



COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

HIGHER EDUCATION CONFERENCE

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



26 TO 28

FEBRUARY 2025



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The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is a statutory body established in terms of the provision of section 4 of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997, as amended, and its mandate as stipulated in section 5 of the same Act, includes arranging and coordinating conferences on themes germane to higher education. It is in line with this mandate that the CHE has regularly organised conferences on topical issues on higher education since 1999.

The CHE hereby announces that its next Higher Education Conference will take place from **26 to 28 February 2025** at a venue within the vicinity of the OR International Airport in Johannesburg. The name of the venue will be confirmed soon. The conference will be in-person only.

The theme of the conference is:

The State of Quality of Higher Education in South Africa Three Decades into Democracy

Background and context

The promotion of quality of higher education has been one of the central pillars of the post-apartheid policy on higher education. The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE)¹ envisaged a transformed higher education system that delivers quality higher education, whilst being responsive to the needs of the country, the southern African region, and the African continent at large. It sought to emphasise that transformation and quality higher education are not inversely related, and therefore, implementing the programme of transformation of higher education should not necessarily result in compromising the quality of higher education.

The Education White Paper 3² identified quality as one of the seven fundamental principles that should guide the process of transforming higher education in the spirit of an open and democratic society based on human dignity, equality and development. The other six principles were equity and redress, democratisation, development, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability. The Education White Paper 3³ went on to identify twelve national level goals or key targets and outcomes to be pursued in the transformation process. One of these goals is to improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the system and, in particular, to ensure that curricula are responsive to the national and regional contexts.

The Plan that the government put together to guide the implementation of the programme for the transformation of higher education⁴ had four primary objectives, one of which was to

¹ NCHE. 1996. A Framework for Transformation of Higher Education. Pretoria: NCHE.

² Department of Education. 1997. *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. Pretoria: Government Publishers.

³ *Ibid*

⁴ Department of Education. 2001. *National Plan for Higher Education of South Africa*. Pretoria: DoE

ensure that the quality of academic programmes, including teaching and research, are improved across the system. One of its priorities for intervention was to link improvements in efficiency, in the form of throughput, with increase in quality. This meant that initiatives to increase throughput should be implemented in parallel with initiatives to improve the quality of teaching and learning, and the quality of graduates produced. The Plan⁵ asserted that quality is central to redress and equity, and that, it would be unacceptable for graduates, particularly those from previously disadvantaged backgrounds, to be 'short-changed' in terms of the quality of programme provision as it would not only impact on their ability to improve their own life chances, but it would also adversely impact on the broader agenda for social and economic development. It further called for continuous renewal and improvement of curricula to ensure that the quality of learning programmes and the quality of the higher education qualifications that they lead to, are improved in line with international best practices.

The White Paper for the Post-School Education and Training⁶ set out a vision for a post-school education and training system that it seeks to build in South Africa. It envisions (a) a post-school system that can assist in building a fair, equitable, non-racial, non-sexist and democratic South Africa; (b) a single, coordinated post-school education and training system; (c) expanded access, improved quality and increased diversity of provision; (d) a stronger and more cooperative relationship between education and training institutions and the workplace; and (e) a post-school and training system that is responsive to the needs of individual citizens and employees in both public and private sectors, as well as broader societal and developmental objectives. Once again, this important policy document emphasises the improvement of quality of provision as one of the critical elements of the vision it sets out for the post-school education and training system, which includes higher education.

The National Development Plan⁷ views quality higher education as pivotal to national development because quality higher education would produce graduates who would be

well-prepared to meet the demands of the economy and who can contribute to societal development, in general.

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Department of Higher Education and Training. 2013. *White Paper for the Post-School Education and Training: Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System*. Pretoria: DHET.

⁷ National Planning Commission. 2013. *The National Development Plan: Vision 2030*. Pretoria: The Presidency

The National Plan for the Post-School Education and Training (NPPSET)⁸ has six national system goals and objectives, each with several outcomes, and, in turn, each outcome has a set of associated intervention strategies. One of the six system goals is an improved quality of provision of education and training, and its objective is to build the capacity of post-school education and training institutions (which include higher education institutions) to provide quality education and training. Some of the associated outcomes of this goal are to improve quality of teaching and learning, improve quality of research, improve quality assurance capability, and improve quality of infrastructure.

The latest national higher education policy document⁹ reinforces the policy commitment for quality higher education. It seeks to create a differentiated higher education institutional landscape committed to expanding access to, and provisioning of quality higher education. It stipulates, for example, that higher education colleges would have to demonstrate stability and quality of provision, if they intend to expand. Similarly, university colleges would have to demonstrate their ability and capability to provide quality higher education sustainably, as one of the conditions for progression to, and conversion into the university higher education institutional type.

It is clear from the foregoing that one of the constants in the post-apartheid policies that relate to higher education is the unflinching commitment to creating and sustaining a higher education system whose hallmark should be the foregrounding of quality of provision. This policy position resonates well with the aspiration of higher education students, as they too have been calling for quality higher education in their various protest campaigns, since the dawn of democracy. For example, during the #FeesMustFall student campaign, the demands of the students included tuition fees-free *quality* higher education, as well as tuition fees-free, decolonised *quality* higher education.¹⁰ In other words, the desire for quality higher education has always been part of the mix of the demands that students have expressed from time-to-time in the various protest campaigns over the last three decades.

Taking into consideration that the policy emphasis on quality higher education has been going on for three decades, and that over the same period, students have expressed quality higher education as one of their demands in their protest campaigns, it is high time that higher education stakeholders posed and reflected on two questions. The first and primary question

⁸ Department of Higher Education and Training. 2021. *National Plan for the Post School Education and Training: 2020 – 2030*. Pretoria: DHET.

⁹ Department of Higher Education and Training. 2024. *Draft Policy on the South African Higher Education Institution Types*. Pretoria: DHET.

¹⁰ Griffiths, D. 2019. #FeesMustFall and the decolonised university in South Africa: Tensions and opportunities in a globalizing world. *International Journal of Educational Research*. 94: 143 - 149

is, what is the quality of higher education in South Africa? The second and corollary question is, has the quality of higher education remained constant, or has it changed over the three decades? If it has changed, then the rider questions that would follow are, (a) What is the nature of the change? and (b) Is the change consistent with the expectations expressed in the policy documents, as well as consistent with the expectations of students?

It is against the background presented in the preceding paragraphs, and in particular, the questions in the last paragraph, that the CHE has selected the *State of Quality of Higher Education in South Africa Three Decades into Democracy* as the theme of the conference that it is planning and organising to take place from 26 to 28 February 2025.

Aim and objectives of the conference

The aim of the conference is to provide a platform at which role players and stakeholder in higher education would engage in reflecting on how much has been achieved during the last three decades in terms of foregrounding quality in the provision of higher education; how much is still remaining to be achieved in this regard, going forward; and what, if any, are the outstanding barriers or obstacles that militate against initiatives towards continuous improvement, or enhancement in the quality of higher education.

The specific objectives of the conference are to:

- Engage in conceptual and/or philosophical discourses on the manifestation of quality of higher education;
- Reflect on the state of quality of high education in South Africa three decades into democracy;
- Reflect on the implications of the state of quality three decades into democracy in relation to the goals of (a) meeting the learning needs and aspirations of individuals, (b) serving the labour market needs in an increasingly knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent economy, (c) developing and nurturing enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens; and (d) creating a rich pipeline of future academics, scholars, researchers, and innovators;
- Assess if there have been any considerable change or changes in the quality of higher education over the three decades, and characterise such change/s (if any);
- Examine the key factors that enable and facilitate the continuous enhancement or improvement in the quality of higher education; and

- Examine current or potential barriers or obstacles that militate or may militate against initiatives towards continuous improvement or enhancement in the quality of higher education.

Categories of people expected to attend the conference

Any person involved in higher education as a current student, former student, academic, researcher, or manager; any person who works in organisations or bodies that regulate higher education; and any person who has general interest in higher education, would be welcomed to attend and participate in the conference. People who fall in the categories listed below are particularly encouraged to attend and participate in the conference.

- Students from public and private higher education institutions;
- Academics from public and private higher education institutions;
- Researchers from public and private higher education institutions, science councils, civil societies, and independent research institutions and think tanks;
- Leaders and executive managers of public and private higher education institutions;
- Members of governance structures in public and private higher education institutions;
- Representatives of academic staff and other higher education staff associations;
- Quality and/or quality promotion managers and/or practitioners in public and private higher education institutions;
- Quality assurance managers and/or practitioners in quality councils, professional bodies, and public and private higher education institutions;
- Student wellness managers and/or practitioners in public and private higher education institutions;
- Community engagement and/or engaged scholarship managers in public and private higher education institutions;
- Student support service managers and/or practitioners;
- Policy developers and/or analysts;
- Officials in the Department of Higher Education and Training;
- Members of the Parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training;
- Officials from education and training regulatory bodies;
- Officials from scholarly publishing houses; and
- Other higher education stakeholders that might be interested in or are affected by matters related to the state of quality of higher education.

Call for abstracts

Researchers, academics, current higher education students, former higher education students, quality and/or quality promotion managers and/or practitioners, quality assurance managers and/or practitioners, student wellness managers and/or practitioners in public and private higher education institutions, community engagement and/or engaged scholarship managers in public and private higher education institutions, policy developers and/or analysts, labour analysts, human resource managers and/or practitioners in public and private sectors, and all others who have something to share about the quality of higher education and its implications, are invited to submit abstracts for:

- a) Platform presentations;
- b) Symposia or workshops; and
- c) Panel discussions, at the conference.

The abstracts should be on topics that speak to the following conference subthemes:

1. Conceptual and/or philosophical discourses on the manifestation of quality of higher education;
2. State of quality of teaching and learning;
3. State of quality of postgraduate student supervision and thesis/dissertation assessment;
4. State of quality of community engagement and/or engaged scholarship;
5. State of quality of student support and wellness services;
6. Implications of the state of higher education in relation to any of the following goals:
 - 6.1 meeting the learning needs and aspirations of individual students;
 - 6.2 serving the labour market needs in an increasingly knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent economy;
 - 6.3 developing and nurturing enlightened, responsible, and constructively critical citizens;
 - 6.4 creating a rich pipeline of future academics, scholars, researchers, and innovators;
7. Changing trends and trajectories in quality of higher education: 1994 – 2024;
8. Key factors that enable and facilitate the continuous enhancement or improvement in the quality of higher education; and
9. Current and/or potential barriers or obstacles that militate or may militate against initiatives towards continuous improvement or enhancement in the quality of higher education.

Each abstract submitted should adhere to the following requirements:

- Not more than 400 words long;
- Reflect title, name of author (or names of authors) and institutional or organisational affiliation or affiliations;
- Bear email address of the author, or of the corresponding author, in case of multiple authors;
- Specify the conference subtheme that the abstract relates to;
- Written in English (South African or United Kingdom);
- List five (5) keywords;
- Typed using 11-point Arial or Century Gothic font type;
- Text lines justified and spaced consistently at one-and-half line spacing.

The abstracts should be sent to the Conference Organising Committee (COC) through the following email address: research@che.ac.za (cc Qampi.W@che.ac.za). The deadline for the submission of abstracts is **6 December 2024**, and the Conference Organising Committee will communicate back to authors by no later than **24 January 2025**. It is recommended that authors register for the conference by the time they submit their abstracts.

Publication of conference papers

The CHE will explore the possibility of entering into an agreement with one of the journals recognised by the Department of Higher Education and Training to publish papers developed from presentations at the conference. Details of this will be provided at the time of the conference.

Registration for the conference

Any person who wishes to be part of the conference should complete and submit a formal registration form which can be accessed by clicking here ([Registration](#)). Please follow the submission instructions on the form after completing it in full. Registration for the conference will close on **14 February 2025**.

Registration Fees

Early Registration: up to 6 December 2024.

- Persons based in South Africa: R4 800 per head
- Persons based outside South Africa: 360 US Dollars per head

Registration after 6 December 2024

- Persons based in South Africa: R5 600 per head
- Persons based outside South Africa: 415 US Dollars per head

Please note that those whose abstracts are accepted for presentation will be exempted from paying registration fees. However, in the event that there are two or more presenters for the same paper, only the lead authors/presenters would be exempted from paying registration fees. The other presenters will be required to pay.

Details of payment methods will appear on the invoice.

Cancellation of registration and refund of registration fees

Registered participants who cancel their registration after having paid their registration fees would be refunded their registration fees according to the following schedule:

- Cancellation on or before 6 December 2024: full amount of the registration fees paid will be refunded
- Cancellation between 7 December 2024 and 31 January 2025: 75% of the amount of the registration fees paid will be refunded
- Cancellation between 1 February to 14 February 2025: 50% of the amount of the registration fees paid will be refunded
- Cancellation after 14 February 2025: no amount of the registration fees paid will be refunded

Further Information

Further information about the conference, including registration and payment queries, should be addressed to research@che.ac.za (cc Qampi.W@che.ac.za). Interested individuals may also obtain more information about the conference by calling +27 (0) 83 319 9170 or +27 (0) 83 319 7907.