent activities for their institutions and for themselves. Several people appreciated the networking opportunities the HEQC events offered.

While there will be an ongoing need to maintain the promotion of quality assurance at acceptable levels, the panel believes that the HEQC must now move into the next stage, which has to do with promoting quality and capacity for quality promotion (see Section 8).

The panel believes that the attention the HEQC has given to quality promotion in core functions of teaching and learning, research, and community engagement (the HEQC Self-Review Report, 2008, 38 – 39) has been appropriate and should be continued and strengthened. The HEQC has ideas for strengthening this area. Other suggestions were that the HEQC send experts on teaching and learning practices, for example, to engage in more depth with their institutional counterparts and that the mission of the Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Directorate could be to help institutions embed quality assurance in institutional governance mechanisms, starting with strategic plans.

The panel believes that there should be a conscious effort to use information gained from all core functions of the HEQC to develop a quality promotion programme which speaks to the key strategic issues facing higher education. Curriculum design and development, approaches to teaching and learning, assessment of student learning, are all aspects that could benefit from capacity building strategies. Given the lack of capacity in the higher education system as a whole and within the HEQC itself, the panel suggests that the HEQC draws on expertise within institutions to develop strategic and focussed interventions.

While there has been much successful quality promotion at an operations level, it does not appear that this has been co-ordinated at a strategic level. There does not appear to be a clear plan and programme from the Directorate for how quality will be promoted. The panel recognises, however, that the effectiveness of these and other similar actions requires support from other policy instruments, such as a sustained and co-ordinated strategy for human development (for example the identification of priority areas for scholarships) or funding of specific improvement programmes aligned with quality issues identified through audits. The panel suggests that the role and functions of the Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Directorate should be more clearly defined, taking into consideration these and other constraints.

Recommendation 6
The panel recommends that the HEQC develops a clear strategic plan and programme for how quality will be promoted across the system, taking into consideration existing constraints and limitations. The panel recommends that the role and functions of the Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Directorate should be more clearly defined in this context.

14.   Auditing the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions

Both the Framework for Institutional Audits and Criteria for Institutional Audits were extensively discussed before their publication in 2004. Several people noted that they had found this consultative process useful and appropriate. Since the start of the first cycle of institutional audits in 2004, the HEQC has completed 15 audits of public higher education institutions and 11 of private institutions.

Interviews with both public and private higher education institutions confirmed that the self-evaluations followed by a site visit were both appropriate and generally effective. Many emphasised that the self-evaluations had enabled them to look critically at themselves through the prism of an outside view. Several university leaders said that the audits and overall quality assurance system in South Africa had enhanced their ability to deal with issues confronting their institutions.

Preparation for the audits and support for institutions had been good. Most appreciated the broad overview provided by the current criteria, but said that this sometimes resulted in a degree of superficiality because of the number of issues that had to be investigated and the limited time that could be devoted to more important areas. This sometimes reduced the effectiveness of audit judgments for institutions. There were suggestions that the HEQC might consider varying its approach depending on the size and/or complexity of the institution concerned. The criteria were described as being clear, useful and well understood, but not all added value, and some overlapped with other agencies' responsibilities (such the NRF[10]). As a whole, the criteria needed streamlining in order to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of the current audit processes. Some argued, in addition, that important criteria which affect quality, such as financial viability, were not included.

The panel agrees that the criteria seem to have been covered in an insufficiently differentiated way in each institution and could be streamlined for the next version. The criteria for research should be differentiated, focusing on research development and capacity development, and avoiding duplication with other evaluations done elsewhere. Teaching and learning and management and systems apply to each institution and should be the guiding criteria.

Recommendation 7
The panel recommends that audit criteria should be differentiated and streamlined.

With regard to the audit panels, panel members generally were said to be well prepared and conducted themselves professionally, although there were some reports of panel members who did not always understand the context of the institution they visited and of panel chairs who were not always able to keep on track auditors who strayed from the guidelines. While recognising that all systems that rely on external reviewers face similar problems, the panel suggests that the HEQC improve the training for audit panel chairs, with a clearer focus on people management and the rules of evidence.

Recommendation 8
The panel recommends that the HEQC reviews training for audit chairs to ensure that they are familiar with the rules of evidence and prepared for managing people.

There was much discussion about the Institutional Profiles produced by the HEQC for the audit visits. The panel heard that initially these had not been made available in time for institutions to discuss them thoroughly before the visit. The HEQC has responded appropriately to these concerns. The panel was told, however, by most of those interviewed that they would have been able to produce their own profiles[11] and this raises the question of why the HEQC is doing work which could

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[10] The panel noted that the quality of research outputs is dealt with adequately through various peer review processes; funding applications and researchers are addressed through the offices of the NRF. The HEQC could, however, focus on the development of research capacity as an element of quality promotion if this is part of an institution's mission.

[11] One of the Vice-Chancellors said, nevertheless, that he found the outside view provided by the HEQC of his institution interesting.

legitimately be done by the institutions concerned, especially since the information used is that submitted to the DoE by the institution. The panel is aware of a general lack of capacity in this area, but thinks that this is an important area to develop, especially if the HEQC has an overall goal for institutions to attain self- regulation status. The panel suggests that institutions should be required to produce Institutional Profiles, according to the HEQC guidelines and by a specified time. To support this, the panel suggests, further, that the HEQC plans to develop capacity in this area and to provide support to institutions that might not at present be able to produce their own profiles for an audit visit.

Recommendation 9

The panel recommends that Institutional Profiles for audit visits should be produced by institutions, according to the HEQC guidelines and deadlines, with support from the HEQC if necessary.

Nearly everyone mentioned the time that it had taken to receive the final audit reports[12], which led to some concerns highlighted therein being overtaken by time and reduced the effectiveness of the audit. The panel was struck by the variability in the time taken, although this seems to have improved in later audits (reports are now produced within 5 months). An agreed schedule for the audit process, including the time allowed for the final report production, would help institutions to know what to expect as well as be part of the accountability of the HEQC to the higher education sector.

The HEQC should consider professionalising the writing of the reports either through the services of a professional writer (already being used by the HEQC) or through getting the chairs, or a designated panel member, to write the reports (and thus becoming part of their contract). In either event, a template for the report would be useful as would an acceptance that reports should not be too long and can never be perfect. (An example of the process to produce a good report would be that followed by the EQUIS reviews, carried out by EFMD.[13])

Recommendation 10

The panel recommends that the time taken to produce audit reports should be reduced substantially and according to an agreed schedule.

There were some complaints that recommendations sometimes strayed from highlighting a problem area to prescribing specific solutions, which the panel agrees is inappropriate. There was also discussion about report revisions in the process of producing a final version. Noting these concerns, the panel affirms that reports should clearly differentiate the views of the external review panel (which should not be altered by the HEQC staff or Board) from the conclusions of the HEQC

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[12] The finalisation of some reports apparently took up to 18 months after the audit visit.

[13] EQUIS refers to the European Quality Improvement System carried out by the European Foundation for Management Development.

Board (which are based on the panel's report and on the Board's own considerations in terms of its responsibilities).

> **Recommendation 11**
> **The panel recommends that the final audit reports should clearly differentiate between the views of the external panel (which should not be altered by the HEQC staff or Board) and the conclusions of the HEQC Board (which are based on the panel's report and on its own considerations in terms of its responsibilities).**

Auditors reported that the training and support received from the HEQC before and during the visits were excellent, but often said that the visits themselves were exhausting and too demanding. Audit visits tended to last an average of 6.5 days. During this time, hundreds of people were interviewed and work continued late into each night. There were complaints about an inappropriate amount of material collected for the audit visits. Effectiveness and efficiency were affected by the time pressure of the visits, which prevented audit panel members from consulting the documentation provided or from pursuing matters needing greater discussion. The panel recognises that the collection of vast amounts of information might have resulted from a particular discourse among institutions and quality assurance managers that favours quality assurance over quality promotion. The panel agrees with suggestions that material collected should be reduced to providing only information that is necessary to support claims. This will reduce the burden on auditors as well as institutions.

> **Recommendation 12**
> **The panel recommends that the amount of information collected for an audit visit should be reduced to essential items only.**

Other ways to reduce the time taken on visits were suggested, such as making more information available to auditors before the visit, so as to reduce the number of questions required during interviews. Efficiency could also be improved if interviews focused on essential matters. This could allow the number of people to be interviewed to be reduced.

> **Recommendation 13**
> **The panel recommends that audit interviews focus on essential aspects, thereby allowing the number of interviews to be targeted and reduced.**

If the HEQC wishes to refine any further at this level[14], it may be a good idea to conduct a general survey of auditors for useful suggestions. While one or two people suggested market-related payment for auditors, many more said that university people were not motivated by money, but went on audits in order to enhance their understanding of higher education thereby benefiting their careers and their institutions as well as out of a sense of commitment to improving higher education.

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[14] The panel recognises that the HEQC has already acted on feedback after audit visits.

Some of the people who came to be interviewed said that the number of people on the audit panel could be intimidating to institutional representatives. This reinforces the panel's suggestion that the efficiency of the audit visits could be improved by reducing the length of the visit (for example to 3 days) as well as by reducing the number of panel members (to possibly around 5 members). This will also help the HEQC to continue to recruit sufficient numbers of auditors.

Recommendation 14
The panel recommends that the HEQC should explore whether it could reduce the length of the audit visit as well as the number of panel members on a visit.

Notwithstanding the discussion above, the panel commends the HEQC for the way audits have been designed and conducted (see Commendation 2) and believes that the implementation of this function has been appropriate. The panel believes that the HEQC has managed to balance the need for accountability and for institutional autonomy. The audits appear to have affirmed the quality assurance practices of institutions at the same time as stretching even the best prepared institution. Audits generally have not been seen as a threat, but as opportunities for improvement (notwithstanding some defensiveness about critical comments).

Follow up after the audit visit has been variable and the accountability part of this process has been neglected. Many institutions have, however, embedded their improvement plans into their own institutional operating plans, which the panel supports.

Recommendation 15
The panel recommends that the improvement plan element of the audit process should be strengthened.

While some of the suggestions made in this section concern planning for the next cycle of institutional audits, some of them can be addressed in the remaining external reviews of the first cycle. For the next round, while many argued that the broad overview of an institution provided by the current approach should continue, others suggested that a second round of audits could focus on particular areas only. Sometimes these were envisaged as being applied across the system, other times it was suggested that focus areas could be crafted for each institution.

The panel believes that quality assurance mechanisms and practices have been embedded in the higher education system. While this strength should be maintained and strengthened further, the panel believes that the HEQC should find ways to focus on quality promotion for the second cycle. However, no specific recommendations will be made in this respect, since the panel is confident that the HEQC, through a thorough analysis of the experience of the first cycle and the characteristics of the South African higher education system, will design a process which will effectively help institutions to advance to increasing levels of quality and responsiveness to student and national needs.

15.   Accrediting programmes of higher education

15.1 National Reviews

National Reviews have focused on re-accrediting existing programmes. Drawing from the HEQC criteria for programme accreditation, specialists in the field have developed criteria for each review by focusing on existing learning programmes in a particular disciplinary or subject area. In 2003, all Master of Business Administration (MBA) programmes were reviewed; in 2005, the Master in Education programmes were reviewed; and through 2006 and 2007, the Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE), Post-Graduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) and Bachelor in Education (B Ed) programmes were reviewed.

The National Reviews appear to have been successful in both their control and improvement features. In the HEQC Self-Review Report, this area was identified as being one with high impact, and the panel agrees with this view. From the interviews, it appears that the HEQC has gained respect and its reputation has been enhanced through the process. The panel also applauds the fact that, through the review of existing programmes, the discussion about quality was focused among academic staff, students and administrators at the programme level, thus supporting the development of a quality culture within the core business of higher education institutions.

The panel believes that the National Reviews have been an appropriate intervention for the HEQC (see commendation 3).

With regard to the effectiveness and efficiency of national reviews, the panel heard that the reviews had been widely welcomed; that preparation had been good, that the visits were well organised and appear to have gone well. The National Reviews had provided a sectoral assessment of the disciplinary area as well as information about each higher education institution participating in the review. With regard to effectiveness of the MBA review, people interviewed agreed that quality across the system had been improved and students and the public had been assured of the quality of MBAs remaining in the system. The panel was concerned that the final report on the Education programmes had still not been completed and regards this as unfortunate, given the overall satisfaction with the process, because this reduces the effectiveness of the review.

Given the success of the first two sets of National Reviews, the panel is concerned that planning for future reviews does not appear to be happening. Rather than being reactive to outside requests, there are several ways in which the HEQC could identify the next areas for review. The HEQC could plan for systemic reviews on a disciplinary basis, focus on selected teaching and learning matters or identify areas of special concern – "red flags" for the system - or a combination of these.

Recommendation 16
The panel recommends that the HEQC develops criteria for identifying the next National Reviews.

15.2 Accreditation of new academic programmes

The HEQC has seen its primary goal as to ensure "that only programmes which met threshold quality levels could be offered" (The HEQC Self-Review Report, 2008, 25). At the time that the HEQC

was established, private education was growing rapidly as a sector in South Africa and there were press reports of many unscrupulous providers. There were also increasing numbers of unregulated partnerships between public and private higher education providers, which the DoE had acted to control.[15] Under these circumstances, the HEQC introduced fairly rigorous criteria[16] for the accreditation of new higher education programmes. In the context of the time, the panel agrees that the introduction of some order, where threshold quality levels had to be met, was both appropriate and necessary. A gate-keeping role will continue to be important to ensure minimum standards across the system, but it may be necessary periodically to revise the criteria in order to ensure their continued relevance.

Dissatisfaction was expressed both from within the HEQC and by public and, especially, private providers with how the accreditation of new programmes has been implemented. The panel believes that problems in this area have a high impact on several aspects of the quality assurance system and on quality itself.

Interviews with public and private providers raised several concerns about the appropriateness of this function. Some of the private providers felt that insufficient consideration was taken of the special circumstances of a provider setting up a new institution, although at least one said that the HEQC's understanding of private providers' circumstances had improved over the years. Some private providers nevertheless felt that they were more rigorously scrutinised than public providers, whatever their history.

Another argument, this time with how new programmes are accredited, was that the HEQC should make greater distinctions between types of institutions and their history and record of quality assurance. The panel was told that there is consideration about the introduction of a "lighter touch" for some institutions with a good record of quality assurance, and that this might already have been applied in a few cases. It was not clear, however, what criteria would inform the application of a "lighter touch", and whether this would be applied to both private and public providers. The panel believes that a set of transparent criteria should be developed which will be regarded as fair to both public and private providers and which outline a path to self-accreditation (see section 10 for recommendation).

There were complaints that responsiveness to social or community needs is hampered by unnecessary and inappropriate delays and that this affects institution's financial viability. The transition to an online application system seems to have been an effective development, although the panel was told that there had been teething problems:
- Some reported that the online application system had been "impossible" to use, although others felt it was an improvement.

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[15] The DoE declared a moratorium on partnerships between public and private higher education providers in 2001.

[16] See "Framework for Programme Accreditation" and "Criteria for Programme Accreditation", both published in 2004.

- There had been problems in clearing applications; a staff member in this Directorate reported that there had been a huge backlog of applications when she was appointed.
- There were also concerns about the amount of information required and the overlap with information also required for the DoE and SAQA.

The online application system had been identified as needing urgent attention by the HEQC staff, so the panel was aware that improvements had already been introduced and others were being considered. If criteria for self-accreditation are developed, this should partially reduce the volume of applications to process. It should also be possible to review the application form itself and to find ways to reduce the amount of information required of applicants, especially if an institution has received a favourable audit. Clearly, for both the effectiveness and efficiency of this process, the HEQC should continue to give attention to managing this system professionally and making it as smooth as possible for users and the HEQC.

Recommendation 17
With regard to the application process for programme accreditation, the panel recommends that the HEQC reviews:
- **The online application system until the HEQC and users are satisfied that it is functioning effectively and efficiently;**
- **The amount of information required for the introduction of new programmes, in a phased process towards eventual institutional self-accreditation.**

Discussions with SAQA and the DoE to provide a streamlined process to reduce duplication for institutions should also continue as this remains a contentious issue for institutions.

Recommendation 18
The panel recommends that the HEQC continues discussions with the DoE and SAQA to streamline processes and to avoid duplication of the information required for the introduction of new programmes.

Following the application stage, several concerns about the evaluation of applications were expressed. There were complaints about the poor quality of some of the reports and lack of clarity about improvements requested. If a re-submitted application went to another evaluator, there were sometimes contradictory views. The panel reviewed some of the reports highlighted in interviews and agreed that, at least in these cases, complaints were justified. There were concerns about a competitor acting as a programme evaluator and the panel agrees that relying on one evaluator in this context is problematic. The panel heard that a cluster approach to considering a batch of programmes in similar areas was being considered by the HEQC and had been attempted when possible. The panel thinks that this is a good idea, but difficult to implement. It would be unfortunate if this led to further delays.

Recommendation 19
The panel recommends that the HEQC considers:

- **Developing criteria for the selection of evaluators of new programme applications so that there is transparency about their selection and concerns about competition are prevented;**
- **Finding ways to improve the quality of evaluation reports and the time taken to complete them, possibly through a 'service contract' with external evaluators.**

There might also not be sufficient attention paid to the need to evaluate a programme from both a disciplinary and a teaching and learning viewpoint (but the panel did not review sufficient numbers of reports to be sure about this). This could, however, be another reason to have more than one evaluator review an application. The panel thinks that the HEQC would probably have to get specialist input as disciplinary experts might not necessarily have the expertise to evaluate teaching and learning concerns. In any case, this has been identified as an area for capacity development across the system.

Recommendation 20
The panel recommends that the HEQC considers ways to improve the process of evaluating applications for new programmes, and in balancing the needs of disciplinary as well as teaching and learning concerns in that process.

Moving to the effectiveness and efficiency of these functions, the process appears to be slow (one private provider reported that applications had been held up for over two years) as well as lacking transparency about timelines; delays in this area have serious consequences for institutions. If the process for accrediting new academic programmes provides contradictory requests for changes or takes too long, it becomes difficult for higher education institutions to engage in adequate planning and affects the credibility of the HEQC.

Many suggestions for improvements were made, which include the following. Desktop screening of programmes at the HEQC could enable a programme to be sent back at an early stage; to support this view, an evaluator also complained about getting applications at too early a stage in their development (from interviewing staff in this Directorate, steps might already have been taken to rectify this). Delegated authority to the Director to approve a programme once specified improvements had been made would speed up approvals as would more frequent meetings of the Accreditation Committee or of specialist committees. Whatever is decided, the panel believes that the HEQC should improve the efficiency of this process. Backlogs need to be cleared and the process speeded up. While the on-line system appears to be an improvement, there are still unaccountable delays. Professionalising the role of staff in the Programme Accreditation Directorate would be an important improvement, but care must be taken not to let staff assume the role of an academic expert.

Recommendation 21
The panel recommends that the HEQC considers developing a 'service contract' or time scheduling for application approval.

Finally, the panel thinks that the system for dealing with appeals (representation, and resubmission) is not sufficiently clear.

Recommendation 22
The panel recommends that the HEQC considers developing a clear system for appeals against accreditation decisions.

16. Building capacity in the field of higher education quality assurance

As discussed earlier, the panel believes that the HEQC's goals and functions have been appropriate for building institutional capacity in quality assurance, but not necessarily for quality promotion.

With regard to the effectiveness and efficiency of capacity building about quality assurance, this appears to have been successful, apart from some concerns about new programme accreditation. The panel considers that evaluators, in particular, need more systematic training.

With regard to the HEQC itself, the panel believes that the HEQC needs to give more attention to capacity development within the HEQC (see section 18).

Recommendation 23
The panel recommends that the HEQC gives attention to providing more systematic training both for external evaluators of applications to offer new programmes and to those responsible for managing these applications within the HEQC.

17. Co-ordinating quality assurance activities in higher education

As noted in section 12, overlapping mandates and policy tensions between the DoE, DoL and DST make jurisdiction and implementation difficult. This leads to duplication in areas of responsibility (NRF, QCTO, SETAS and professional bodies) and increased administrative demands for institutions. The panel noted earlier that there is a weak form of co-ordination between different bodies, and that its impact is not monitored. Although, from a statutory point of view, the HEQC has overarching power, which is appropriate, real and systemic co-ordination of quality assurance interventions has not taken place thus affecting effectiveness and efficiency. These unresolved governance issues create many areas of duplication and irritation for institutions.

With regard to professional bodies, there is currently only one Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), with the Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA). The panel believes that the HEQC should work towards the development of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) with other professional bodies. This would reduce some of the pressure on the HEQC and also improve quality promotion across the system. The panel also heard about pressure experienced by higher education institutions when they had an HEQC and an ECSA accreditation at the same time. Greater co-ordination between the bodies about scheduling of reviews is certainly required.

Recommendation 24
The panel recommends that the HEQC develops a greater number of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) with other bodies concerned with quality assurance. This will enhance

the work of the HEQC, deepen the culture of quality assurance in the country and enable attention to be given to co-operative scheduling of reviews.

Several sources told the panel that co-ordination within the HEQC is weak. Useful information is not always passed on to people involved in activities of the HEQC, and institutions sometimes had to respond to overlapping requirements from different parts of the HEQC (for example, information provided for audits covers some of the information required for the accreditation of new programmes). Certainly, links between the HEQC Directorates could be strengthened. As some examples, information from processes in the Programme Accreditation Directorate could inform the Institutional Audits Directorate; both of these Directorates could provide useful direction for Quality Promotion and Capacity Development. All of the Directorates could provide direction for the CHE priorities.

Recommendation 25
The panel recommends that all quality assurance decisions and the data generated by the different Directorates in the HEQC be co-ordinated in one consolidated data information system.

SECTION E: EVALUATING THE GOVERNANCE AND RESOURCES OF THE HEQC

18.   Evaluating the governance and resources of the HEQC

Members of the HEQC Board are appointed, in their own right, by the CHE from a list of nominations from interested parties in higher education. Two CHE representatives sit on the HEQC Board, one of them the Chair. The HEQC Board has several specialist committees:

- An Executive Committee (EXCO) composed of Board members and chaired by the Chair of the HEQC Board;
- An Accreditation Committee composed largely of external people and chaired by the Chair of the HEQC Board;
- A Special Accreditation Committee (National Reviews) composed largely of external people, who are specialists in the particular field, and chaired by the Chair of the HEQC Board;
- An Institutional Audits Committee composed largely of external people and chaired by a member of the HEQC.

The panel met the chairs of the CHE Council and the HEQC Board, the Executive Committee of the HEQC and some other members of the various committees. All were committed and involved with various activities and had views on current and future priorities. Several had been involved with the HEQC since its inception and provided a useful historical perspective.

The panel believes that both the specialised committees established by the HEQC and the incorporation of peers in those structures are appropriate and effective.

Commendation 5
The panel commends the HEQC for its governance structure through its specialised committees as well as for the incorporation of peers into those structures.

The panel believes that the formal governance of the HEQC through its Board is appropriate and effective. The links between the CHE and the HEQC, however, do not always appear to be effective or efficient. Although the HEQC members are appointed by the CHE and two members of the CHE sit on the HEQC Board, the relation between the CHE and the HEQC does not seem clearly articulated, and the advisory role of the HEQC back to the CHE appears weak. For example, the outcomes of the quality assurance processes and activities could inform the advisory role of the CHE in a more explicit way. This shortcoming was identified by several interviewees, including the DoE, and the panel agrees with the assessment.

Recommendation 26

The panel recommends that the HEQC and the CHE strengthen the links between them so that the outcomes of quality assurance processes can inform the advisory functions of the CHE in a more explicit way.

The panel was told about the long time that the HEQC sometimes takes to produce policy advice for the DoE, and that this sometimes meant that the need for the advice was superseded by events. The panel believes it is necessary to distinguish between bureaucratic and political timeframes, which often have urgent deadlines, and academic timeframes, which are not always constrained by external considerations and can continue until a researcher is satisfied. In order to produce timely advice, the HEQC might not always be able to, or need to, provide the quality of research that it might ideally desire. The HEQC will have to make appropriate distinctions to strengthen its professional function.

Recommendation 27

The panel recommends that the HEQC develops the capacity to offer policy- focused advice, which can be timeously delivered.

There is evidence of a great degree of commitment on the part the academic community to quality assurance, as displayed by the willingness of academics to serve as panel members. While this was the case in the initial stages of the process (learning about external audits was a strong incentive), it might be reaching a limit which could compromise the success of the quality assurance system. As noted earlier, the panel regards the coordination of tasks between Directorates as weak. There appears to be a great deal of informed contact between people, but this is not always systematised or directed. As with many working in the higher education system after 1994, those who worked at the HEQC in its early years appeared to have been committed activists working on whatever tasks were required and for a common cause. While the commitment and dedication continue to be evident, the HEQC has now become a complex organisation that employs many people carrying out diverse tasks. There is now a need to stabilise the functions of the HEQC and to recruit and train employees who will regard quality assurance as their profession.

Each Directorate's roles and responsibilities should be clearly defined; incumbents at every level should know what is expected of them, to whom they must account and report, and who accounts and reports to them, as currently much of the knowledge and co-ordination appear to be tacit. There should be explicit protocols for recurrent processes, like audits and programme accreditation, and systematised links between functions when appropriate. In short, there should be a clear move to the full professionalisation of quality assurance within the HEQC.

Recommendation 28

The panel recommends that the HEQC moves to professionalise and strengthen the capacity of its staff.

While the HEQC appears to have had sufficient resources to carry out its functions, it has suffered a continuing lack of internal capacity, staff turnover and high workloads. This has,

nevertheless, not prevented it from producing significant achievements, often thanks to the dedicated efforts of individuals.

The panel believes that thought must be given to the next step in professionalising the work of the HEQC staff and in developing mechanisms for training quality assurance professionals. In the absence of relevant training programmes or qualifications, the HEQC could explore internships in other QA agencies, bringing in experts on various areas of work or organising in-house workshops. Professionalisation begins with a clear understanding of the roles staff members are expected to play, namely that they are experts in quality assurance criteria and procedures, but not in actual assessment, which is the role of academic peers.

Recommendation 29
The panel recommends that the HEQC clearly distinguishes the professional role of the HEQC staff from the role of academic expert peers.

Job descriptions of the HEQC staff should be appropriate for the level of post concerned. The panel was told about senior staff carrying heavy administrative loads and junior staff required to have academic insights in order to take administrative decisions. Currently, staff members not only oversee processes and support institutions on the application of criteria and implementation of quality assurance procedures, but, according to staff spoken to, are also required to make decisions based on academic judgement. This is something that should be carefully considered, as the distinction between the expertise of peers who provide academic advice and the professional role of the HEQC staff, who oversee and run the quality assurance system, should never be blurred.

Recommendation 30
The panel recommends that expectations of staff should be appropriate for the level of each post and that these should be reflected in clear job descriptions.

Those in leadership positions believe that the HEQC is constrained by the post structure, which follows government post levels. The panel understands that some posts, especially at the higher levels, might be graded too low, but is not sure that this argument applies across the board. Part of the problem might be the unrealistic expectations placed on lower level posts, as discussed above. Clearly, the current review of salaries should be concluded and decisions made about appropriate re-grading.

The panel supports the introduction of performance appraisals against annually negotiated goals for the HEQC staff, but this requires management to make expectations clear and to support and develop current and new staff. Ways to maintain a supportive work culture, where long hours are not the norm, should be sought. The panel understands that there is not an explicit human resources function or HR post/s in the CHE. However this is done, the panel suggests that the HEQC explores ways of developing this function more clearly, especially given the need for induction, training and appraisal of staff.

Recommendation 31

The panel recommends that ways to reinforce human resource functions at the HEQC be sought, especially given the need for induction, training and appraisal of staff.

Regarding resources available for audits, some amendments could be introduced even in the remaining part of the first cycle of audits, although more important changes should wait until the second cycle. Some of the ways to reduce the amount of work required were discussed in a previous section and these would also aid staff of the HEQC. It should also be possible to reduce the number of staff accompanying the audit panel (the panel saw that some reviews had up to 4 senior HEQC staff, although these already seem to have been reduced in later audit visits[17]). It is essential to look for ways to make external reviews sustainable in the medium- and long-term; the process cannot continue to depend on the good will of the academic community.

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[17] The panel accepts that at the beginning of the audit cycle, the HEQC was concerned that all staff gain experience of audits and that a consistent understanding among HEQC staff be developed. This level of staff investment is not sustainable in the long-term, however.

SECTION F: THE INQAAHE GUIDELINES OF GOOD PRACTICE

19.   Evaluating the HEQC against the INQAAHE Guidelines of Good Practice

The International Network of Quality Assurance Agencies for Higher Education (INQAAHE) has defined a set of guidelines of good practice for external quality assurance agencies. The guidelines are meant to promote good practice and to assist an agency to improve its performance on the basis of its own experience. The HEQC used the guidelines in its self-evaluation as did the panel during the external evaluation. The panel's findings are summarised in the following section. Although the detail of what follows is covered more fully in the body of the report, the organisation of the criteria is slightly different. Given the importance of the INQAAHE Guidelines to the HEQC, the panel thought that a separate section was appropriate, despite the overlap. The INQAAHE guidelines are inserted in each section for ease of reference.

The panel had to decide whether the HEQC complied fully, substantially, partially, or failed to meet the guideline concerned.

1.   The governance of the HEQC (External Quality Assurance Agency - EQAA)

> The EQAA has a written mission statement or set of objectives that takes into account the cultural and historical context of the EQAA. The statement explicitly provides that external quality assurance is a major activity of the EQAA, and it requires a systematic approach to achieving the mission or objectives of the EQAA. There is evidence that the statement of objectives is implemented pursuant to a practical management plan that is linked to EQAA resources. The ownership and governance structure is appropriate for the objectives of the agency.

The HEQC complies fully with this guideline.

It has a written mission statement, clearly aligned with national priorities, which identifies quality assurance as its major activity.

The HEQC organises its activities in order to achieve its objectives. It has been designated as the agency responsible for the promotion of quality and of quality assurance for higher education in South Africa, and its governance and organisational structure make it possible for it to achieve its objectives. The development of the agency and the success it has had in promoting quality assurance provide the platform necessary to advance to a more sophisticated and professional organisational structure, which should include better co-ordination and alignment among its different Directorates.

2.   Resources

> The EQAA has adequate and accessible human and financial resources to conduct external evaluation effectively and efficiently in accordance with its mission statement and its methodological approach. The EQAA's resources are also adequate for the appropriate development of the agency.

The HEQC complies substantially with this guideline.

The HEQC has adequate funding, but has experienced a high turnover and some difficulties in recruiting qualified staff. In spite of this, it manages to meet its objectives to the satisfaction of stakeholders.

The panel considers, however, that in its present stage, the HEQC needs to revise the way in which it recruits and trains staff. Its development will require a higher level of professionalisation, and less of an academic approach. This professionalisation includes a clearer definition of roles and expectations, as well as induction practices for new staff.

3.   Quality assurance of the HEQC

> The EQAA has a system of continuous quality assurance of its own activities that emphasises flexibility in response to the changing nature of higher education, the effectiveness of its operations, and its contribution towards the achievement of its objectives.
>
> The EQAA conducts internal self-review of its own activities, including consideration of its own effects and value. The review includes data and analysis.
>
> The EQAA is subject to external reviews at regular intervals. There is evidence that any required actions are implemented and disclosed.

The HEQC complies fully with this guideline.

It has sound and continuous mechanisms for internal quality assurance: it gathers feedback from institutions, carries out surveys, commissions research studies, prepares annual reports and requires its Directorates to provide annual reviews.

The HEQC carried out a very good self-evaluation exercise, resulting in a clear and comprehensive report. The external evaluation is included in its basic documentation, and it was well organised, with a wide and fair selection of stakeholders interviewed. Provisions are in place for periodic self- and external evaluations.

4. Reporting public information

> The EQAA informs and responds to the public in accordance with applicable legislation and the cultural context of the EQAA. This includes full and clear disclosures of its relevant documentation such as policies, procedures and criteria.
>
> The EQAA also demonstrates public accountability by reporting its decisions about higher education institutions and programs. The content and extent of reporting may vary with cultural context and applicable legal and other requirements.
>
> If the external evaluation leads to a decision about the higher education institution or program, the procedures applied and the criteria for decision-making are public, and the criteria for review are transparent, public, and ensure equality of treatment.
>
> The EQAA also discloses to the public the decisions about the EQAA resulting from any external review of its own performance.

The HEQC complies fully with this guideline.

It makes full and clear disclosure of relevant documentation: its basic documentation, criteria and procedures are public. It reports on its decisions through a summary of the audit report, which goes on its website. All decisions about accreditation and programme review are public, as well as a comprehensive report on the national reviews of selected programmes[18].

While all criteria and procedures are public, there may be a need to improve the procedures for programme accreditation. Institutions are not always fully aware of the criteria for the selection of evaluators, and it would be helpful to develop some sort of 'service contract' that clearly states the commitments and obligations of both parties (the HEQC and the institutions).

5. The relationship between the HEQC and higher education institutions

> The EQAA:
>
> - recognises that institutional and programmatic quality and quality assurance are primarily the responsibility of the higher education institutions themselves;
> - respects the academic autonomy, identity and integrity of the institutions or programs;
> - applies standards or criteria that have been subject to reasonable consultation with stakeholders; and
> - aims to contribute to both quality improvement and accountability of the institution.

The HEQC complies fully with this guideline.

It explicitly recognises that implementing quality is the responsibility of the institutions and respects their autonomy.

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[18] At present, the report on the National review of MBA programmes has been published. The report on the National Review on Education is in its final stage and will be published soon.

Criteria were developed with ample consultation with representatives from all types of higher education institutions. The main quality assurance processes carried out by the HEQC put a strong emphasis on quality improvement as well as accountability.

The HEQC has carried out significant capacity development within institutions, and provides strong support during the self-assessment process.

There was a clear consensus on the impact of the quality assurance processes developed by the HEQC on the internal quality assurance arrangements in institutions.

The progress made clearly shows the need to advance towards institutional self-accreditation, as a means to validate the outcomes of audits for those institutions which have shown adequate self-regulatory capacities. The HEQC could start by defining what it understands by self-accreditation, and develop progressive stages, which could start – as suggested by the Accreditation Committee – with the exemption of some of the criteria for programme accreditation and end in complete self-accrediting powers for some institutions.

6.   The HEQC's requirements for institutional / programme performance

> The EQAA has documents that indicate clearly what the EQAA expects of the institution. Those expectations (which may for example be called standards or factors or precepts) are appropriate for the core activities of an institution of higher education or program. The standards should explicitly address all areas of institutional activity that fall within the EQAA's scope, such as teaching, learning, research. community work, etc. and necessary resources such as finances, staff/faculty, and learning resources. Standards may refer to specific areas, levels of achievement, relative benchmarking and types of measures, and may provide general guidelines. They may also include specific learning goals.

The HEQC complies substantially with this guideline.

In all matters related to institutional audit and programme review (national reviews), criteria and procedures are clear and considered so by institutions. Although there are published criteria and procedures for programme accreditation, there have been complaints about the quality of evaluations. The names of the evaluators are not disclosed, as the result of a policy decision, and this adds to the discomfort. An additional source for problems is the delay in some of the accreditation decisions, although the HEQC reported that it is solving this problem. This matter is discussed extensively in the section on programme accreditation.

7. **The HEQC's requirements for institutional self-evaluation and reporting to the HEQC**

> The documentation concerning self-evaluation explains to the institutions of higher education the purposes, procedures, process and expectations in the self-evaluation process. The documents also include the standards used, the decision criteria, the reporting format, and other information needed by the higher education institution.
>
> Typically, an EQAA review process includes a self-evaluation through self-study by the institution or program, external peer review, and a follow-up procedure.
>
> As necessary and appropriate, the EQAA guides the institution or program in the application of the procedures of the quality assurance process, such as self-evaluation, external review, or solicitation of assessment/feedback from the public, students, and other constituents.

The HEQC complies fully with this requirement.

There is a clear manual, which provides institutions with the necessary information to prepare their self-evaluation including the criteria that will be applied, and the need for supporting documentation. In addition, the HEQC staff visit the institutions three times during the period of the self-evaluation to check on progress, offer advice and answer questions.

Institutions systematically commended the effectiveness of the support provided by the HEQC during all audit stages.

8. **The HEQC's evaluation of the institution and/or programme**

> The EQAA has clear documentation concerning the external evaluation that states the standards used, assessment methods and processes, decision criteria, and other information necessary for external review. The EQAA also has specifications on the characteristics, selection and training of reviewers. The EQAA's system must ensure that each institution or program will be evaluated in an equivalent way, even if the external panels, teams, or committees (together, the "external panels") are different.

The HEQC complies substantially with this guideline.

External reviewers are carefully selected and trained. The process of preparation for the audit visits is thorough and well supported. Provisions are made to avoid conflicts of interest. Reports are evidence based and the conclusions are clearly stated.

However, while this has operated in a highly effective manner, the system runs on the good will of the academic community and demands a high level of commitment that may be impossible to maintain in the longer term. The current process puts a very high workload on panel members, both in terms of the number of people in the panel (up to nine members) and the length of the visit (five full days). The risk of 'panel fatigue' and of losing the collaboration of qualified academics in this process is high, unless measures are taken to reduce the demands on the system.

In the case of programme accreditation, complaints were heard about the quality of evaluation and the fact that evaluations were not always objective; the panel also wants to highlight the need

for a more careful consideration of curricular and teaching and learning aspects in the applications to offer new programmes, and would like to suggest that programmes are sent to more than one evaluator to allow this to happen. When a programme has received comments and must be evaluated in a second round, the panel suggests that, if possible, the same evaluators review the amendments made.

9. Decisions

> The EQAA evaluations address both the higher education institution's own self-assessment and external reference points, such as judgments by knowledgeable peers or relevant legislation. An EQAA must be independent, i.e. it has autonomous responsibility for its operations, and its judgments cannot be influenced by third parties. The EQAA's decisions must be impartial, rigorous, thorough, fair, and consistent, even if the judgments are made by different panels. Consistency in decision-making includes consistency and transparency in processes and actions for imposing recommendations for follow-up action. The EQAA's reported decisions are clear and precise.

Compliance with this guideline is substantial in the case of institutional audits and programme reviews, and partial in the case of programme accreditation.

In the case of institutional audits, the decision-making process is careful and participatory, taking into account both the self-evaluation report and the views of the external evaluation panel, as well as the considerations of the Audit Committee. Decisions are independent, rigorous and consistent, and are considered to be so by institutions. It is important, however, clearly to differentiate in the final reports the voice of the panel, and the decisions of the HEQC.

Programme accreditation decisions, on the other hand, are sometimes contested. There is some feeling that the HEQC's views may disregard those of the peers. This relationship must be clarified for the sake of transparency.

In the case of both institutional audits and programme (national) reviews, reports have been delayed, losing some of their impact, although the HEQC is aware of this and is trying to reduce the time lag. There have been substantial delays in providing decisions about programme accreditation and the HEQC is also giving attention to this.

10. Appeals

> The EQAA has appropriate methods and policies for appeals. Appeals should be conducted by reviewers who were not responsible for the original decision and who have no conflict of interest, but appeals need not necessarily be conducted outside the EQAA.

The HEQC complies partially with this guideline.

There is certain degree of dissatisfaction with the way in which representations are dealt with in the case of programme accreditation. Appeals are made through representation to the HEQC, which arrives at a decision through a new evaluation. The HEQC should develop clear and transparent guidelines for appeals, especially in the case of programme accreditation.

11.   Collaboration

> The EQAA collaborates with other EQAAs, if possible, in areas such as exchange of good practices, capacity building, review of decisions, provision of transnational education, joint projects, and staff exchanges.

The HEQC complies substantially with this guideline.

The HEQC has a good record of collaboration with other QA agencies. It has signed MoUs with QA Agencies in India, Australia and the UK and it has carried out one joint audit visit with AUQA. It has also collaborated with QA work in other African countries and with the regional network for Africa (AFRIQAN). It plays an active role in INQAAHE, and two of its officials have served on the INQAAHE Board.

The HEQC has also signed a MoU with one professional body in South Africa. It needs to work towards the development of conditions for mutual recognition agreements with professional and other QA bodies, in order to increase effectiveness and efficiency in the system, as well as to reduce overlaps and redundancy. At the same time, functional exchanges of processes and procedures at an operational level could be improved.

12.   Transnational / cross border higher education

> The EQAA has policies relating to both imported and exported higher education. These policies may be the same as those for domestic providers and domestic provision. In formulating its policies and practices, the EQAA should consider relevant guidelines issued by international agencies and other associations. All EQAAs should consult with appropriate local agencies in the exporting or importing countries, although this might not be possible or appropriate in situations such as those involving distance learning or small enrollment.

The HEQC complies substantially with this guideline.

The HEQC has clear policies regarding exported higher education, which must be assessed in the institutional audits. At the same time, it has addressed the issue of imported higher education, initially through the National Review of MBAs, which explicitly dealt with cross-border offerings in this respect.

20.   Concluding comments

The panel was impressed by what the HEQC has achieved since it was established and the good opinion in which it generally is held. The panel members are grateful for the generosity of the people who gave up time, often travelling from different parts of the country, to speak to them and for the candour with which they expressed their views. Staff members of the HEQC were open about how they conducted their work as well as about their concerns, and this information and these insights were very useful for the panel. The panel was also grateful for the logistical and other support offered to them by all members of the HEQC and in particular by the Executive Director, Dr Lis Lange, and Ms Pam du Toit, Project Administrator in the Executive Director's office.

List of commendations and recommendations

Commendations

1. The panel commends the HEQC for the professionalism with which it has created a strong and reliable quality assurance system for South African higher education and for working with institutions to develop their own quality assurance mechanisms, especially through the audit process.
2. The panel commends the HEQC for the design and implementation of the institutional audits.
3. The panel commends the HEQC for the development and implementation of the National Reviews. These have been an appropriate focus for the HEQC's work and an important intervention in South African higher education.
4. The panel commends the HEQC on the capacity development for quality assurance at institutional level.
5. The panel commends the HEQC for its governance structure through its specialised committees as well as for the incorporation of peers into those structures.

Recommendations

1. The panel recommends that the HEQC continues with its efforts to clarify responsibilities and to streamline and simplify processes for quality assurance in higher education.
2. The panel recommends that the HEQC gives attention to promoting debate on, and to developing a better understanding of the links and differences between, fitness <u>for</u> purpose and fitness <u>of</u> purpose, and ways in which these lead to individual and social transformation.
3. The panel recommends that the HEQC clarifies the different criteria and procedures that apply for control and compliance (manifested in programme accreditation), accountability (manifested in national reviews) and improvement (manifested in institutional audits).
4. The panel recommends that for the next cycle of audits the HEQC should promote a more integrated approach to quality, focusing on the implementation of self-regulatory processes.
5. The panel recommends that the HEQC develops criteria for institutional self-accreditation for new programmes.
6. The panel recommends that the HEQC develops a clear strategic plan and programme for how quality will be promoted across the system, taking into consideration existing constraints and limitations. The panel recommends that the role and functions of the Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Directorate should be more clearly defined in this context.
7. The panel recommends that audit criteria should be differentiated and streamlined.
8. The panel recommends that the HEQC reviews training for audit chairs to ensure that they are familiar with the rules of evidence and prepared for managing people.
9. The panel recommends that Institutional Profiles for audit visits should be produced by institutions, according to HEQC guidelines and deadlines, with support from the HEQC if necessary.
10. The panel recommends that the time taken to produce audit reports should be reduced substantially and according to an agreed schedule.
11. The panel recommends that the final audit reports should clearly differentiate between the views of the external panel (which should not be altered by the HEQC staff or Board) and the

conclusions of the HEQC Board (which are based on the panel's report and on its own considerations in terms of its responsibilities).

12. The panel recommends that the amount of information collected for an audit visit should be reduced to essential items only.

13. The panel recommends that audit interviews focus on essential aspects, thereby allowing the number of interviews to be targeted and reduced.

14. The panel recommends that the HEQC should explore whether it could reduce the length of the audit visit as well as the number of panel members on a visit.

15. The panel recommends that the improvement plan element of the audit process should be strengthened.

16. The panel recommends that the HEQC develops criteria for identifying the next National Reviews.

17. With regard to the application process for programme accreditation, the panel recommends that the HEQC reviews:
   - The online application system until the HEQC and users are satisfied that it is functioning effectively and efficiently;
   - The amount of information required for the introduction of new programmes, in a phased process towards eventual institutional self-accreditation.

18. The panel recommends that the HEQC continues discussions with the DoE and SAQA to streamline processes and to avoid duplication of the information required for the introduction of new programmes.

19. The panel recommends that the HEQC considers:
   - Developing criteria for the selection of evaluators of new programme applications so that there is transparency about their selection and concerns about competition are prevented ;
   - Finding ways to improve the quality of evaluation reports and the time taken to complete them, possibly through a 'service contract' with external evaluators.

20. The panel recommends that the HEQC considers ways to improve the process of evaluating applications for new programmes, and in balancing the needs of disciplinary as well as teaching and learning concerns in that process.

21. The panel recommends that the HEQC considers developing a 'service contract' or time scheduling for application approval.

22. The panel recommends that the HEQC considers developing a clear system for appeals against accreditation decisions.

23. The panel recommends that the HEQC gives attention to providing more systematic training both for external evaluators of applications to offer new programmes and to those responsible for managing these applications within the HEQC.

24. The panel recommends that the HEQC develops a greater number of mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) with other bodies concerned with quality assurance. This will enhance the work of the HEQC, deepen the culture of quality assurance in the country and enable attention to be given to co-operative scheduling of reviews.

25. The panel recommends that all quality assurance decisions and the data generated by the different Directorates in the HEQC be co-ordinated in one consolidated data information system.

26. The panel recommends that the HEQC and the CHE strengthen the links between them so that the outcomes of quality assurance processes can inform the advisory functions of the CHE in a more explicit way.

27. The panel recommends that the HEQC develops the capacity to offer policy- focused advice, which can be timeously delivered.

28. The panel recommends that the HEQC moves to professionalise and strengthen the capacity of its staff.

29. The panel recommends that the HEQC clearly distinguishes the professional role of the HEQC staff from the role of academic expert peers.

30. The panel recommends that expectations of staff should be appropriate for the level of each post and that these should be reflected in clear job descriptions.

31. The panel recommends that ways to reinforce human resource functions at the HEQC be sought, especially given the need for induction, training and appraisal of staff.

22. References

Department of Education (1977), *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, White Paper 3,* Government Gazette No. 18207.

Higher Education Quality Committee (2001, *Founding Document,* Pretoria, Edition January 2001.

Higher Education Quality Committee (2004a), *Criteria for Institutional Audits,* Pretoria.

Higher Education Quality Committee (2004b), *Framework for Institutional Audits,* Pretoria.

Higher Education Quality Committee (2004c), *Criteria for Programme Accreditation,* Pretoria.

Higher Education Quality Committee (2004d), *Framework for Programme Accreditation,* Pretoria.

Higher Education Quality Committee (2008), *Self-Review Report*, Pretoria.

External evaluation of the HEQC

Terms of reference

Introduction

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is an independent statutory body which was set up in 1998 by the Higher Act of 1997. It advises the Minister of Education on all matters pertaining to higher education and has executive responsibility for quality assurance in higher education.

The CHE exercises this executive responsibility through a permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The HEQC was launched in May 2001. According to the HE Act of 1997, the statutory responsibility of the HEQC is to

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

To the above three areas of responsibility, the Board of the Higher Education Quality Committee has added capacity development for quality assurance.

In its Founding Document, published in January 2001, the HEQC identified as a critical success factor "the development of an analytical and self-reflective approach to quality assurance premised on continuous self-assessment" not only within the higher education institutions which it evaluates but also within the HEQC itself. The Founding Document, therefore, signals that an external evaluation of the HEQC's policies, programmes and implementation strategies will be conducted in every fifth year of its work.

Since its inception, the HEQC has worked in a self-reflective way, commissioning local and international evaluations of its various programme activities, inviting comments on its draft policy and systems documents, and conducting regular internal planning, debriefing and self-evaluation activities, in order to address identified problems and gaps, strengthen the existing systems, and introduce appropriate innovations. The HEQC also underwent an external evaluation conducted by the South African Qualifications Authority between 18 and 21 November 2003. This evaluation was conducted within the requirements of the regulations for Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies accredited by SAQA. The SAQA evaluation focused on the quality management policies and procedures of the HEQC.

The present evaluation takes place while the HEQC is in the fourth year of full-blown implementation of its systems in the areas of programme accreditation, national reviews, institutional audits and quality promotion and capacity development.

From a methodological perspective the HEQC locates this evaluation within programme theory framework and defines it as formative in terms of its purpose.

1. Evaluation aim and objectives

The overarching aim of the proposed external evaluation is formative, i.e. to improve the work of the HEQC in all its core functions. This implies that the evaluation should in the first instance generate results that indicate whether and to what extent the HEQC has achieved its main objectives in terms of:

- Promoting quality and quality assurance in HE in South Africa

- Auditing QA mechanisms at HE institutions in South Africa

- Accrediting programmes of higher education

- Building capacity in the field of HE quality assurance

- Co-ordinating QA initiatives in HE in South Africa.

In doing this it is important that the evaluation takes into account good international practice. The INQAAHE guidelines for good practice in quality assurance will serve as a benchmark of international good practice against which the HEQC performance can be measured.

The period covered by the review will be 2001 to 2007, that is from the launch of the HEQC to the present.

2. Evaluation Criteria

The evaluation needs to focus on the core functions of the HEQC and how have they been given expression at the organisational and system design level. The criteria to assess the extent to which the HEQC has been able to discharge its mandate will be

Appropriateness and relevance: the extent to which to HEQC system (and its components) is fit for its purpose and responds to the specific context in which it operates; effectiveness: the extent to which the system is able to achieve its objectives; efficiency: the competence and economy with which the system works.

HEQC Core functions	Evaluation criteria
Promoting quality assurance in HE in South Africa	Appropriateness/relevance Effectiveness Impact

Auditing QA mechanisms at HE institutions in South Africa	Appropriateness/relevance Effectiveness and efficiency Impact
Accrediting programmes of higher education	Appropriateness/relevance Effectiveness and efficiency Impact
Building capacity in the field of HE quality assurance	Appropriateness/ relevance Effectiveness Impact
Co-ordinating QA initiatives in HE in South Africa.	Appropriateness/relevance Effectiveness Effect/Impact

3. Design and methodology

- Undertake an internal documentation process of the core functions and achievements of the work of the HEQC over the past 6 years.

- Review team to interview all relevant stakeholders (including audited institutions, programmes, other role players in the sector) through site visits and panel reviews. This process to be administered by the secretariat.

- Final writing of a draft review report by the panel and circulation for comments to a small number of critical readers.

**HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE (HEQC)
INTERNATIONAL REVIEW**

SCHEDULE

13 – 21 November 2008

As provided to the panel by the HEQC

Day 1	Thursday 13 November	**Introduction** **Chairs: CHE Council and HEQC Board**
		Group arrives in Pretoria from 09:30 onwards
1.1	1130	Welcome by Dr Lis Lange, Executive Director of the HEQC
1.2	1230	CHE Council Chair Prof Chabani Manganyi
1.3	1300	LUNCH
1.4	1400	HEQC Chair of the Board Prof Hugh Africa
1.5	1500	Dr Lis Lange Executive Director HEQC
1.6	1600	Planning/reading (panel only)
1.7	1700	Planning for Day 2
1.8	1900	Dinner at guesthouse

Day 2	Friday 14 November	**2 Publics** **Site visits: Advantaged/disadvantaged/merged/incorporation. Meeting with senior staff included**
2.1	08:00	Depart from guesthouse. Frontline Africa will pick everyone up.
2.2	08:30	Arrive TUT Pretoria West campus. Meet Mr Dhaya Naidoo at the main gate. (083 626 1196) Venue:: TLT Seminar Room: Building 9: GO1 View campus buildings while driving in
2.3	08:30 – 09:00	Registrar: Mr. N. Stofberg and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Research, Innovation and Partnerships: Dr. P. Nevhutalu
2.4	09:00 – 09:30	Director: Quality Promotion: Mr. D. Naidoo
2.5	09:30 – 10:00	Deputy Vice-Chancellor (Institutional Planning and Operations): Prof S.J. Molefe, and Deputy Vice-Chancellor Finance and Development: Ms Joyce Matshebela
2.6	10:00 – 10:30	Vice-Chancellor: Prof E. Tyobeka (via video conference)
2.7	10:30 – 10:45	Tea
2.8	10:45 – 11:15	Drive to Soshanguwe. Mr Johnny Masebe from TUT will accompany panel.

2.9	11:15 – 11:45	Walk-about at Soshanguve
2.10	11:45 – 12:15	11:45 – 12: 15 Deans (~~Dr S Mukhola~~ and Dr J Zaaiman)
2.11	12:15 – 12:45	Travel to University of Pretoria
2.12	12:45 – 13:30	LUNCH at the Van Tilburg Museum Park at Kya Rosa. Isobel Vosloo (082 398 3747) from the Quality Unit will meet you there.
2.13	13:45 – 14:15	Informal discussions with the head of the Quality Unit Mrs Christa North and colleague from Botwana, Ms Olivia Mokanthkgla Blue Room, Old Chemistry Building
2.14	14:15 – 14:45	Informal discussions with the representative of the Support Services Prof Susan Adendorff
2.15	14:45 – 15:00	Comfort break
2.16	15:00 – 15:45	Informal discussions with the representative of the Academic Deans Prof Carolina Koornhof
2.17	15:45 – 16:30	Informal discussions with the Vice-Chancellor and Principal, and Registrar Prof Calie Pistorius and Prof Niek Grové
2.18	16:30	Return to guesthouse

Day 3	**Saturday 15 November**	**Executive Committee members of the HEQC Board**
3.1	0900 – 1200	Meeting with members of HEQC Board Executive Committee At the Birdwood Guest house. Ms Jenny Glennie
	0900 – 1000	Ms Jenny Glennie
	10:00 – 12:00	Prof Dhiro Gihwala Ms Judy Favish Dr Rolf Stumpf
	12:00	LUNCH at guesthouse on patio

Day 4		**Sunday**
		Working day for panel

Day 5	Monday 17 November	HEQC ED and Directorates; and Chairs of Audit Panels and panel members		
		DIRECTORATES		
5.1	08:30	Mr Theo Bhengu/Prof Francis Faller Co-ordination and Stakeholder Affairs Accreditation and National Reviews		
5.2	09:30	Mr Theo Bhengu/Dr Lumkile Lalendle/Dr Lis Lange Institutional Audits/Quality Promotion and Capacity Development		
	10:30	Break		
		CHAIRS OF AUDIT PANELS AND PANEL MEMBERS		
5.3	10:45	~~Prof Renuka Vithal~~ ~~(teleconference)~~ ~~(Audits)~~ Did not take place due to problems with the CHE speaker system	Dr Themba Mosia (Audits/Accreditation)	
5.4	11:45	Prof Martin Hall (teleconference) (Audits)	Dr Antoinette van der Merwe (Audits)	
5.5	12:45	Review morning		
5.6	13:00	LUNCH		
5.7a	14:00	Prof Rocky Ralebipi-Simela (Teleconference) (Audits)		
5.7b	14:30	Dr Lis Lange		
5.8	15:00	Dr Cheryl de la Rey CHE CEO / Chair of Audit Panel		
5.9	16:00	Dr Mpumelelo Bomela (Audits)	Prof Jan Botha (Accreditation/ Audits/National Reviews)	Dr Mashupye Kgaphola (Audits)
5.10	17:00	Panel Review of Day		
5.11	18:00	Panel Review for Day 6		
5.12	19:00	Dinner		

Day 6	Tuesday 18 November	6 STAKEHOLDERS
6.1	0800	Higher Education South Africa (HESA) – Dr Duma Malaza, Chief Executive Officer
6.2	0845	Panel review
6.3	0900	South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) – Mr Samuel Isaacs, Chief Executive Officer
6.4	0945	Panel Review
6.5	1000	Break
6.6	1030	Panel Review
6.7	1115	Panel Review
6.8	1130	Teleconference – Open University, United Kingdom Founder Executive Director HEQC Prof Mala Singh
6.9	1230	Panel Review
6.10	1300	LUNCH
6.11	1400	Association of Private Providers of Education, Training and Development (APPETD) Dr Tony Khatle
6.12	1500	Review Panel
6.13	1515	The Independent Institute of Education (IIE) Dr Felicity Coughlan, Director
6.14	1600	Tele-conference with Ms Nasima Badsha Department of Education
6.15	1700	Interviews with HEQC Directors: Mr Theo Bhengu, Dr Lumkile Lalendle, Prof Francis Faller
6.16	1900	Dinner

Day 7	Wednesday 19 November	5 PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS
7.1	0800	University of South Africa (UNISA) Prof Barney Pityana – Vice Chancellor Prof Narend Baijnath - Vice Principal Strategy Partnerships and Planning (Audit, Accreditation, National Reviews)
7.2	0900	Panel review

7.3	0930	University of the Witwatersrand (WITS) Ms Lynda Murray – Head Academic Planning Office Prof Peter Owen (Audit, Accreditation, National Reviews)
7.4	1030	Panel Review
7.5	1100	University of the Western Cape (UWC) Prof Brian O'Connell – Vice Chancellor Mr Vincent Morta – QA Manager (Audit, Accreditation, National Reviews)
7.6	1200	Panel Review
7.7	1300	LUNCH
7.8	1400	University of Fort Hare (UFH) Dr Mvuyo Tom – Vice Chancellor Mrs Nabe – Acting Quality Assurance Manager
7.9	1500	Review Panel
7.10	1600	Durban University of Technology (DUT) Prof R du Pre – Vice Chancellor Ms Bella Sattar – Quality Assurance Director (Audit, Accreditation, National Reviews)
7.11	1700	Review of Day
7.12	1800	Planning for Day 8
7.13	1900	Dinner
Day 8	**Thursday 20 November**	**3 PRIVATES**
8.1	0800	Monash South Africa Prof T Pretorius – Pro Vice Chancellor and President Ms N Murdoch – Director Institutional Planning and Quality Assurance (Audit and Accreditation)
8.2	0900	Review Panel
8.3	0930	Da Vinci Institute for Technology Management Prof Bennie Anderson, ~~Prof Schoeman~~ Mr Piet Swanepoel, Registrar (Audit and Accreditation)
8.4	1030	Review Panel
8.5	1130	~~Cranefield College~~ ~~Dr Alwyn Kruger – Registrar~~ ~~(Audit and Accreditation)~~ Tendered apology.

8.6	1230	Interview with HEQC Managers/Project Administrators Belinda Wort, Tamara Bezuidenhout, Mercy Sondlo, Daya Gobind, Pam du Toit
8.7	1300	LUNCH
8.8	1400	Panel deliberation: Draft recommendations.
8.9	1900	Dinner

Day 9	**Friday 21 November**	**SUMMING UP**
	08:00	Summing up
	Midday	Departure to airport.