

**Quality Assurance in Higher Education:
The Role and Approach of Professional Bodies
and SETAs to Quality Assurance**

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Integrated Summary

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PREFACE

The Council on Higher Education (CHE), which has statutory responsibility for quality assurance in higher education, set up the interim Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) in June 1999 to investigate how best to establish a national system for the quality assurance of public and private providers of higher education. This report was commissioned last year by the interim HEQC in an attempt to get a more comprehensive understanding of the quality assurance systems, approaches and expectations of a cross section of professional councils and SETAs. The investigation was intended to inform the HEQC about the co-ordination role assigned to it in the Addendum to the **Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs** (SAQA 2000), as well as to explore the nature of the partnerships and contractual agreements that would have to be established with other ETQAs operating in the higher education and training band. This report brings together the separate investigations into the quality assurance approaches of professional councils and SETAs, as well as an integrated report on the two investigations. The integrated report is a summary of information furnished by professional councils and SETAs about their quality assurance systems, perceptions and expectations of the HEQC, and an identification by the two researchers of critical issues to be noted by the HEQC in embarking on the development of co-operation agreements.

From the time these investigations were commissioned, a number of developments have occurred which have sharpened our understandings of the requirements as well as the complexities of co-operation. However, the documents are still a useful snapshot of preliminary discussions among ETQAs in higher education on a common approach to quality and quality assurance, as well as a useful foundation on which to build future relationships. A coherent and value-adding quality assurance system can be built only on the foundations of co-operation, the sharing of information and a common commitment to the best interests of learners and educators in higher education. The report will be submitted to the HEQC to be used in the process of developing memoranda of understanding with partner ETQAs in higher education.

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March 2001

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INTRODUCTION

Background

In August 2000, the interim Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) commissioned a research study to establish the following:

- the different conceptions held by the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and various professional bodies about their quality assurance (QA) role—including, where relevant, the current involvement, policies and procedures of the various professional councils in the approval/accreditation of higher education programmes within their respective fields of education
- the envisaged scope of their quality assurance role—that is, what types of higher education programmes they intend to include
- their perceptions of interrelationships between SETAs, professional bodies and the HEQC with respect to the accreditation of institutions that offer higher education programmes.

It is expected that this research represents an initial step in the evolving process of exploring possible relationships between the HEQC and other ETQAs. This document, as well as the supporting documents, will be circulated to all other ETQAs, potential ETQAs and professional bodies. It is intended that they will serve as the basis for further discussion. Among other issues, it is hoped that one eventual result will be a better understanding of the necessary components of a contractual relationship between the SETAs, professional councils and the HEQC.

Methodology

The research included an initial workshop, held on 23 March 2000, with the following professional bodies:

- Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA)
- Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)
- Law Society of South Africa
- Public Accountants and Auditors Board (PAAB)
- South African Council for Professional and Technical Surveyors (PLATO)
- South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP)
- South African Dental Technicians Council (SADTC)
- South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA)
- South African Natural Sciences Council (SANSC)
- South African Nursing Council (SANC)
- South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC).

A review of existing documentary information was carried out, including the collection and analysis of relevant documentation of SAQA, the Department of Labour, the Department of Education, SETAs, and professional bodies. Other related national and international literature was also studied.

Interviews were conducted with individuals from a number of bodies, including:

- Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA)
- Law Society of South Africa
- South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA)
- South African Dental Technicians Council (SADTC)
- South African Nursing Council (SANC)
- Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)

- South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC)
- Financial and Accounting Services SETA (FASSET)
- Education, Training and Development Practitioner SETA (ETDP SETA)
- Banking Sector Education and Training Authority (BANKSETA)
- Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA)
- Energy Sector Education and Training Authority (ESETA)
- Forest Industries Education and Training Authority (FIETA)
- Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunication Technologies SETA (ISETT)
- Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging SETA (MAPPP)
- MQA (Mining Qualifications Authority)
- Tourism and Hospitality Education and Training Authority (THETA).

Interviews were also conducted with individuals from the “Band ETQAs” and the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), as well as with members of Project 7, including Gail Elliot and Darryl McLean.

The councils and SETAs mentioned above were selected on the basis of a range of criteria, including the need to interview bodies that have had different approaches to accreditation, as well as those whose statutory responsibilities differ, for example, SAICA, FASSET and BANKSETA. With regard to the SETAs, there was also a focus on those bodies where a substantial component of their primary responsibility falls within the HET band. In some cases, the selection also depended on those bodies that were available within the allocated timeframe.

The initial report was distributed to SETAs and professional bodies that were involved in the research process. These bodies—as well as some that had been identified by interviewees as being possible partners in their QA activities—were then invited to a workshop, held on 21 November 2000, to comment on the document in order to validate its accuracy and to suggest ways in which the document and its recommendations could be taken forward more broadly.

Editorial suggestions made at the workshop have been incorporated into this document. However, recommendations emerging from the workshop which pertain to the criteria and process, as well as ways in which potential relationships could be piloted and taken forward, are captured in the workshop report. The workshop report will be circulated by the Interim HEQC.

CONTEXT OF THE REPORT

These interviews have taken place at a time when a number of changes are taking place across the professions. Many of the Councils are new, and a number of the Acts and related regulations are under review. Further, the SETAs are currently in the process of exploring their roles as ETQAs and defining their primary focus. Many of the SETAs are also integrating the existing Industrial Training Board (ITB) functions within the broader role of the SETA.

This general state of flux creates some uncertainty about the roles and responsibilities that the different bodies may play. At the same time, however, it has the advantage that there is a climate in which there is openness about the need for transformation and the possibility of new roles and relationships.

DEFINING QUALITY

The South African Qualifications Authority Act (No. 58 of 1995) lays the basis for a common understanding of the notion of quality in education and training, and the implementation of a holistic quality management system, with the objective of enhancing the quality of education and training in South Africa. This notion of quality, which is perceived as a continuum of quality assurance activities, is embodied in the required development of ETQA bodies.

While the imperative of quality is well accepted, a key challenge facing the system is to reach a common understanding of what quality is.

The HEQC Founding Document outlines the organisation's approach to quality. The document states that the HEQC will develop a quality assurance framework and criteria based on:

- fitness for purpose in the context of mission differentiation of institutions within a national framework
- value for money, judged not only in terms of labour market responsiveness or cost recovery, but also in relation to the full range of higher education purposes set out in the White Paper (1997)
- transformation in the sense of developing the personal capabilities of individual learners, as well as advancing the agenda for social change.

By defining quality in relation to purpose, the HEQC points to the need to consider the priorities of different sectors when developing quality indicators. This approach is echoed in the Department of Labour document, *Quality Management Systems (QMS) for SETAs and ETQAs*, which defines quality as "the totality of characteristics of an entity that bears on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs" (DoL, 2000).

Another approach can be drawn from a report by the committee established by the Minister of Education to look at *Value, Education and Democracy*. This report highlights various indicators of quality, including equity, tolerance, multilingualism, openness, accountability and honour.

In contrast, the MQA states that competence in terms of health and safety requirements is an absolute priority for the SETA.

These quality issues are framed within the objectives and principles of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

RATIONALE FOR ACCREDITATION

Objectives of Accreditation

Accreditation objectives are well captured in an ECSA Document (August 2000). It provides an overview of the objectives of accreditation and serves as a useful reference point for these discussions. It is suggested that the objectives of accreditation are:

- to establish whether or not a programme meets the educational requirement toward registration in a particular category
- to establish whether the graduates of a programme are ready to enter (engineering) employment and are equipped to continue learning throughout their careers
- to establish the international comparability of programmes
- to assure the public of the quality of the programme

- to encourage improvement and innovation in (engineering) education in response to national and global needs.

This focus, described by the Health Professions Council of South Africa as “rendering a service to the public” and intended to assure the public that it is protected, represents only one aspect of the focus of the HEQC. This issue will be explored later in this report.

Implications of Accreditation

Having outlined the objectives of the accreditation process, it is worth touching on some of the implications of whether or not a provider is accredited.

In many of the Acts, providers are not legally allowed to offer programmes that culminate in “professional qualifications” if the relevant professional Council does not accredit them. For example, nursing programmes may only be offered if the Nursing Council has approved the programme. In other cases, providers may legally offer programmes without being accredited. In such cases, their non-accreditation status may have a range of implications.

Firstly, in the case of many of the professions, institutions will not receive financial support from the professional council if they are not accredited to provide the programme. However, in some cases the professional bodies *do* offer development support to enable institutions to become accredited, and this may include financial support.

Secondly, in certain professions, accreditation impacts on the students. In accounting, for example, students may not write the examination towards registration if they have not completed their qualification at an accredited provider. This requirement is in place on the basis of the experience of SAICA, which has shown that learners who have not come through these institutions have a minimal chance of passing. Similarly in the health profession, if a student graduates from an institution that is not accredited, s/he will not be registered by the Medical and Dental Board. By contrast, in the engineering profession the examination is open to all individuals who wish to undertake it, regardless of which institution the individual attended.

Further, many professional bodies list the institutions that are accredited, and thus the accreditation impacts on the providers’ ability to attract students to the programme. The accreditation—or non-accreditation—status of an institution also impacts on the manner in which potential employers perceive the programme. Thus, accreditation status has a significant bearing on the future employability of graduates.

Accreditation also impacts on recognition processes among HET institutions. In many cases there are arrangements in place to ensure that learners who receive their qualification at an institution that is not accredited will be able to enter a programme at an accredited institution and receive recognition for the bulk of their studies. They would then be required to complete a stipulated course of study, for example, an additional year at the accredited institution.

Implications for Students if Accreditation is “Removed” from the Provider

It was emphasised across the professional councils that withdrawal of accreditation takes place only after an institution has been given the opportunity to remedy the problems identified. Where institutions lose their accreditation—and this is often by mutual agreement—a number of processes are put in place to protect the learners. These may take any of several forms:

- Students in the institution which has lost its accreditation are able to complete the programme and access the same opportunities as those learners who are at accredited institutions.
- Students are able to enter a programme at an accredited institution (either at the same level or at an agreed level).
- Students are able to write the national examination regardless of the institution where the learner is registered.

The protection of the learner within the system is critical in the light of the importance of the impact of accreditation arrangements on students and the options that are available to them upon completion of their qualification.

BROAD RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN ETQA BODY

This section forms the backdrop for the approach proposed in this report, which explores the potential relationship between the HEQC and other ETQAs, as well as the possible roles that the different bodies could play. It takes as its starting point the functions, roles and activities of the ETQA as defined by SAQA.

Requirements for Accreditation as an ETQA Body

To be accredited by SAQA as an ETQA and to have the authority to accredit providers—and thus play a quality assurance role with regard to providers—a body must fall within one of three sectors: an economic sector, a social sector, or an education and training sub-system. It must also be able to demonstrate that:

- it meets a justifiable need
- it has a primary focus
- there is minimum duplication
- there is the capacity to perform the functions assigned to it by the Authority.

However, the authority to quality assure certain programmes offered by learning institutions is also given to different bodies through a range of Acts that regulate the professions. Within these Acts there is considerable variation as to the type of quality assurance activities that must take place. There are also different terms associated with such activities, including approval and accreditation.

Accrediting a Provider

Once a body is accredited as an ETQA, one of its key functions is to accredit providers. SAQA specifies a range of criteria that a provider must satisfy in order to be accredited.

A critical consideration for this document is the requirement, specified by SAQA, that providers must be accredited by a single ETQA. This suggests that multi-purpose providers within the HET band must be accredited by the education and training sub-system ETQA—in other words, by the HEQC.

However, as stated, certain of the Acts require that professional bodies take responsibility for the accreditation of certain programmes and institutions that operate within this band. This leads to the scenario in which a multi-purpose provider may be involved in the provision of a programme that must by law be accredited by a professional council. Yet this multi-purpose provider must also, by law, be accredited by the HEQC. An approach is needed that enables the different bodies to fulfil their legal responsibilities while ensuring that consistency, maximum coherence and minimum duplication are achieved in accordance with the requirements of SAQA.

The distinction between multi-purpose and single-purpose institutions will be maintained throughout this report, and has important implications for the relationships between the HEQC and other ETQAs.

Terminological Clarification

Institutional audit and programme evaluation

When exploring the functions of the ETQAs, it is useful to note the different terminologies that are employed. The functions of the HEQC, as drawn from the Education White Paper (DoE, 1997), include those of programme accreditation, institutional auditing and quality promotion.

While the discourse is slightly different from that of SAQA, the approach suggested is consistent with SAQA requirements. SAQA states that an ETQA accredits a provider (the institution) against qualifications and standards registered on the National Qualifications Framework (the programme).

Compatibility of discourse is suggested in the SAQA criteria for the accreditation of the provider (SAQA, 2000), which states that a provider must:

- satisfy a number of institution-wide criteria, such as having a quality management system (QMS)
- satisfy a number of programmatic criteria such as the ability “to develop, deliver and evaluate learning programmes which culminate in specified registered standards or qualifications”.

It is possible to consider these two elements (institution and programme) as distinct functions that must be carried out in an integrated manner. The distinction allows for these functions to be carried out by more than one body through a combination of structured relations and practices. For example, with reference to the previous discussion about the distinction between multi-purpose and single-purpose providers, it is likely that “multi-purpose providers would generally be accredited in terms of their institutional quality management systems by the relevant education and training sub-system” (SAQA, 2000), for example the Council on Higher Education. By contrast, a single purpose provider would generally be accredited in terms of their institutional quality management systems by an appropriate economic sector ETQA.

The above suggests that the accreditation process includes both an institutional audit and a programme evaluation, and provides an example of the different responsibilities that may flow from these processes.

This distinction enables us to explore carefully the respective roles of the different bodies with regard to these functions. Part of this will require further clarification of these two functions, as the question arises as to where institutional audits end and programme evaluations begin.

Audit

The term “audit” is used to mean a variety of activities. In general, the term “audit is” used to describe site visits. These serve either to validate information gained through the self-evaluation undertaken by the provider—(verification)—or in some cases to access additional information from the perspectives of different stakeholders.

Accreditation versus approval

Another term that may cause confusion is “approval”. The term *approved* is used in certain of the Acts synonymously with the term *accreditation*. Thus, the Pharmacy Council approves programmes, but their process and criteria are consistent with the requirements of an accreditation process (as suggested in SAQA documentation). In other cases, such as with ECSA, there has been a shift from an approval system to an accreditation system to indicate that they are moving towards more rigour.

This report utilises both of these terms and suggests that through developing a common approach and set of quality criteria, as well as through the clarification of potential relationships, it may be possible to disentangle the terminology issues. It is absolutely clear that the manner in which the accreditation will be carried out is one that encourages co-operation and partnerships.

CURRENT QUALITY ASSURANCE RESPONSIBILITIES

Quality Responsibilities of the HEQC

The previous section suggested that, as an education and training sub-system ETQA, the HEQC will have specific responsibilities for quality assurance within the HET band. The Addendum to the Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs (2000) states the following:

...it is appropriate for the CHE, through the HEQC, as the ETQA of primary focus for higher education—that is, universities, technikons, colleges and private higher institutions, in terms of the ETQA regulations—to perform the co-ordinating function to enable the establishment of the required partnerships with other ETQAs working in the band. The CHE then will:

- *facilitate a common interpretation of quality assurance policy for the HET band by ETQAs operating in the band*
- *co-ordinate the establishment of a common set of ground rules for the practice of quality assurance including the inter-relationship between quality assurance promotion, institutional audits and programme assessment*
- *provide a platform together with SAQA for regular discussions on quality assurance policy and implementation issues by ETQAs in the HET band*
- *co-ordinate and facilitate discussions to enable the required agreements between ETQAs to be established*
- *set up, in consultation with the other relevant ETQAs, co-ordinated timeframes for quality assurance visits to providers and facilitate other administrative quality assurance measures common to all ETQAs.*

Responsibilities of the Councils and SETAs

Professional Councils are regulated by law, with responsibility for the administration of the specific Acts regulating the profession resting with the relevant government department. The Acts make provision for the appointment of a council which could differ in size or composition. Council members are appointed by the relevant Minister. The majority of representatives are from the respective professions. The powers and functions of the councils are similar, and include the registration of different categories of professionals and persons in training, reservation of work in some cases for specific categories, development and enforcement of codes of conduct, and ensuring that the professions fulfil their role in the interests of the public. Most of the Acts make provision for advisory committees responsible for educational standards and the accreditation of educational institutions.

Voluntary Associations are formed by professionals with the main objective of promoting the interests of the profession and the quality of work done in the particular field. They serve an important role as a lobbyist for the profession, and represent the interests of their members.

Twenty-five SETAs were established by the Minister of Labour in March 2000. SETAs serve defined sectors covering a range of economic activities. The Skills Development Act (1998) defines the functions of the SETAs, and stipulates that each must:

- prepare a sector skills plan and implement this through learnerships
- approve and promote learnerships
- quality assure training
- administer the levy/grant system
- inform the National Skills Authority about their progress.

In order to perform the quality assurance role delineated, they have to be accredited as ETQAs by SAQA.

NATURE OF THE PROVIDERS

The programmes that culminate in professional qualifications form part of a larger higher education field. They are offered by a broad range of providers, including public and private HET institutions. The majority of such programmes are offered at public multi-purpose HET institutions. These include both technikons and universities. There are some single-purpose providers that offer programmes leading towards these qualifications, such as banks and the nursing profession. However, some of these institutions may be integrated into a multi-purpose institution, for example, nursing colleges.

There is also likely to be an increase in the numbers of private providers in the pharmaceutical sector, as many have indicated an interest in offering programmes that culminate in the pharmaceutical assistant qualification. The Pharmacy Council has historically offered these programmes itself, but this provision will be phased out in terms of the ETQA requirements.

CURRENT APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

Quality Management Systems

Many of the SETAs and a few of the professional bodies are adopting and adapting existing quality management systems. The systems that have primarily been referred to include:

- the International Standards Organisation (ISO) 9000 system
- British Standard (BS) 5750
- the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award
- the Investors In People Award (IIP).

This section does not attempt to be definitive, but rather highlights the trends that are being followed within SETAs in relation to the quality management systems that they will require potential providers to have (generally the single purpose providers), as well as the internal QMS systems that they are likely to utilise themselves as ETQAs.

Methodologies to be Utilised by SETA ETQAs in the Accreditation of Providers

This section pertains to those providers that will be accredited by the SETA ETQA. As discussed above, these are likely to be single purpose providers that fall within the scope of the SETA ETQA.

Most SETAs interviewed suggested that they would be utilising a combination of methods in the accreditation of providers. In essence, the SETA ETQAs suggested that they would rely on a combination of self-evaluation and audits.

The self-evaluation would be carried out by the provider, and would involve an assessment of the provider using a range of categories. In most cases, the SETA ETQA will request the provider to complete a supplied form. This would serve to guide the provider in terms of the areas of information that the SETA ETQA requires.

It is expected that an audit would involve a team of people—a panel—that will undertake a site visit in order to assess the provider. This type of assessment may focus on areas that come to light through the self-evaluation process, or it may serve to verify the information provided by the self-evaluation.

This echoes the processes followed by the professional bodies, where the main trends with regard to quality assurance processes are:¹

- self-evaluation/assessment
- follow-up visit by a panel (primarily made up of people from the profession, often from both academic and industry contexts). These visits include a range of interviews with different players in the institution. Particular emphasis is placed on interviewing learners (present and past) as a key indicator of issues that may relate to the teaching and learning process. The ECSA process also includes a brief meeting with the university executive.
- interventions when problems emerge.

In most cases the Councils rely on clear procedures and manuals to guide the quality assurance process. The Council either develops these procedures and standards itself or utilises the SERTEC procedure. For example, ECSA relies on:

- standards—that is, the outcomes that a programme must lead towards
- accreditation policy governing how evaluation of programmes is performed
- operational procedures for arranging, conducting and following up on visits
- documentation requirements for each programme to be evaluated
- reporting methods and formats.

Selection and training of panels (evaluators)

The selection process for deciding on the evaluation panels varies. Generally the panels include members of the profession. They may be drawn from academia or, in certain professions, may also include members of the profession working in industry. In a few of the professions, the panels specifically include laypersons. In the case of the South African Medical and Dental Board, it is suggested that this person be an educationalist, while in Pharmacy the specific expertise of the individual is discretionary.

¹ Note that this applies to the quality assurance processes that are followed for those programmes that fall within the legal jurisdiction of the Professional Councils. Where there is no legal jurisdiction, the quality assurance processes tend to be less formal.

A number of the professions attempt to develop a broad pool of individuals to assist with these evaluations. This allows for the development of expertise in these activities. Some of the Councils have also put in place a training system for evaluators.

The panels are provided with training material or guidelines. Even where there is no formal training, Councils indicate that prior to the actual visit the panel will meet to discuss the manner in which they will approach the visit.

Criteria to be Utilised by SETA ETQAs in the Accreditation of Providers

A range of criteria is emerging regarding the accreditation of providers. This section details the kind of criteria suggested by the SETAs and the professional bodies. There is a high level of overlap between the criteria suggested by the different bodies.

The subsections that follow are grouped according to SAQA criteria for accrediting providers and outline the requirements for workplace experience and learning.²

Learning programmes: development, delivery and evaluation

- Establishment that there is a need for the programme:
A number of the professions have commissioned studies that explore the nature of the need and the impact that this should have on where programmes are offered, programme numbers, and the nature and content of programmes.
- The ability to conduct outcomes-based education and training.
- Nature of the teaching and learning:
This is to ensure that learners are able to develop problem solving skills, and that the methods of teaching and learning enable learners to develop an applied competence (that is, through simulations, case studies, use of laboratories, and so on). In most cases there are guidelines about the nature of the teaching and learning process that is expected.
- Syllabi:
In many cases the professional body determines the syllabus; however, this emphasis may shift as national standards are agreed upon. In some cases the emphasis is on accessing information about what modules will be utilised, and about the course content.
- Course materials:
in many cases the syllabus is outlined and the training centre only has to develop the content of the course.
- In addition to the above, certain of the professional councils (such as the Nursing Council) suggest that the criterion of time—that is, the length of programme—has historically been a key criterion and is, in fact, a regulatory requirement. However, this has resulted in discriminatory practices, where students lose credits that they have acquired because they suspend their studies for a period. For this reason, the time-based criterion is to be reviewed and amended. In other professions, it is suggested that time may still be considered as an important indicator of quality.
- SETA interviewees also emphasised the role that they play, as defined by the Skills Development Act (No. 97 of 1998), in the quality assurance of learnerships.³ This

² Note that the SAQA criteria appear as subheadings within this section, and the discussions within the SETAs are reflected within each subsection.

³ A learnership is a learning programme consisting of two elements, a learning component and practical work experience. A learnership must lead to a qualification registered by the South African Qualifications Authority and related to an occupation. All learnerships must be approved by a SETA and be registered with the Department of Labour. (Department of Labour: Understanding the Laws (2000)).

responsibility carries with it the need to ensure that the criteria, as specified in the Draft learnership regulations and guidelines, are met. Some relevant factors are that 70% of the assessment must take place in the workplace and that there is an employer body involved in the Learnership.

Policies and practices for managing off-site practical or work-site components

- Placement or practical opportunities:
In many of the professions, there is a requirement for a “practical component” in the phase towards qualification. In these cases, a workplace that has adequate facilities and staffing to absorb the students during this phase is required. This is seen as increasingly important in terms of the need for students to develop the ability to utilise their knowledge and skills in an applied context. For example, in the medical profession there are discussions about the possibility of introducing the clinical component (hospital work) from year one.
- It is generally felt that workplaces should not be accredited according to the same criteria as other providers, and that the emphasis should be placed on assessors and possibly mentors. This is illustrated below in the criteria for workplace accreditation outlined by the professional bodies. Note, however, that this would only apply where the workplace was not playing the role of a provider; where the workplace is the provider, the same criteria would apply as for other providers.

Policies and practices for learner entry, guidance and support systems

- In many cases there is an emphasis on flexible entry requirements coupled with adequate support for students where required.
- Generally, however, there has been limited emphasis on matters such as learner support and guidance, although the MQA does include issues such as learner selection criteria and processes.
- There is a consensus that appeal procedures for learners should be built into the assessment process.

Staff selection, appraisal and development

- Staffing:
Numbers, qualifications and experience.
- Provision of on-going professional development to staff:
This is an area that received considerable attention, with SETAs suggesting that a key priority is the training and assessing of assessors, as well as the development of qualified Education, Training and Development Practitioners (ETDPs).

Financial, administrative and physical resources

- Facilities (for example, laboratories) are key aspects of the required infrastructure. However, certain of the professions also consider aspects such as facilities for students.
- Sustainability:
There should be the funding to ensure that the programme will be able to continue at the current quality level. The possibility was also mooted of a trust fund for learners in the event that they could not complete the programme at their current institution because of problems at that institution.
- Assessing whether the provider has the relevant premises and equipment (including software where relevant).
- Facilities for students (including areas for students to relax in and to pursue their learning activities).

- Health, hygiene and safety issues.

Management of assessment

- Both the nature and level of assessment are considered.
- A number of the professions have legal responsibility for examinations. These can take the form of moderated internal examinations at the point of qualification. Often there is an additional examination at the point of entering the profession. There are also professions where an external examination is required at the point of qualification.
- There is a shift towards assessing problem solving skills in an applied context and away from approaches that encourage institutions to “train learners for the examination”.
- With regard to the SETAs, the bulk of the system has revolved around the assessment of the learner and the moderation of learner achievement. Thus, many providers ran an internal assessment process that was based on nationally developed assessment tools and criteria.
- SETAs generally adopt different approaches to learner assessment. Some of the SETAs suggest that they are likely to develop assessment tools against which learners will be assessed. In some cases where SETAs are not developing assessment tools, employers have agreed to participate in their development.
- In some sectors, the provider develops the assessment tools or contracts an agency to conduct assessment on its behalf. Sometimes the approach is to quality assure the assessment tool. However, in other cases it was felt that providers were able to develop these tools, and they would be audited only if there were complaints.

Reporting procedures

- The SETA interviewees commented on this issue, based on their experiences with the Industrial TBs. Some of the ITBs had more advanced systems of gathering data than others. This unevenness was also reflected in the interviews with the professional bodies.
- It was agreed that continuous as well as actual results are important indicators of quality, and can be used to identify problems.
- It was stated that in the past data was collected but not analysed and put to use for development.
- Generally, a strong emphasis was placed on the importance of good record-keeping, with some SETAs placing a strong focus on verifying data. This aspect of verification was considered to be particularly important in the developmental phase.

Other factors pertaining to the overall institution as well as the specific faculty

- Mission statement.
- Relationships within the organisation:
This was mentioned by one of the Councils as an issue that impacts considerably on the functioning of a department or school.

Different Levels of Accreditation

Two issues emerged relating to the issue of whether there should be different levels of accreditation:

- whether there should be different accreditation criteria in order to ensure that emerging sector providers and smaller providers could be accredited
- the extent to which different levels of accreditation could be utilised to indicate additional responsibilities as a provider.

Many SETAs argued that providers did not possess an appropriate QMS. While some providers appeared to have quality assurance people in the organisation, the majority of SETA providers did not have a specific person responsible for this area of work.

There is an increased level of awareness of the need for quality assurance arrangements by providers. However, it is still felt that many institutions have not understood the requirements for a quality management system, and that there are insufficient resources available for quality assurance activities. This is supported by the view expressed in the evaluation commissioned by the HEQC (CHE, 2000). The report states that:

...it also became apparent that the understanding of quality assurance as opposed to certification and accreditation at most of the institutions is a relatively new concept. Most are working on developing policies, procedures and processes to give expression to the quality assurance goal. There is no consistency in the level of preparedness at most institutions.

Many SETAs were concerned about the size of provider organisations and the implications that this had for accreditation arrangements. A related question regarding whether there should be different criteria for emerging providers compared to established providers was also raised by a number of the SETA interviewees.

The SETA interviewees argued that one should avoid the creation of a dual quality assurance system. The MQA suggested that it would have one QMS system—one set of processes and criteria—but that aspects (not requirements) of the system could differ depending on the size of the provider. For example, smaller providers could utilise the Internet, while larger providers would require their own IT systems.

These issues, coupled with the need to take the present situation of establishing SETA providers into account, has led to the perspective that quality management systems need to be phased in. This is consistent with the SAQA approach, which suggests that the process must take existing quality assurance and accreditation practices into account.

The approach, favoured by the majority of interviewees, is a developmental one and allows for ongoing improvement in the system. However, it was felt that this should be carried out in a manner that took cognisance of two factors. Firstly, where a provider cannot meet certain crucial criteria, such as health and safety measures, the provider should not be able to operate. Secondly, the process must ensure that learners are not disadvantaged.

There were also proposals that providers could be accredited at different levels. The quality for the learner would be consistent, but certain providers would be able to take on functions that others might not be able to carry out. This approach is supported by many of the professional bodies, who have emphasised the development of providers. There is an understanding that accreditation must serve to ensure that the standard of provision is good, that it should enable the individual to reach a level of applied competence and in this way protect the public. This highlights the imperative to ensure that the standard of provision is high and that accountabilities within the system are key.

However, many of the professional bodies are also exploring the type of development support that they can offer providers to enable institutions to meet the accreditation requirements. This is seen as being important both in terms of the need for higher numbers of graduates (in the case of certain professions), as well as in terms of the challenges of transformation and the imperative of institutional as well as individual redress.

In a number of cases, a profession has allocated a substantial amount of money to ensure that this support is in place, and that institutions are able to improve and meet the required

standards. Such support could even include the payment of staff or the purchase of materials. In other cases, the development support relies on the provision of advice.

Criteria for workplace experience and learning

While the HEQC responsibility relates to the first stage (towards the achievement of qualification), this document also outlines those criteria that are utilised for the second stage (accreditation of providers). This is presented both in terms of what we can learn from quality criteria and because of the inter-relationship between the two stages regarding overall learning.

The key criteria that are outlined for the accreditation of the workplace are:

- The company must be credible within the profession. This could differ across professions. For example in the legal profession, this would imply that the placement was with a firm where the senior partner is able to practise on his/her own account and is registered with one of the four law societies.
- The individual will be properly supervised (this relates to the qualification and experience of individuals within the workplace). The importance of this supervision is illustrated by the example of the Nursing Council, which provides a quality promotion instrument that is critical to guide the nature of the supervision during the workplace phase.
- The workplace is able to provide the requisite experience.

Additional criteria for registration

In addition to the qualification and experience requirements, there are requirements for registration—for example, additional study, the individual's moral character, an additional examination that assesses the individual's ability to make high-level judgements, and in some cases the individual's academic record.

What are the Core Criteria?

It was generally felt that while certain criteria are absolutely vital, others are also important and should be worked towards. Failure to meet this latter category of criteria would not exclude a provider from becoming accredited. For example, SAICA suggests that the syllabus and the level of assessment are vital criteria for the accreditation of the institution. On the other hand, the mission statement for the department is important, but its absence should not prevent the institution from becoming accredited.

The issue of facilities and staffing is one that requires some attention. While these are consistently cited as key criteria, the expectations related to them are open to discussion. It was generally agreed that there must be adequate staffing levels, with an emphasis on both the numbers of staff that the provider employs and on their qualifications and experience.

While it was felt that there needs to be a Head of Department with sufficient experience and expertise, it may be possible for an institution to rely on visiting lecturers and on a range of open learning methodologies to ensure that the learners access adequate support and resources.

Further, while the institution may not have all facilities, they must have agreements in place with other institutions that have these facilities. This ensures that their students can access these facilities.

What is considered critical in determining which criteria are “absolute” is that learning happens in a manner that is interactive, encourages problem solving, and integrates knowledge and skills in an applied context.

The ability to assess whether a programme is able to fulfil the requirements highlighted above suggests the need for clear outcomes, both critical cross-field as well as specific, that specify what the individual must know, do and understand. This will require concerted energy, as part of the SGB process, to ensure that these outcomes are generated across the different fields.

Institutional Factors that Impact on the Quality of the Programme

There is clearly a need to define the inter-relationship between institution-wide processes and the quality of the programmes that are offered by that institution, that is, what factors may receive particular attention within an institutional process versus those factors that are considered crucial to programme evaluation. This is important in order to begin to define the contribution that an institutional audit can make towards the activities of programme evaluation.

Institutional factors that are considered important if a programme is to be of a high quality are:

- *Staffing policy*
This includes factors such as requirements for promotion—experience should be considered as well as research output—and remuneration policy, such that academic staff can earn well enough to encourage them to remain in the institution rather than go into private practice.
- *Information systems*
This relates to the demographics of students and the throughput rates of learners in the system. The pass and failure rate is also considered important as a potential indicator of the quality of teaching and learning.
- *Student selection policies*
There is an increasing emphasis on the need for institutions to develop alternative policies for admission. A key issue that emerged during this process relates to the importance of the recognition of prior learning (RPL). The Nursing Council intends to introduce RPL processes to enable learners to enter a programme at a point relevant to their existing knowledge. This provision is being catered for in an amendment that is to be passed soon.

The South African Dental Technicians Council argues that there is currently no clear route to enable laboratory assistants to access the profession. They highlight the role that RPL could play in facilitating access, and suggest that the absence of this mechanism feeds into a number of problems such as unregistered practitioners.

It is felt that while the institutions currently recognise the need for RPL policies, they frequently fail to implement the policy, and this makes it difficult for the process to make good progress.

- *Assessment policy*
It was felt that this area requires attention, more specifically the internal procedures that are followed regarding both formative and summative assessment. There also needs to be an understanding of the external moderation processes that are followed, in order to ensure that these processes are properly valued and are operating effectively.
- *Institutional finances*
It was felt that this aspect would permeate all programmes and would have a particular impact on staffing and facilities.

- *Relationships within the institution*
This issue emerged as an important one, as it is felt that the nature of the organisational structure and the relationships within the institution impact on the ability of the department to function effectively.
- *Communication processes*
Linked to the above, the manner in which communication takes place within an HET institution is also considered to be important to the functioning of the institution as a whole, as well as of its specific departments.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HEQC

This section explores the possible relationship that could be developed between the HEQC and the different SETAs, as well as the type of role distribution that can emerge within the context of these relationships. The key point that needs to be emphasised is that there are a number of possible relationships that may be forged. These will differ depending on the scope of the ETQA, on whether there is a professional body as well as a SETA within a particular field, and on the nature of the providers offering the programmes.

An Analysis of the Roles that ETQA Bodies Could Play in Relation to Each Other

When considering the question of relationships, it is important firstly to consider this within the context of the roles that are required by the system, and then to explore the different roles that the respective bodies could play.

As discussed in this document, the SAQA sets forth a number of functions and roles that an ETQA Body is required to play. This section explores some of these functions and roles in terms of the manner in which the different bodies can contribute to fulfilling these roles.

Accredit constituent providers for specific standards or qualifications registered on the NQF

The possibility, raised by the SETAs, is that the band ETQA—in this case the HEQC—is well placed to play a key role in the institutional audit of multi-purpose providers. Certain of the SETAs—as well as professional bodies where relevant—could play a more prominent role in evaluating programmes. Thus, while these two roles will need to be carried out in an integrative manner, the different bodies can take differing responsibilities within this.

The institutional audits will focus on “the efficacy of institutional arrangements to support high quality teaching and learning and research” (HEQC Founding Document). It will also need to explore the overall QMS employed by the institution.

The evaluation will focus on development, delivery and the nature of the learning programme. This will require that the HEQC, in consultation with other ETQAs and SAQA, establish an evaluation framework. The panels that evaluate the programmes will need to include the various role players, and will have to be trained to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the different panels and programmes.

There will need to be a mechanism to ensure that the institutional audit is fed into the programme evaluation in a manner that enhances the value of the overall process. This approach will also assist in streamlining the process for providers—a factor that all SETAs agreed was critical.

Regularly seek, receive and act on feedback from both their “internal customers” and sector stakeholders

While there are many aspects to this role, one interviewee provided an example that illustrates the type of activity that could be undertaken. It was suggested that SETAs could play an important role in assessing the impact that programmes have in the economic sector and the extent to which they address the needs emerging from the Sector Skills Plans. This information and perspective can feed into the monitoring system that is developed.

Contribute to ensuring the relevance, comprehensiveness and clarity of standards

The SETAs can also assist to clarify what “customers” want and need and thereby ensure that providers have a clear understanding of the quality standard. Further, the HEQC could play an important role in ensuring that the quality standards address all the purposes of HET, and that they are not reduced to a narrow occupational focus. This will allow for a dynamic interplay between these purposes to ensure HET institutions are able to realise their missions. This discussion will need to be contextualised by the nature of the programme and the extent to which it is foundational or more specialised.

Assessment policies and procedures

Another possible division of functions emerges from the SAQA discussion document on QMS systems (2000). This suggests that the economic sector ETQAs may be better placed to undertake workplace assessment, with education ETQAs better placed to conduct institutional assessment. There is also the related suggestion that different assessment methods are appropriate for the different types of ETQA providers. It is generally felt that this approach would undermine the integrative approach to the NQF and would lead to fragmentation.

SETA interviewees argued that while they would in all likelihood include within their scope those standards and qualifications that are primarily delivered in the workplace, this should not imply that there should be a division of assessment responsibilities on the basis of theory and practice or institutional location. It was argued that this would lead to the perpetuation of the old system.

Suggested Role of HEQC

A number of roles were suggested for the HEQC in relation to professional bodies. This section should be read within the context of the fact that the HEQC’s primary responsibility is the accreditation of multi-purpose providers within the HET band, and for assuring and ensuring the quality of provision within these institutions.

Institutional audit

In general it was agreed that there should be a collaborative approach between the SETAs, professional bodies and the HEQC. With regard to multi-purpose providers that offer programmes within the professional fields, it was suggested that the professional bodies play a primary role in programme evaluation, while the HEQC plays a key role in the institutional audit. This suggests that the inter-relationship between these two processes needs to be carefully unpacked.

As discussed above, there are institutional factors that enable effective programme delivery. It is critical that the HEQC builds and supports these aspects of institutional functioning so as to promote the quality of learning and teaching across programmes. While possible foci for these components have been suggested in previous sections, there is a need to develop this further.

Moreover, it is felt that the HEQC could play an important role when an institution has severe problems that impact on all programmes. This would require a holistic intervention that could be undertaken by the HEQC, as part of the CHE, and that would enable specific interventions to take place in departments, faculties or schools.

The above does not imply that the HEQC plays no role at all where a single purpose provider offers these programmes within the HET band. Rather it suggests that this would require a different role. The HEQC will add value to the quality assurance process and should therefore play a role with regard to single purpose providers. This “value added” role is explored further below.

Establishing coherence across the programmes

An important area that emerges is the need for the HEQC to play a role across programmes to ensure coherence. This could be assisted in a number of ways.

Developing benchmarks for quality criteria and processes

Firstly, it was suggested that the HEQC needs to play a role in facilitating discussions about the development of benchmarks for QA criteria and processes. This implies the need to reach agreement regarding the criteria and their associated indicators that can form the benchmarks against which programmes can be assessed to ensure that they are of “good” quality. In other words, these criteria and processes should represent the “minimum threshold” standard for programmes. Additional criteria may be utilised, but the minimum threshold implies a standard that is acceptable to all parties, enabling them to satisfy the requirement of “serving and protecting the public”.

Playing a role in programmatic evaluation

Practically, the HEQC could assist in establishing coherence across programmes and providing a particular quality perspective, through playing a role in the programme evaluation visits or by participating in discussions about the report that emerges from the visitation process. A key aspect of this role is the focus on educational considerations that the HEQC is likely to bring into the process.

Panels

The involvement of the HEQC could include representation on the panels that visit the institutions and develop the report on the particular programme(s). Currently the Professional Councils rely almost entirely on professionals from academia and industry to form these panels. However, as indicated in previous sections of this report, it may be possible to include an individual nominated by the HEQC.

The status of the HEQC panellists will need to be agreed upon. One suggestion that emerged is the possibility that the HEQC person could be an observer with speaking rights.

An alternative model currently being explored by the HPCSA—involving in the panels members of the professions *as well as* an educationalist (someone not necessarily qualified in the profession)—is one that has considerable merit. These teams are constituted ensuring that they are multi-disciplinary in nature and that they have the capacity to ensure that the education and training programme is preparing the individual to be a medical practitioner in a holistic manner.

This approach is also reflected in the panels of the Pharmacy Council. These panels consist of a non-pharmacist as well as individuals that have expertise in the different disciplines.

Thus, for example, the panel constituted in 2000 had a teacher as well as professional pharmacists.

In order to clarify the role that the HEQC could play in the visits and on the panels, there will need to be discussion about the manner in which the HEQC panellist could enrich the evaluation process. This relates to two aspects: firstly, the need to establish coherence and, secondly, the role that the HEQC could play in ensuring that the learning finds a compromise between “neat for purpose” and strictly “fit for purpose”.⁴

Facilitating the development of a broader perspective on quality-related issues

It was also suggested that the HEQC could help to ensure that attention is paid to quality issues that are emerging across the HET band and within specific professions. This would feed into the development of a broader perspective on quality. Some issues that bear examination include RPL processes and the relationship between formative learning and continuing professional development.

THE NATURE OF THE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENTS

What emerges throughout this report is that different types of relationships are likely to be developed with the different SETAs and professional Councils. This section will explore the possible arrangements that could be developed. However, underpinning all of these arrangements is the need to reach agreement on the underlying principles.

Possible Types of Agreements

The preferred arrangement is for a clear agreement (contractual arrangement) that specifies the role that the HEQC, the professional body and the SETA will play in the accreditation of providers and particular programmes within the HET band. There will need to be a process to define relationships among the different bodies. In certain of the programmatic areas, these processes will be more gradual, as mechanisms have not been in place in the past.

The contractual arrangements should also take into account the role that a particular sectoral ETQA may play in relation to the providers and specific programmes. The contracts will need to define the different areas of responsibility and specify the role of each of the relevant structures. Thus, in some cases there may need to be tri-partite agreements, as the relevant SETA may also have a role to play. The nature of these specific arrangements will need to be negotiated between the different parties.

Principles that should Underpin the Agreements

If we are to have successful partnerships, it is critical that some of the following principles underpin these relationships.⁵

Establishing trust through open communication, co-operative and developmental approaches, and the shared understanding of the transformation project that lies ahead

This includes an acceptance of the value that each player brings to the partnership and the specific role(s) that each of the partners can play. There is a need to ensure that the agreement facilitates an on-going process so as to allow for changes based on developments as they unfold. It also implies the need to establish clear mechanisms for

⁴ See P. Lolwana, FETC Certificate, 2000.

⁵ Note that these principles are drawn from the SETA document, *The Role and Approach of SETA ETQAs to Quality Assurance*. These are included at the suggestion of the workshop participants who felt that it was critical that the underpinning principles of these relationships be clearly stated.

collaboration—for example, workshop(s) with all parties, and bilateral as well as other forms of communication.

Clear quality indicators are needed

An understanding is required of the particular standards of quality that are used, and what type of indicators should be applied in order to ensure good quality education and training which, in turn, ensures that competent learners exit the system.

The role of standards in the development of quality indicators

The complexities of developing a common conception of quality have been raised throughout this document. An additional issue is the specific difficulties that will emerge during the transitional period, while there is an absence of registered standards. Without the registered standards, the quality criteria tend to be very broad, making it difficult to gauge quality. There will need to be a discussion as to how articulation will occur during this transitional phase.

Drivers in the system for attaining quality indicators

An issue that emerged from the SETA interviews was a concern about the extent to which the HEQC would be able to ensure high quality standards.

Certain of the professional bodies—for example, SAICA—accredit only those HET institutions that offer high quality programmes—that is, “centres of excellence”. It was argued that in this way the professional bodies encourage “best practice”. However, other HET institutions continue to offer programmes that have not been accredited by the professional body. These programmes are currently recognised by the Department of Education for funding purposes.

A question was raised about what, in the future, would drive the decision of whether to accredit a provider—the state subsidy or quality imperatives. In other words, will the HEQC be able to take a firm stance on accreditation *vis-à-vis* quality? How will this be balanced with developmental considerations, where the decision whether or not to accredit an institution may impact on whether or not the Department of Education funds a particular programme?

Underlying this issue are the complexities that arise from the inter-relatedness of these processes, as discussed previously in this document—that is, programme accreditation, funding and awards for best practice. These issues are explored in the sections that follow.

An approach to attaining “good” quality

It is suggested that in order to meet the quality objectives that have been set for the system, it is necessary to reach a common definition of quality. This would be the standard against which all programmes are evaluated.

However, it is not enough to agree on minimum standards that represent the lowest common denominator. Rather, the concept of “threshold” needs to be deepened to ensure that the standard carries an understanding of good quality leading to applied competence, as defined in the SAQA regulations on qualifications.

This is consistent with the approach suggested in the HEQC Founding Document which states that “it is important to ensure that the quality assurance system enhances access not simply to higher education but to high standards of provision and their concomitant intellectual and economic benefits”.

Awards for best practice

Best practice can be rewarded by recognising those providers who excel. It might be useful to consider an award system that publicly recognises programmes of particularly high quality. Awards could be conferred annually, and could serve as an impetus to ensure that “good practice” gradually evolves into “best practice”.

The other issues flowing from the above lead to two further key principles for the system.

The need to ensure that there is a balance between accountability and improvement in the system

The HEQC Founding Document emphasises the importance of upholding the accountability requirements of higher education within the context of a strong developmental approach to quality assurance. This approach is important in the light of the concern regarding the attainment of good quality.

The report commissioned by the HEQC to evaluate the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU) and SERTEC (CHE, 2000) comments on the absence of clear follow-up mechanisms in the evaluation process. The result was a situation where problems were identified but without measures being built into the process to ensure that the institution acted upon recommendations. This has led to a perception among some of the interviewees that the HEQC may be reluctant to act strongly if an institution fails to meet quality standards. The Founding Document, however, states clearly that while the HEQC is committed to the improvement of institutions, it will not hesitate to expose and act against persistently poor provision of quality.

Further, a number of the professional bodies have developed practices that attempt both to ensure accountability and encourage the development of good quality programmes. In some cases this includes assistance with funding and other resources to enable the institution to make the required changes.

The manner in which this issue will be dealt with needs to be built into partnership agreements. In addition more funds need to be made available to assist institutions to improve quality when necessary.

Protecting the learner

A key feature of the arrangements to ensure quality in learning institutions is the need to protect the learner. Learners should not be disadvantaged through any action that is taken against an institution. In cases where an institution is given time to rectify certain problems or where an institution has its accreditation withdrawn, there must be an agreement on how learners will be able to attain their qualification. This qualification must have the same status as the same qualification attained at another institution.

An understanding of the measures taken to protect learners may need to be built into the agreement. This could take the form of the appointment of an assessment agency for those learners already at an institution. However, such decisions may have costing implications, and the question of who pays will need to be dealt with from the outset. There are a number of examples where the professional bodies have protected learners that could serve as useful models for this aspect of the QA process.

Need for quality management systems

For the system to remain credible and to build the trust required, it is critical that ETQA bodies have quality management systems, and that these are understandable by other players. This does not suggest that all ETQAs will have the same system. However, in the

same way as this will be a requirement for provider accreditation, there will need to be a way of benchmarking quality approaches across ETQAs.

This aspect of recognising the quality management systems of other ETQAs and the quality criteria utilised to evaluate providers are both fundamental to ensuring that there is articulation and progression in the system. While the registration of standards and qualifications on the NQF should facilitate recognition, progression and articulation, this is dependent on the development of trust and credibility across the system.

Building an approach of meta-evaluation into the system

Evaluators need to be evaluated to ensure that their work meets their stated objectives and quality imperatives. In other words, there should be an assessment of how well the evaluators—in this case the ETQAs themselves—have been doing their job; the assessment should point to methodological or other changes that may be required.

This will also build trust in the system, assist with the overall functioning and credibility of the system, and act as an important developmental tool. It is possible that this aspect could be built into the QMS of all the ETQAs.

According to the HEQC's Founding Document, it is important to develop an analytical and self-reflective approach to quality assurance premised on continuous self-assessment, both within the HEQC and the providers that it accredits. It has been agreed that an external evaluation of the HEQC's policies, programmes, and implementation strategies will be conducted in every fifth year of its work.

The need for moderation across the system to ensure that quality is of a consistent standard

The need for moderation is particularly important as the system is developing, although it should always remain an element of the system.

Areas for Contractual Agreements

The following areas represent the issues that will need to be tackled in the different agreements:

- participating bodies
- introduction to the process
- purpose of the agreement
- background to the issues
- scope of agreements—in particular in relation to the qualifications and standards that are covered within agreements
- items of agreement:
 - defining vocabulary
 - approach to transformation issues—articulation, progression and articulation
 - establishing a common understanding of current and future systems for the generation of standards and qualifications—this should include an approach for the recommendation of new standards and qualifications (or the review of existing standards and qualifications)
 - approach and process of quality assurance:
 - including a common understanding regarding approach and quality criteria
 - approach to the improvement of institutions (including funding issues)
 - approach to addressing institutions in which there are persistent and unaddressed quality problems (including protecting learners)

- approach to the quality assurance of Learnerships and Skills Programmes in the HET band
- developing a common understanding regarding other legislative requirements such as licensing and registration
- delineating roles, responsibilities and functions of the different parties, including issues regarding:
 - generation of standards and qualifications
 - quality assurance
 - certification of learners
 - registration of constituent assessors
 - other legislative requirements
- rules and procedures for collaboration, including:
 - financial arrangements (for example, in-kind contributions or direct funding)
 - hosting of meetings, meeting procedures, chairing and secretarial services
 - keeping of records and a management information system database of education and training standards affected by the agreement
 - submission of reports
- provision for emerging developments
- procedures whereby parties can by agreement amend or add to specific sections of the agreement
- dispute resolution mechanisms.

BROAD RECOMMENDATIONS

Core “Quality Indicators”

In order to ensure co-operation, there needs to be agreement about the quality indicators that will be utilised in the QA process. This includes establishing an understanding of the core quality specifications relating to criteria and process. These should be developed in partnership with the relevant professional bodies, as well as SETAs.

In order to build an integrated quality assurance process, core quality specifications or “quality indicators” should be identified in order to address issues relating to educational standards, the teaching, learning and research processes, and the optimal infrastructure requirements.

These quality indicators will need to satisfy the requirements of the different players and will need to balance the different imperatives that drive each of the QA systems.

Feeding into a Quality Spiral

A key aspect emerging from the research is the need to share information, including reports on the quality management process. This highlights the importance of the development of an information transfer system, especially in relation to provider and programme accreditation.

The HEQC could distil the key quality issues emerging from these processes and feed them into a collective forum in a manner that contributes towards an evolving understanding of quality.

Part of this process would entail the development of more organic relationships among the different bodies. This suggests the involvement of individuals—for example, from the

education committees of the professional bodies—in collective processes that relate to areas such as standards setting, accreditation and evaluation of programmes, and assessment.

This suggests that the HEQC must have the resources to enable it to effectively play this role, and thus contribute to the continual development of providers to offer quality programmes.

Facilitating Co-ordination across the Evaluation Process

The HEQC will need to play a role in assisting with the overall co-ordination process. This *does not* suggest that the HEQC become responsible for setting up programme visits. Rather, bodies that have responsibility for this should channel information to the HEQC. This would allow for the development of an overall timetable and scheduling of visits to ensure that there is minimum disruption for institutions and that the visits are as effective as possible.

Establishing Mechanisms to Ensure Quality Throughout the System

There need to be mechanisms that specifically address those programmatic areas that are not adequately catered for within the current accreditation processes. For example, how will the QA be carried out for courses that form part of a programme that culminates in a qualification but do not fall within the core activities of the professional bodies?

The converse of this is the courses that fall within a professional field but do not lead to a professional qualification. For example, there needs to be clarity about who takes QA responsibility for accountancy as part of a general degree.

Further, a process of meta-evaluation needs to be built into the system so as to ensure that all quality assurance bodies are reflecting on their systems and continually becoming more rigorous in their approach.

On-going Legislative Process

A number of Acts are currently being reviewed and changed. We will need to monitor the impact that these changes have on relationships that may be set up.

Further, there may be a need to ascertain whether existing or envisaged arrangements are impacting on the various pieces of legislation.

CONCLUSION

There is a large degree of openness from SETAs and the professional bodies about the potential role of the HEQC. The issues raised relate to the extent to which it is possible to develop a collaborative approach to developing quality processes and criteria. However, concern was expressed that the HEQC may make quality demands that may be inappropriate for the economic sector.

The interviewees also stressed the perceived complexity of the system, especially in view of the number of different bodies that have specific responsibilities within any given field of learning. The actual role that each of these structures are to play in the new system still requires clarification, as well as the manner in which they will impact on quality assurance arrangements.

At this point it may be useful to reiterate some of the points raised in the November 2000 workshop regarding the way forward. The workshop felt that certain initiatives would be useful to further this evolving process. Some of the suggestions that emanated from that discussion include the following:

- There should be an attempt to “test” recommendations through a number of case studies. Several of the bodies present at the workshop volunteered to be part of the pilot process.
- The preparation of sample Agreements would be useful. It was felt that such samples would exemplify ideal Agreements, and could also assist in reducing legal costs.
- Since the whole process involves building trust, it is important to ensure that clear accountability exists so as to foster longer-term devolution of responsibility.

Considerable work has already been done to improve the quality assurance processes that exist for education and training provision. Work has also been undertaken to forge new relationships. However, much more work is required to establish who will do what and against which indicators. This will contribute substantially to the process of building quality across provision in South Africa.

This work will need to be undertaken in a manner that takes into account the legal responsibilities suggested by the different Acts, and the imperatives for transformation, coherence and quality in the system.

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Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the Role of Professional Bodies and their Approach to Quality Assurance

**Report to the
Higher Education Quality Committee**

Carmel Marock and Kirti Menon

Acknowledgement

The CHE acknowledges with gratitude the contribution made to this report by the late Leon Christodolou, who was a member of the Interim HEQC.

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PURPOSE OF THE REVIEW

The establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education which is responsible for quality assurance in higher education has necessitated a review of the quality assurance responsibilities of professional councils and boards. Such a review is required in order to identify overlaps in responsibility and to ascertain how co-operation can be effected to avoid duplication of quality assurance activities. The intention of this report is therefore:

- to establish the current involvement, policies and procedures of the various professional councils in the approval/accreditation of higher education within their respective fields of education and training
- to determine the future role of the HEQC in relation to these bodies.

METHODOLOGY

Information was gathered from a number of sources. These included a workshop, held on 23 March 2000, with the following professional bodies:

- Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA)
- Law Society of South Africa
- Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA)
- Public Accountants and Auditors Board (PAAB)
- South African Council for Social Services Professions (SACSSP)
- South African Natural Sciences Council (SANSC)
- South African Dental Technicians Council (SADTC)
- South African Nursing Council (SANC)
- South African Council for Professional and Technical Surveyors (PLATO)
- South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC)
- Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA).

These bodies provided extensive documentation about their accreditation-related responsibilities, processes and criteria. Subsequent interviews were also conducted with a number of these bodies, including:

- Engineering Council of South Africa (ECSA)
- Law Society of South Africa
- Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA)
- South African Dental Technicians Council (SADTC)
- South African Nursing Council (SANC)
- Health Professions Council of South Africa (HPCSA)
- South African Pharmacy Council (SAPC).

The above-mentioned selection was made in order to include bodies with divergent approaches to accreditation and different statutory responsibilities.

Some of the bodies were interviewed because they were available within the allocated timeframe. However, as the HEQC develops its work, it will engage with all other relevant professional councils and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).

CONTEXT OF THE REPORT

The interviews were conducted at a time when changes were emerging in several professions. Many of the councils are new, and a number of the Acts and related regulations are under review. Consequently, the work and approaches of many of the councils are in a state of flux.

However, this period of change also holds many opportunities, as councils examine their roles and responsibilities in a climate of openness about the need for transformation and the possibility of new roles and relationships.

Councils are exploring their roles in relation to the requirements of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Most of the professional bodies are familiar with the statutory regulations associated with South Africa's new education legislation, and many are aligning their functions with SAQA requirements. However, some of the councils are still uncertain about the role that they should be playing in the new framework. There is also some uncertainty about how the different players in education should inter-relate, that is, how the pieces of the puzzle fit together.

TERMINOLOGY

In certain of the Acts, the term *approved* is used synonymously with the term *accreditation*. Thus, the Pharmaceutical Council approves programmes yet their processes and criteria meet those of an accreditation process as suggested in SAQA documentation. However, ECSA, for example, has shifted from an approval system to an accreditation system to indicate a movement towards a more rigorous procedure. In this report, both *approve* and *accredit* are used, depending on the respective Council. Some commonality will have to be established across these different usages.

Clarity must also be sought on the following issue: SAQA requirements state that providers must be accredited by a single ETQA, but certain of the Acts require the professional bodies to accredit the programme. The solution to this apparent contradiction may simply be to use the terms "ETQA" and "professional body" interchangeably within a restricted context. However, the matter requires resolution through further discussion.

This report attempts to clarify the issue of potential relationships. Once the approach is resolved, it may be possible to resolve issues of terminology more easily.

CURRENT QUALITY ASSURANCE RESPONSIBILITIES

Quality Responsibilities of the HEQC

The addendum to the *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs* states the following.

...it is appropriate for the CHE, through the HEQC, as the ETQA of primary focus for higher education that is, universities, technikons, colleges and private higher institutions, in terms of the ETQA regulations, to perform the co-ordinating function to enable the establishment of the required partnerships with other ETQAs working in the band. The CHE then will:

- *facilitate a common interpretation of quality assurance policy for the HET band by ETQAs operating in the band*
- *co-ordinate the establishment of a common set of ground rules for the practice of quality assurance including the inter-relationship between quality assurance promotion, institutional audits and programme assessment*
- *provide a platform together with SAQA for regular discussions on quality assurance policy and implementation issues by ETQAs in the HET band*
- *co-ordinate and facilitate discussions to enable the required agreements between ETQAs to be established*

- *set up in consultation with the other relevant ETQAs co-ordinated timeframes for quality assurance visits to providers and facilitate other administrative quality assurance measures common to all ETQAs.*

The HEQC Founding document states that:

The primary responsibility of the CHE as an ETQA will be to ensure that the quality of qualifications in higher education is maintained and enhanced through evaluating and monitoring the capacity of higher education providers to deliver those qualifications effectively and efficiently. This will include looking at the quality assurance systems and processes of providers, their arrangements for assessment and moderation as well as the responsiveness, relevance and coherence of their qualifications in relation to their specified institutional mandates and missions (2000: 6).

It is evident that the scope and range of the tasks facing the HEQC are wide, encompassing many activities and processes in higher education. The relationship between these activities, and the responsibilities and roles of other bodies, is a critical element of this review.

Responsibilities of the Councils

Acts govern all the professional bodies, although their status differs from statutory bodies to regulated voluntary bodies. The Acts stipulate the nature of their responsibilities for education and training.

An analysis of the Acts of the respective professional councils indicates that they are empowered and obliged to carry out the following functions⁶ in the establishment, development, maintenance and control of the education and practice aspects of the professions:

- set, maintain and control the standards of professional education and training
- conduct quality assurance of education and training
- assess and/or examine candidates for purposes of registration to practice
- prescribe the minimum educational outcomes, activities and/or curriculum and syllabi for the profession
- register persons for purposes of practice (voluntary or compulsory).

In respect of all the above functions, the professional board is answerable to the relevant minister in terms of the provisions of the professional Acts.

There is wide variation in the quality assurance activities conducted by the professional boards. The primary focus is on ensuring professional or workplace competence. This is accomplished in different ways by the professional boards⁷:

- accreditation of providers of education and training
- evaluation and approval of courses, programmes and providers
- administration of qualifying examinations and competence assessment prior to registration as a professional
- setting of standards for registration as a practitioner
- development of codes of conduct for practitioners.

⁶ Note that these differ across the Councils, and not all of the Councils are required to carry out all of these areas of responsibility.

⁷ Again the extent to which these different activities are undertaken differs widely across councils.

Examples of the types of role that different bodies play follow.

HPCSA

The Health Professions Council of South Africa was established in terms of the Health Professions Act No. 56 (1974). The Council, in conjunction with the twelve boards which operate independently under the co-ordination of the HPCSA, is responsible for the following:

- promoting the health standards of professional education
- maintaining fair standards of practice
- conferring professional status as a prerequisite to practice
- maintaining a register of practitioners
- setting standards for recognition of overseas qualifications
- providing continuing education for practitioners.

SANC

The South African Nursing Council was established in terms of Act No. 50 (1978) as amended. In accordance with the provisions of the Act, the SANC performs the following tasks:

- prescription of minimum requirements for the education and training of nurses and midwives
- approval of training schools and institutions
- registration and enrolment of those who qualify in one or more of the basic or post-basic categories
- approval of learning programmes according to standards set by the SANC.

ECSA

The Engineering Council is established in terms of Act No. 114 of 1990. ECSA's focus is extended to the different branches of engineering across various levels of the NQF, and has different categories for registration. The following tasks are performed:

- evaluation and accreditation of programmes leading to qualifications recognised for the academic requirements for registration according to predetermined standards or criteria
- the registration of professionals required for occupations as specified by the minister.

SADTC

SADTC was established in terms of the Dental Technicians Act No. 19 of 1979, as amended in 1997. The council is required to:

- approve persons to practise as dental technicians or dental technologists
- approve institutions which will provide training
- in consultation with the minister prescribe qualifications for registration as a dental technician or a dental technologist
- register professionals in the categories of dental technologist, clinical dental technologist, dental laboratory assistant and dental technician contractor.

South African Law Society

The South African Law Society has been established in terms of Attorneys Act No. 53 of 1979 and the Advocates Act No. 74 of 1964. The four statutory law societies, which exist in terms of the Attorneys Act of 1979, conduct admission examinations after a compulsory vocational training period. Membership of societies of advocates is voluntary, and many advocates practise without being subject to the control of any regulatory authority other than the High Courts.

The first step in the transformation of the legal profession has been the introduction of a single qualifying degree for admission to practise as a lawyer. The Qualification of Legal Practitioners Amendment Act of 1997 amended the Admission of Advocates Act of 1964 and the Attorneys Act of 1979 by introducing a four-year undergraduate LLB degree as the minimum academic qualification for admission to practise either as an advocate or as an attorney.

Advocates are also now compelled to do pupillage and write a bar exam. Practical training schools have been established to augment the learning undertaken as part of articles. The completion of these processes enables an individual to apply to the profession of attorneys for registration.

The primary quality assurance process comes after the completion of the basic qualification.

PAAB

The Public Accountants and Auditors Board is established in terms of Act No. 80 of 1991, as amended in 1997. Quality assurance functions are delegated to the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA) which is accredited as an ETQA by SAQA. These functions are:

- prescription of syllabi, including those for degrees or diplomas
- assistance in the provision of education, maintenance of integrity, and enhancement of competence
- registration of trainees and internship centres
- accreditation of providers
- the registration required before a person may practise.

Examinations are prescribed but may be conducted by universities approved by the minister

Quality Assurance Role that the Councils Have Played Historically

While the professional bodies are generally amenable to playing a quality assurance role, as suggested in the above section, historically their involvement in quality assurance has differed widely. For example, in the legal profession, there has been minimal involvement of the professional body in the quality assurance of those programmes that are offered towards a qualification. The profession has relied on informal relationships with the institutions providing education and training in the legal field. These have taken the form of meetings that serve to provide feedback to the institutions about issues that are emerging in the profession which have a bearing on education and training.

However, quality has been enhanced through such interactions with members of the profession. This interaction has enabled the members of the profession to observe problems in provision that may arise. They suggest that the quality of provision is generally reflected in the quality of graduates that are “produced” by different institutions.

The Dental Technicians have played an important role in the quality assurance of the programmes that culminate in those qualifications serving as pre-conditions for entry to the profession. They determine the syllabus of the programmes and the minimum standards for the practical examination. The Dental Technicians rely on SERTEC to facilitate the quality assurance processes.

SAICA, the Nursing Council and ECSA have had formal relationships with the institutions offering programmes culminating in qualifications that are pre-requisites for professional registration. They accredit the institutions that provide these programmes and have formal

quality assurance arrangements in place to assure the quality of the provision. This is also linked to other support for the institutions. The processes and criteria utilised by these bodies are detailed in later sections.

Historically, the HPCSA has approved a qualification at a particular institution. This approval has primarily involved an inspection of the final examination, as well as discussions with examiners and departments. This enabled the Council to develop an understanding of the nature of the education and training being provided, and the extent to which it has covered all relevant areas. This process is being formalised, and the regulations are being amended to enable the Council, through the Boards, to accredit the programmes being offered by a particular institution. This process began last year and will be expanded incrementally.

NATURE OF THE PROVIDERS

The majority of the programmes that culminate in qualifications, and which are pre-requisites for professional registration, are offered at public multi-purpose HET institutions. These include both technikons and universities.

There are some single-purpose providers that offer programmes that lead towards these qualifications, such as in the nursing profession. However, these institutions may be integrated into a multi-purpose institution, if the nursing colleges are incorporated into HET institutions.

There is some limited provision by private providers, such as in the accounting profession. There is also likely to be an increase in the numbers of private providers in the pharmaceutical sector, as many have indicated an interest in offering programmes that culminate in the pharmaceutical assistant qualification. Historically, the Council has offered these programmes itself, but this provision will be phased out in terms of the ETQA requirements.

The programmes that culminate in a “professional” qualification form a part of the larger field, and a broad range of providers, including public and private HET institutions, offer these programmes.

RATIONALE FOR ACCREDITATION

Objectives of Accreditation

Accreditation objectives are succinctly stated in an ECSA document. The document provides an overview of the objectives of accreditation and serves as a useful reference. It states that the objectives of accreditation are:

- to establish whether or not a programme meets the educational requirement toward registration in a particular category
- to establish whether the graduates of a programme are ready to enter (engineering) employment and are equipped to continue learning throughout their careers
- to establish the international comparability of programmes
- to assure the public of the quality of the programme
- to encourage improvement and innovation in (engineering) education in response to national and global needs.

This focus, described by the HPCSA as “rendering a service to the public” and intended to assure that the public is protected, represents only one of the foci of the HEQC. This is an issue that will be explored later in this report.

Implications of Being an Accredited Provider

Having outlined the objectives of the accreditation process, it is worth addressing some of the implications of a provider having accreditation.

In many of the Acts, it is illegal for providers to offer programmes that culminate in certain qualifications (the “professional qualifications”) if the relevant professional council does not accredit them. For example, nursing programmes may be offered only if the Nursing Council has approved the programme. In other cases, providers may offer such programmes legally, even without being accredited. However, their non-accreditation status may have a range of implications.

Firstly, in the case of many of the professions, institutions will not receive financial support from the professional council if they are not accredited to provide the programme. However, in some cases the professional bodies *do* offer development support, including financial support, to enable institutions to become accredited.

Secondly, accreditation impacts on the students, as in the case of certain professions such as accounting. In this profession, students may not write the examination towards registration if they have not completed their qualification at an accredited provider. SAICA enforces this requirement based on experience which shows that learners who have not attended an accredited institution have a minimal chance of passing the examination.

Similarly in the health profession, where a student graduates from an institution that is not accredited, (s)he will not be registered by the Medical and Dental Board.

By contrast, in the engineering profession, the examination is open to all individuals who wish to undertake it, regardless of which institution the individual attended.

Further, many of the professional bodies list the accredited institutions, and thus the accreditation impacts on the ability of the providers to attract students to the programme. The accreditation—or non-accreditation—status of an institution also impacts on the manner in which potential employers perceive the programme. Hence, it has a large bearing on the future employability of a graduate.

Accreditation also impacts on the recognition processes amongst HET institutions. In many cases there are now arrangements in place to ensure that learners who receive their qualification at an institution that is not accredited will be able to enter a programme at an accredited institution, and receive recognition for the bulk of their studies. They would then only be required to complete a stipulated course of study, for example, an additional year at the accredited institution.

Implications for Students When the Accreditation is “Removed” from the Provider

Across the professional councils it was emphasised that the withdrawal of accreditation only takes place after the institution has been given the opportunity to remedy the problems identified. Where institutions lose their accreditation, and this is often by mutual agreement, there are a number of measures to protect the learners. These range in nature as follows:

- students in the institution at the point that it loses its accreditation are able to complete the programme and to access the same opportunities as those learners that are at accredited institutions
- students are able to enter a programme at an accredited institution (either at the same level or at a level that is agreed upon)

- students are able to write the national examination regardless of the institution where the learner is registered.

The protection of learners within the system is critical to accreditation arrangements.

QUALITY ASSURANCE: PROCESSES AND CRITERIA

Process for Quality Assurance

The main trends with regard to quality assurance processes are:

- self-evaluation or assessment
- a follow-up visit by a panel (primarily made up of people from the profession—often from both an academic and industry context). Such visits include a range of interviews with different players in the institution. Particular emphasis is placed on interviewing learners (present and past) as a key indicator of issues that may relate to the teaching and learning process. The ECSA process also includes a brief visit to the university executive.
- interventions when problems emerge.

SAICA undertakes visits on a four-yearly cycle. They also require providers to complete a self-assessment questionnaire within this four-year cycle (although the visit and the assessment are required to take place in different years).

If problems are identified during the visit, a follow-up visit is scheduled three or four months later. This provides the institution with the opportunity to present a plan for remedying any problems that have been identified. Where the problem is severe, the plan presented can only be expected to be a short-term one.

In addition to these formal processes, there is also continual interaction between the institutions and SAICA. SAICA suggests that such informal interactions are actually the key to quality control and to identifying any problems that may be emerging in a particular institution.

The Nursing Council relies on visits every three years. The visits are part of a quality promotion process and are supportive and developmental. Such visits encourage institutions to develop internal quality control mechanisms. If there is a problem of non-performance, then the institution is given a period of six months to remedy the problem(s). If there are persistent problems, the institution is given a final three-month period to resolve the problem(s). The measures taken to remedy the problems are either verified through additional visits or, where the problems are smaller scale, through evidence-based reports. If the problem is still not remedied, staff (in the case of public institutions) and students are relocated to an alternative institution.

The Nursing Council also relies on continual interaction with the institutions. Where problems arise in an institution, the Council will ensure that the visit takes place earlier than originally scheduled.

The frequency of visits, while scheduled as described above, may differ depending on the needs of a particular institution. For example, the Pharmaceutical Council undertakes visits every three years. However, as in one case, circumstances require that they undertake an annual inspection until the arrangements in the institution are properly established.

An alternative model is the one that is followed by the Dental Technicians. Historically, they have had a relationship with SERTEC. SERTEC has co-ordinated the quality assurance

activities, and the criteria and processes followed are agreed upon at the level of SERTEC. The Council appoints two people (an education inspector and a member of Council) to participate in the visits and the development of the reports.

In most cases the councils rely on clear procedures and manuals to guide the quality assurance process. The council either develops such procedures and standards itself or the SERTEC procedure is utilised. For example, ECSA relies on:

- standards, that is, the outcomes that a programme must lead to
- accreditation policy governing how evaluation of programmes is performed
- operational procedures for arranging, conducting and following up on visits
- documentation requirements for each programme to be evaluated
- reporting methods and formats.

Selection and training of panels of evaluators

The selection process for deciding on the evaluation panels varies. Generally, the panels include members of the profession. These may be drawn from academia or, in certain professions, may also include members of the profession who are working in industry. In a few of the professions, the panels specifically include laypersons. In the case of the Medical and Dental Board, it is suggested that such a person be an educationalist, while in Pharmaceuticals the specific expertise of the individual is discretionary.

A number of the professions attempt to develop a broad pool of individuals who assist with evaluations. This allows for the development of expertise in these activities. Further, some of the councils have also put in place a training system for evaluators.

The panels are also provided with training materials or a set of guidelines. Even where there is no formal training, councils indicate that, prior to the actual visit (such as the evening before), the panel will meet to discuss the manner in which the visit will be approached.

Quality Criteria

Generally, the process of becoming a registered professional is made up of two phases. The first phase includes the period of learning that enables the individual to attain the required qualification. The second phase relates more to the requirements for workplace experience and learning.

Thus many of the professional bodies have two levels of accreditation. Firstly, the accreditation of the provider and, secondly, the accreditation of workplaces for professional placement.

Criteria for the quality of teaching and learning at HET institutions

The criteria for quality assurance differ across the professions. However, there are some criteria that emerge clearly as critical across the professions:

- the satisfactory nature of the mission statement
- establishing that there is a need for the programme. A number of the professions have commissioned studies that explore the nature of the need and the impact that this should have on where the programmes are offered, programme numbers, as well as on the nature and content of the programme
- nature of the teaching and learning—to ensure that the learners are able to develop problem solving skills, and that the methods of teaching and learning enable learners to develop an applied competence (that is, through simulations, case studies, usage of

laboratories). In most cases there are guidelines about the nature of the teaching and learning process that is expected

- syllabi (in many cases the professional body determines the syllabus. However, this emphasis may shift as national standards are agreed upon)
- nature and level of assessment (this issue will be addressed again later in this document)
- staffing (numbers, qualifications and experience)
- facilities (for example, laboratories are a key aspect of the required infrastructure; however, certain of the professions also consider aspects such as facilities for students)
- placement or practical opportunities—in many of the professions, there is a requirement for a “practical component” in the phase leading to qualification. In such cases, this requires that there are workplaces with adequate facilities and staff to absorb the students during this phase. Increasingly, it is regarded as important for students to develop the ability to use their knowledge and skills in an applied context. For example, in the medical profession, there are discussions about the possibility of introducing the clinical component (that is, hospital work) from year one.
- sustainability—that there is the funding to ensure that the department will be able to continue to offer the programme at the current quality level
- entry requirements—in many cases there is an emphasis on flexible entry requirements coupled with adequate support for students, when required
- continuous assessment, as well as actual results of examinations, are considered important indicators of quality, and quickly point to where there may be problems
- relationships within the organisation (this was mentioned by one of the councils as an issue that impacts considerably on the functioning of a department or school).

In addition to the above, certain of the professional councils, such as the Nursing Council, suggest that the criterion of time (that is, length of the programme) has been a key issue historically and is, in fact, a regulatory requirement. However, this has resulted in a discriminatory practice where students lose credits acquired because they suspend their studies for a period. For this reason, the time-based criterion is to be reviewed and amended. In other professions, it is suggested that time may still be considered an important indicator of quality.

Nature of assessment

As already highlighted, assessment is seen as an important criterion in the accreditation process, and a number of the professions have legal responsibility for examinations.

In certain cases, such as the legal profession, there is an examination that is undertaken as a requirement to enable the individual to access the profession. The council runs this examination. However, the examination required at the point of qualification is an entirely internal concern of the provider institution.

By contrast, SAICA takes responsibility for an external examination at the point of qualification. They then also administer a second examination 18 months into “stage two”. The examinations are integrative and applied, and it is expected that the examination will be an open-book examination from 2002. This shift indicates the increasing emphasis on the ability to apply the skills and knowledge acquired through the formal learning component at the HET institution. Thus, it serves to discourage learning methods such as rote learning.

The emphasis on rote learning has been a particular problem in certain institutions, and SAICA suggests that this approach serves to explain the low pass-rates. A further problem cited by SAICA is that certain institutions “train” learners for the examination and that, given the nature of the examination, this causes problems for the learners.

The Nursing Council runs a bridging examination, as there were a number of complaints from students about the manner in which the examinations were being conducted by providers. In the other programmes, the Council has the responsibility for the setting of the exams, but institutions run the examination. In addition, in the discipline of nursing, the final result is not limited to the examination and includes the results from internal assessment processes and case histories.

The Dental Technicians Council plays the role of external moderator of the examination. It is assumed that the provider has clear internal moderating processes in place.

Core criteria

Generally, it was felt that while certain criteria are essential for accreditation, others are important and worth striving towards, but are not criteria that if not met would exclude a provider from becoming accredited.

For example, SAICA suggests that the syllabus and the level of assessment are vital criteria for the accreditation of the institution, while the mission statement for the department is important yet its absence would not prevent the institution from becoming accredited.

The issue of facilities and staffing is one that requires some attention. While these are consistently cited as key criteria, the expectations related to them are open to discussion. It was generally agreed that there must be adequate staffing levels, with an emphasis on both the numbers of staff employed by the provider, as well as their qualifications and experience.

However, while it was felt that there needs to be a Head of Department with sufficient experience and expertise, it may be possible for an institution to rely on visiting lecturers, as well as a range of open learning methodologies, to ensure that the learners have access to adequate support and resources.

Further, while the institution may not have all the facilities, it must have agreements in place with other institutions that have the required facilities to ensure that their students can access such facilities. For example, in the pharmaceutical industry, a partnership is currently being accredited. One of the partners is in a position to provide the laboratory experience, while the other partner has access to the hospitals and clinics which can provide the clinical experience. This is an innovative way to ensure that the students are able to have access to an applied teaching and learning experience. Another such example is that of UNISA which is accredited by SAICA on the strength of its materials and the type of support that the learners are able to access.

What is considered critical in determining which criteria are “absolute” is that learning happens in a manner that is interactive, encourages problem solving, and integrates knowledge and skills in an applied context.

Criteria for the workplace experience and learning

While the HEQC responsibility relates to the first stage (towards qualification), this document also outlines those criteria that are utilised for the second stage. This is provided both in terms of what can be learnt from quality criteria for this component, and because of the inter-relationship between this second stage and stage 1 as regards overall learning.

The key criteria that are outlined for the accreditation of the workplace are:

- the company must be credible within the profession—this could differ across professions. For example, in the legal profession, this would imply that the placement

was with a firm where the senior partner is able to practise on his/her own account and is registered with one of the four law societies.

- the individual will have proper supervision. This relates to the qualification and experience of individuals within the workplace. The importance of such supervision is illustrated by the example of the Nursing Council which provides a quality promotion instrument to guide the nature of the supervision during the workplace phase.
- the workplace is able to provide the requisite work experience.

Additional criteria for registration

Besides the qualification and experience, there are additional requirements for registration. For example, in the legal profession the individual is required to attend a five-week course coupled with the two years of articles or a five-month course coupled with one year of articles. These courses are accredited by the statutory law society. Factors that are considered as part of this accreditation process include the curriculum, how much time is devoted to each of the areas, and who the lecturers are. In the five-week course there is no assessment. However, the five-month course has a countrywide examination and applicants are required to attain a minimum percentage.

There is also a discretionary factor, which considers the individual's moral character. Part of this assessment includes whether or not the individual has been convicted of a criminal offence or has been found guilty of an offence such as cheating.

In accounting, as previously mentioned, there is an examination during the workplace phase. The examination assesses an individual's ability to make high-level judgements. In addition to the applied competence required by the learner in order to obtain the qualification, the subsequent examination tests higher-level judgement and problem-solving ability.

With nursing, registration is dependent on the submission by the institution of the individual's academic record. This includes a theoretical and practical component. The Council can then assess whether the individual has met the minimum requirement for registration.

The Medical and Dental disciplines rely on the report on the learner from the supervisor at the hospital at the end of the learner's internship. This stipulates that the individual has the required experience and the appropriate approach to the profession.

Institutional Factors that Impact on the Quality of the Programme

There is a need to define the inter-relationship between the institution-wide processes and the quality of the programmes offered by the institution. Such processes can affect quality even if they do not have an impact on the factors (described previously) which are considered crucial to programme evaluation. This is important in order to define the contribution that the institutional audit can make towards the activities of programme evaluation.

Institutional factors that are considered important to attaining a high-quality programme include the following.

Staffing policy

This includes:

- the requirements for promotion, for example, that professional experience is considered, and not only research output
- remuneration policy—if academic staff can earn on a scale that would encourage them to stay in the institution, it should prevent them from moving into private practice (which is generally more lucrative).

Information systems

For example:

- to process data on the demographics of students or the throughput rates of learners
- to make accessible important potential indicators of the quality of teaching and learning such as pass and failure rates.

Student selection policies

There is an increasing emphasis on the need for institutions to develop alternative policies for admission which includes, but is not limited to, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)

- The Nursing Council intends to introduce RPL processes to facilitate flexible entry
- The Dental Technicians argue that there is currently no clear route to enable laboratory assistants to access the profession. They highlight the role that RPL could play to facilitate this access, and suggest that lack of access causes a number of problems such as there being unregistered practitioners.
- In general, the professional bodies acknowledge that institutions are developing RPL policies, but RPL is not yet practised because implementation of the policies are proving difficult.

Finances of the institution

The financial standing of the institution affects all programmes and will have a particular impact on staffing and on facilities.

Relationships within the institution

This issue is regarded as important since the nature of the organisational structure and the relationships within the institution affect the ability of the department to function effectively.

Communication processes

Linked to the above, the manner in which communication takes place in a HET institution is considered to be important to the overall functioning of the institutions, and in turn to the specific departments.

Emphasis on the Development of Providers

There is an understanding that accreditation must ensure that the standard of provision is “good”, and that it enables the individual to reach a level of applied competence. The rationale for accreditation, including the need to protect the public, highlights the imperative to ensure that the standard of provision is high. Therefore the professional bodies have emphasised the importance of accountability in their quality assurance systems.

In addition, many of the professional bodies are also exploring what type of development support they can offer providers to enable these institutions to meet their accreditation requirements. This is important both in terms of the need for higher numbers of graduates, in the case of certain professions, as well as in terms of the challenges of transformation and the imperative of institutional as well as individual redress.

In a number of cases, the profession has allocated a substantial amount of money for such support so that institutions are able to improve and meet the required standards. This even includes the payment of staff and support to purchase materials. In other cases, the development support takes the form of the provision of advice.

COSTING

While this study has not focussed on the costing of quality assurance processes, it is worthwhile to mention the issues that have emerged concerning costing. Specifically, the Nursing Council has recommended, for the new legislation, that they charge the provider a fee of R5000 (excluding VAT) for the initial accreditation process, and a fee of R3000 (excluding VAT) for any subsequent inspection. The Council has completed an extensive costing exercise to determine this figure, although it is felt that this figure may be too low.

The majority of the councils are reliant on income from membership fees. The Dental Technicians also charge a fee to laboratory owners. ECSA states that in the past they have borne the cost of accreditation but there is a need to move towards cost-sharing as the provider derives significant benefit from the accreditation. This approach is echoed by a number of the other councils. It is seen as particularly important since most councils face the imperative of becoming financially viable.

DEFINING FUTURE QA ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES

A number of discussions are under way about the future role of the professional bodies and the manner in which they are likely to interact with the HEQC, as well as with the SETAs. Some professional bodies have not yet defined their own roles, which makes it difficult to define the relationship they are likely to have with other ETQA bodies. Nevertheless, it is clear that all of these bodies view quality assurance as critical, and that there are pointers to possible relationships that can be forged. This section explores such issues further.

Relationships with Other Quality Assurance Bodies

A number of relationships are possible, ranging from the professional body being accredited as the ETQA and subsequently developing relationships with the SETA and the HEQC, to the professional body playing a role in the ETQA function that forms part of a SETA responsibility.

For example, the Law Society plays a key role in the provision of the five-week and five-month programmes that are provided during the articles stage. For this reason it is unlikely that it will become an ETQA. The legal statutory bodies are also unlikely to play the role of an ETQA, as there must be one national ETQA. Thus, the profession is considering the possibility of the relevant SETA (POSLIC) playing the ETQA role for legal qualifications. This matter is being discussed at present, and there is general support within the profession for clear quality assurance mechanisms.

SAICA has been accredited as the ETQA to quality assure the professional qualifications. FASSET is in the process of being accredited as an ETQA to quality assure certain other qualifications in the finance sector. However, FASSET would consider the scope of SAICA to fall within its broad scope of responsibility. Therefore these two bodies need to co-operate and reach agreement on quality criteria, the possibility of joint visitations, and the need to ensure that both bodies have access to reports emanating from the quality process.

SAICA has worked effectively in its relationship with PAAB where it has the delegated responsibility for quality assurance. SAICA and PAAB agree on quality criteria, and SAICA provides reports to PAAB.

The Nursing Council is in the process of being registered as an ETQA, and envisages being ultimately responsible for adherence to standards in the profession (although they are open to the possibility of a relationship with the Health and Welfare SETA and the HEQC). Similarly, the HPCSA suggest that the twelve Boards that fall within the Council are likely to seek accreditation as ETQAs, and these would forge relationships with the HEQC. They are still clarifying the relationship between these bodies and the Health and Welfare SETA.

ECSA is likely to seek accreditation as an ETQA. It already has a Memorandum of Understanding with the Mining Qualifications Authority about how they will co-operate and support each other's QA functions. ECSA has also developed mutual arrangements for QA with other SETAs in engineering-related fields. These relationships suggest that ECSA will play a leading role in the QA functions, but that nonetheless SETAs will be involved in the QA processes, including accreditation and the review of standards. There will also need to be clear relationships with regard to learnerships.

Suggested Role of HEQC

There are a number of roles suggested for the HEQC in relation to the activities and roles that the professional bodies may play.

Institutional audit

In general, professional bodies agreed that there should be a collaborative approach amongst the SETAs, professional bodies and the HEQC. In the professional fields, professional bodies should play a primary role in the programme evaluation, while the HEQC could play a key role in the institutional audit. If this suggestion were to be followed, the inter-relationship between the two processes would need to be clarified.

As discussed previously, there are institutional factors that provide an enabling environment for effective programme delivery. It is critical that the HEQC builds and supports these aspects of the institutional functioning so that the quality of learning and teaching is promoted across programmes. There is a need to develop further the list of attributes outlined in earlier sections of this report.

Moreover, it is felt that the HEQC could play an important role when an institution has severe problems which impact on all programmes. Holistic intervention could be undertaken by the HEQC, which would enable specific interventions to follow at lower levels, such as in faculties or departments.

Establishing coherence across the programmes

The HEQC needs to play a co-ordinating role across programmes to ensure coherence. This could be effected in a number of ways.

Developing benchmarks

The HEQC could facilitate discussions to develop benchmarks for QA processes and criteria.

Playing a role in the programme evaluation

The HEQC could provide a particular quality perspective by playing a role in the visits related to programme evaluation or by participating in discussions about the report that emerges from the visitation process.

Panels

The HEQC could have representation on the panels that visit the institutions and report on the particular programmes. Currently the professional councils rely on professionals from academia and industry to form these panels. However, it may be possible to include an individual nominated by the HEQC on the panels.

The status of the HEQC panelists will need to be resolved; for example, there was a suggestion that the HEQC representative be an observer with speaking rights.

The model currently being explored by the HPCSA of involving the professions, *as well as* an educationalist (who is not qualified in the profession) is one that has considerable merit. These teams are composed to ensure that they are multi-disciplinary in nature, and that the team has the capacity to ensure that the education and training is preparing the individual in a holistic manner to be a medical practitioner.

This approach is also reflected in the panels of the Pharmaceutical Council. These panels consist of individuals who have expertise in the different disciplines, as well as a non-pharmacist. For example, the panel this year has on it a teacher, as well as professional pharmacists.

To clarify the role that the HEQC could play in the visits and on the panels, there will need to be discussion on how the HEQC could enrich the evaluation process. The HEQC has a role to play in establishing coherence and in identifying where “neat for purpose” is more appropriate than strictly “fit for purpose”⁸.

Facilitating the development of a broader perspective on quality related issues

The HEQC could assist by identifying quality issues that are emerging across the HET band and specifically within the professions. This would enhance the development of a broader perspective on quality. Such issues include:

- RPL processes
- the relationship between formative learning and Continuing Professional Development (CPD).

BROAD RECOMMENDATIONS

Core “Quality Indicators”

To facilitate co-operation there needs to be agreement on the quality indicators to be used in QA processes. These should be developed in partnership with the relevant professional bodies and SETAs. For an integrated quality assurance process, core quality specifications or “quality indicators” should relate to educational standards, the teaching, learning and research processes and the optimal infrastructure requirements. These “quality indicators” will need to satisfy the requirements of the different players, and will need to balance the different imperatives that drive each of the QA systems.

⁸ See P. Lolwana, FETC Certificate, 2000

Feeding into a Quality Spiral

Information needs to be shared, including reports that are developed through the quality management process. This highlights the importance of the development of an information transfer system especially for provider and programme accreditation.

The HEQC should distil the key quality issues emerging from these processes and present them to a collective forum which should contribute to an evolving understanding of quality.

Part of this process would entail the development of more organic relationships amongst the different bodies. For example, members from the education committees of the professional bodies could become involved in collective processes that relate to areas such as standard setting, accreditation/evaluation of programmes, and assessment.

Facilitating Co-ordination Across the Evaluation Process

The HEQC will need to play a role in assisting with the overall co-ordination process. This *does not* suggest that the HEQC should become responsible for scheduling programme visits; rather, bodies with such responsibility should provide the HEQC with scheduling information. An overall timetable could then be developed, and visits could be scheduled to ensure that there is minimum disruption to institutions.

Establishing Mechanisms to Ensure Quality throughout the System

There need to be mechanisms to cater for programmes in areas that are currently not adequately accredited. How is quality assurance performed when courses do not fall within the professional body's core activities but are required for qualification?

Conversely, how is quality assurance performed for courses that fall within the field of the professions but do not lead to a professional qualification? For example, there needs to be clarity on who takes responsibility for the quality assurance of accountancy when taken as part of a general degree.

Contractual Arrangements

There will be a process of defining relationships amongst the different bodies. These are likely to be clustered depending on the level of responsibility for which the different bodies are able and willing to take responsibility.

Where the provider is a multi-purpose provider operating within the HET band, the HEQC is likely to have the responsibility of accrediting the provider, while the professional body takes responsibility for the programmatic evaluation.

In certain of the programmatic areas, this will require a more gradual process, as these mechanisms have not been in place in the past.

There may also be cases in which the professional body accredits the provider, where it is a single-purpose provider, although it is offering a qualification that is primarily offered within multi-purpose HET institutions. It will be important that the HEQC plays a role in this process to ensure that these programmes are seen as equivalent to those programmes offered at multipurpose HET institutions.

The contractual arrangements should also take into account the role that a particular SETA may play in relation to the providers and specific programmes. The contracts will need to

define the different areas of responsibility and specify the role of each of the relevant structures. Thus, there may need for tri-partite agreements as the relevant SETA may also have a role to play in these functions.

Other issues that will require attention in the contract include reporting mechanisms and processes for sharing information. This could include joint assessment/accreditation visits or audits, sharing of documentation, separate but concurrent processes resulting in separate reports, or joint visits with a combined report.

The contracts would need to specify the point at which the provider may be accredited, and how the ultimate decision relating to accreditation is made. At present, the Interim Joint Committee accredits learning programmes leading to a professional qualification only after it has been accredited or approved by the relevant professional board. This process is based on the assumption that the capacities of both the provider and the learning programme have been reviewed; in the future these decisions would be predicated on the adoption of the core “quality criteria”.

On-going legislative process

There are a number of Acts that are currently being reviewed and changed. We will need to monitor the impact that these changes have on relationships that may be developed. Further, there may be a need to ascertain whether any of the co-operative arrangements have an impact on the various pieces of legislation.

CONCLUSION

There is a range of areas in which collaboration can take place. There also appears to be a willingness amongst the different bodies to work effectively together.

However, the interviewees stressed the complexity of the system. This complexity is increased by the number of different bodies that have specific responsibilities within any given field of learning. The actual role that each of these structures are to play in the new system still requires clarification, as does the manner in which their roles will impact on quality assurance arrangements.

The process of establishing the foundations for collaboration, and to establish who will do what and against which indicators, will contribute substantially to the process of building “quality across provision” in South Africa. Such a process will need to take into account the legal responsibilities suggested by the different Acts and the imperatives for coherence in the system.

Quality Assurance in Higher Education: the Role of SETA ETQAS and their Approach to Quality Assurance

**Report to the
Higher Education Quality Committee**

Carmel Marock and Kirti Menon

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TERMS OF REFERENCE

Proposed Study of the SETAs with respect to their Quality Assurance Role in Higher Education.

Background

The CHE, through the HEQC, is charged with:

- promoting quality assurance in higher education
- auditing the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions
- accrediting programmes of higher education.

In performing these roles, it needs to comply with SAQA policies.

The CHE has reached agreement with SAQA that the HEQC will be the co-ordinating body with respect to quality assurance. In particular, the CHE will:

- facilitate a common interpretation of quality assurance policy for the HET band by ETQAs operating in the band
- co-ordinate the establishment of a common set of ground rules for the practice of quality assurance, including the inter-relationship between quality assurance promotion, institutional audits and programme assessment
- together with SAQA, provide a platform for regular discussion on quality assurance policy and implementation issues by ETQAs in the HET band
- co-ordinate and facilitate discussions to enable the required agreements between ETQAs to be established
- in consultation with the other relevant ETQAs, set up co-ordinated timeframes for quality assurance visits to providers, and facilitate other administrative quality assurance measures common to the ETQAs.

Simultaneously, a number of SETAs are being established in terms of the National Skills Development Act. These bodies are expected to perform a quality assurance role. Given the obvious overlap between the work of the HEQC and the SETAs, the Interim HEQC wishes to commission a study on the emerging conception of the quality assurance role of the SETAs.

Terms of Reference for the Study

On the basis of an examination of developments in at least six SETAs, produce a report which describes:

- the different conceptions of their quality assurance role
- the envisaged scope of their quality assurance role, that is, what types of higher education programmes they intend to include
- their perceptions of interrelationships between the SETAs and the Interim HEQC with respect to the accreditation of institutions to offer higher education programmes
- make proposals regarding:
 - how the HEQC might best work or interact with SETAs in this development phase
 - the necessary components of the contractual relationship between SETAs and the HEQC
 - the detailed considerations under the different components identified in the second bullet above
 - how to overcome any potential conflicts between the SETAs and the HEQC

□ whether the HEQC should play a role in the SAQA decisions to accredit ETQAs covering higher education programmes.

Choice of SETAs

In choosing the SETAs to be studied, criteria should include:

- significant progress in establishing the SETA and determining its quality assurance role
- likely significant overlap with the HEQC.

Examples that have been suggested are the ETDP SETA (with whom the Interim HEQC has had a meeting), the Financial SETA, the Mining SETA and possibly the Services SETA.

INTRODUCTION

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) commissioned an investigation to identify the following:

- the different conceptions held by the Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) of their Quality Assurance (QA) role
- the envisaged scope of the QA role of the SETAs and specifically the identification of the types of higher education programmes which they intend to include
- the perceptions of the SETAs of the inter-relationships between them and the HEQC with respect to the accreditation of institutions that offer higher education programmes.

This research was intended to should provide the basis for proposals regarding:

- the interaction of the HEQC with SETAs during the current development phase
- the necessary components of a contractual relationship between the SETAs and the HEQC
- strategies to overcome any potential overlap or conflicts between the SETAs and the HEQC.

Methodology

The methodology used in the research for this report included the following.

Review of Documents

Relevant documents were collected and analysed, including those produced by the Department of Education (DoE), the Department of Labour, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and a selection of SETAs. Other related national and international literature was also consulted.

Interviews⁹

Individuals from SAQA were interviewed¹⁰, as well as from a range of ETQAs which encompass particular National Qualifications Framework (NQF) bands.

People from the following SETAs were interviewed:

- Financial and Accounting Services SETA (FASSET)
- Education, Training and Development Practitioner SETA (ETDP SETA)
- Banking Sector Education and Training Authority (BANKSETA)
- Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA)

⁹ G. Mercurio assisted with several such interviews.

¹⁰ There were also interviews with members of Project 7, including Gail Elliot and Darryl McLean.

- Energy Sector Education and Training Authority (ESETA)
- Forest Industries Education and Training Authority (FIETA)
- Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunications Technologies SETA (ISETT)
- Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging SETA (MAPPP)
- Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA)
- Tourism and Hospitality Education and Training Authority (THETA).

DEFINING QUALITY

Interviewees all agreed on the need to attain and maintain quality, but specified that a common definition of quality had to be developed.

The SAQA Act (No. 58 of 1995) provides the basis on which a common understanding of quality in education and training can be founded. It lays the foundation for a holistic quality management system in which quality is perceived as a continuum of quality assurance activities. Such a continuum is embodied in the required development of Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) bodies.

The approach of the HEQC to quality is outlined in its Founding Document, in which it is stated that a QA framework and QA criteria will be developed based on:

- fitness for purpose in the context of mission differentiation of institutions within a national framework
- value for money, judged not only in terms of labour market responsiveness or cost recovery, but also in terms of the complete range of higher education purposes described in the White Paper on Higher Education
- transformation, both in terms of developing the personal capabilities of individual learners and of advancing towards the goals of social change (2000: 8).

To define quality in relation to purpose, the HEQC will consider the priorities of different sectors when developing quality indicators. This approach is echoed in a document of the Department of Labour on *Quality Management Systems (QMS) for SETAs and ETQAs*, in which quality is defined as “the totality of characteristics of an entity that bears on its ability to satisfy stated and implied needs”.

There are more definitions of quality, however. For example¹¹, the quality indicators of equity, tolerance, multi-lingualism, openness, accountability and honour are drawn from the report of the committee established by the Minister of Education to investigate “Values, Education and Democracy”. In contrast, the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) states that competence in terms of health and safety requirements is an absolute priority for the SETA.

The above-mentioned quality issues should be framed within the objectives and principles of the NQF, which SAQA (in *Criteria and Guidelines for the NQF*) suggests are the quality indicators for the national outcomes and requirements of the NQF.

BROAD RESPONSIBILITIES OF AN EDUCATION AND TRAINING QUALITY (ETQA) ASSURANCE BODY

This section explores the functions and roles of an ETQA as defined by SAQA. It also highlights the terminological issues that emerge in discussion. Finally, it highlights related areas of activity within the system. This section provides the backdrop for the approach

¹¹ G. Elliot in a draft paper (unpublished) prepared for the ETDP SETA.

proposed in this report—specifically in the section below entitled *Relationship with the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)*—which explores the potential relationship between the HEQC and the SETA ETQAs and the possible roles which the different bodies could play.

Requirements to be Accredited as an Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) body

To be accredited, an ETQA must fall within one of three sectors: the economic sector, the social sector, or the education and training sub-systems. It must also be able to demonstrate that:

- it meets a justifiable need
- it has a primary focus
- there is minimum duplication
- there is the capacity to perform the functions assigned to it by SAQA.

The implication is that “multi-purpose providers would generally be accredited in terms of their institutional quality management systems by the relevant education and training sub-system”¹², for example the Council on Higher Education (CHE). By contrast, most single-purpose providers would have their quality management systems accredited by an appropriate sector ETQA such as ECSA or a “mining” SETA. This assumption underpins this report and has important implications for the relationships between the HEQC and SETAs.

The Functions of the ETQA as Defined by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) Act

The SAQA document *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs* (1998) outlines a number of functions for which an ETQA is responsible. These include:

- accrediting constituent providers for specific standards or qualifications registered on the NQF
- promoting quality among constituent providers
- monitoring provision by constituent providers
- evaluating assessment and facilitating moderation among constituent providers
- ensuring that all ETQAs and providers have a QMS in place
- evaluating the assessment policies and procedures of constituent providers on the principles of fairness, validity and reliability
- registering constituent assessors for specified registered standards or qualifications in terms of the criteria established for this purpose
- taking responsibility for the certification of constituent learners
- co-operating with the relevant body or bodies appointed to moderate across ETQAs, including (but not limited to) moderating the quality assurance on specified standards or qualifications for which one or more ETQAs are accredited
- recommending new standards or qualifications, or modifications to existing standards or qualifications, to the National Standards Bodies (NSBs) for consideration
- maintaining a database acceptable to SAQA
- submitting reports to SAQA in accordance with the requirements of SAQA
- performing such other functions as may from time to time be assigned to an ETQA by SAQA.

¹² See the SAQA document, *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers*.

A Note on Terminology

When exploring the functions of the ETQAs it is useful to note the different terminologies in use. As drawn from the Education White Paper, the functions of the HEQC, include those of programme accreditation, institutional auditing and quality promotion.

While the discourse is slightly different from that of SAQA, the approach suggested is consistent with SAQA requirements. SAQA states that an ETQA accredits providers (the institution) against qualifications and standards on the NQF (the programme).

This compatibility of discourse is suggested in the SAQA criteria for the accreditation of the provider¹³, which states that a provider must:

- satisfy a number of institution-wide criteria, such as having a QMS
- satisfy a number of programmatic criteria such as the ability “to develop, deliver and evaluate learning programmes which culminate in specified registered standards or qualifications”.

Therefore these two elements, institution and programme evaluation, can be considered as distinct functions that must be carried out in an integrated manner. The distinction allows for these functions to be carried out by more than one body through a combination of structured relations and practices. The implication of this will become clearer in later sections of this report.

Note also that the term *audit* is used to encompass a variety of activities. Where SETAs refer to an audit, the term is generally used to describe a site visit or visits. These serve either to validate information gained through the self-evaluation undertaken by the provider, or in some cases to access additional information from the perspectives of different stakeholders.

Roles of the Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) body

SAQA suggests a number of roles that an ETQA will be required to play. These include the need to:

- create and sustain a quality culture
- contribute to ensuring the relevance, comprehensiveness and clarity of standards
- confirm that providers ensure that Education and Training Development Practitioners (ETDPs) of learning and assessment have the requisite skills
- confirm that providers regularly monitor and report on the quality achieved for each indicator
- confirm that providers ensure that practices are enhanced in the light of what is learned from monitoring activities
- confirm that suitable resources are available and are used to good effect
- seek, receive and act regularly on feedback from their “internal customers”, SAQA, providers, Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) and sector stakeholders
- audit provider outcomes and internal audit processes, and report back to providers, SAQA and SGBs.

¹³ See the SAQA document, *Criteria and Guidelines for Providers*.

Related Areas of Activity

Accreditation must be distinguished from the related functions of endorsement for subsidies, registration of qualifications, and licensing. While they are inter-related, the terms should not be conflated in discussions about accreditation and quality assurance of providers.

The definition of accreditation in terms of SAQA requirements is as follows: “the certification, usually for a period of time, of a person, a body or an institution as having the capacity to fulfil a particular function in the quality assurance system set up by SAQA in terms of the Act”.

Generally, accreditation has been separated from recognition for funding, although they clearly impact on each other. This is reflected in the Founding Document of the HEQC in which it is stated that “the HEQC will not, on the basis of its evaluations, make any recommendations on the funding of programmes leading to NQF qualifications, which is a Department of Education responsibility”.

A diagram, adapted from that of the Interim Joint Committee (which includes the Department of Education, the CHE and SAQA) (2000: 12), depicts the roles and responsibilities as follows:

Activity	Responsible Body
Registration of qualifications	SAQA
Accreditation of providers in relation to specific programmes	HEQC of the CHE
Approval of new learning programmes for funding purposes	Department of Education
Registration of providers	Department of Education

CURRENT APPROACHES TO QUALITY ASSURANCE WITHIN SECTOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING AUTHORITIES (SETAs)

Quality Management Systems

SAQA defines a quality management system as “the combination of processes used to ensure that the degree of excellence specified is achieved” (1998: 24).

SAQA suggests that a QMS should encompass quality assurance, quality audit and quality control. In addition, SAQA states that there are aspects that are critical to a QMS, and that the QMS must ensure that the degree of excellence specified is achieved through:

- the quality management policies, which define the quality which is to be achieved
- the quality management procedures, which ensure that the practice of the organisation is consistent with policy
- the review mechanisms, which ensure that that the quality management policies and procedures defined are applied and remain effective.

The Project 7 QMS document elaborates on the subject, and defines QMS as follows: “All the activities of the overall management function that determine the quality policy,

objectives and responsibilities and implement them by means such as quality planning, quality control, quality assurance and quality improvement within the QMS”.

In other words, the QMS comprises the systems that inform providers how to perform functions to achieve planned quality requirements¹⁴.

SETA approach to QMS

This section attempts to identify the QMS that is preferred by each SETA and may require of the providers that they accredit. Generally, this section refers to the preferred QMS of the single-purpose providers (referred to in the section above, entitled *Broad Responsibilities of an Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) Body*), but it also identifies the internal QMSs that are likely to be utilised by the SETA ETQAs themselves.

Many of the SETAs are adopting, and adapting, existing QMSs such as:

- the International Organisation for Standards (ISO) 9000 system
- the British Standard (BS) 5750
- the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award
- the Investors In People Award (IIP).

Amongst the SETAs and more broadly there is considerable debate about what constitutes a QMS—whether it is a set of standards to ensure that quality requirements are met, or whether it is a Business Excellence Model, which places greater emphasis on results.

Many of the SETAs report that they are in the pre-planning and planning stages. There are also those that suggest that they are in the implementation stage.

The Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) has agreed upon a version, adapted by the SETA, of the ISO quality system. It has further agreed that the South African Bureau of Standards (SABS) will manage this system, and that the MQA will moderate SABS processes in this regard. The MQA will also be accredited in terms of ISO Guide 62, as the MQA will be the body held accountable for the accreditation of providers. This includes an emphasis on structure, processes, procedures and resources.

In other cases, such as with the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA), the proposal is to utilise only some aspects of the ISO system for providers. The CETA regards the attainment of the remaining aspects of the ISO system as unrealistic for providers at this stage of their development. However, CETA will ensure that it is fully accredited with ISO so as to ensure that it sets an example to providers with regard to quality management.

Similarly, the Banking Sector Education and Training Authority (BANKSETA) has utilised the ISO approach and systems, but has chosen not to seek accreditation from ISO. The BANKSETA will also include elements of the IIP system because of the emphasis that IIP places on human resources and the development of learning organisations.

Other SETAs, such as the Forest Industries Training Authority (FIETA), are adapting the SAQA Guidelines for ETQA accreditation. However they are adapting the guidelines to ensure that they are made relevant to the specifics of the sector (including a specific focus on Information Technology (IT) aspects and methods for verifying learner numbers).

Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunication Technologies (ISETT) have decided on a broad approach that builds on a European model focussing on leadership,

¹⁴ *Quality Management System for SETAs and ETQAs*. Peter Kleinsorge (12.06.2000)

processes (including enablers) and results. This approach falls within the Business Excellence model.

The Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging (MAPPP) approach has been to develop a system that emphasises the quality loop. The key elements of this system are those of quality policy, quality planning, quality control and quality verification. MAPPP states that, while ISO is a valuable tool, it must be located within a “systems milieu, within the unique systems didactic model of our emerging NQF” (MAPPP SETA ETQA, Procedures and Practices).

Methodologies to be Utilised by SETA ETQAs in the Accreditation of Providers

This section refers to providers that will be accredited by the SETA ETQA. These are likely to be single-purpose providers that fall within the scope of the SETA ETQA.

Most SETAs interviewed suggested that they would be utilising a combination of methods in the accreditation of providers. In essence, the SETA ETQAs will rely on a combination of self-evaluation and audits.

The self-evaluation would be carried out by the provider, and would involve an assessment in terms of a range of categories. In most cases, the SETA ETQA will provide a form for completion. This would provide guidance to the provider in terms of the areas of information which the SETA ETQA requires.

The audit would involve a team of people—a panel—undertaking a site-visit in order to assess the provider. This may focus on areas that are highlighted within the self-evaluation process, or may serve to “verify” the information provided as part of the self-evaluation.

The BANKSETA, for example, wishes to avoid what it terms “quality through inspection” by ensuring that the providers take responsibility for quality assurance. Therefore, while it will audit the providers it accredits, audits will largely target non-conformance identified by inconsistencies or by complaints received from clients of the provider—either learners or companies.

The MAPPP SETA states that providers will be evaluated through an on-site assessment by an external evaluator or evaluation team. The audit will include “interviewing programme learners, programme instructors, counsellors and management personnel. The facilities and equipment are to be inspected. The curriculum is also reviewed for relevance and content validity to employment” (MAPPP SETA ETQA, Procedures and Practices).

In general, those interviewed regarded the audit as an important opportunity to talk to the different sectors both inside and outside the provider organisation—for example, students, employers, and unions. It would also provide an opportunity to observe the teaching and learning process and, in particular, the assessment process.

The combination of the internal (provider) self-evaluation and external (SETA) audits promotes a gradual development towards increasing the levels of internal responsibility for quality management (including quality assurance). Further, one of the SETAs suggested a classification system based on the readiness of the provider. The first category would require minimal external measures, while the third category would need more regular audits.

Criteria to be Utilised by SETA ETQAs in the Accreditation of Providers

This section details the kind of criteria suggested by the SETAs for the accreditation of providers. They point to attributes of a QMS. They are clustered below within the SAQA criteria for accrediting providers:

Learning programmes: development, delivery and evaluation

Providers must:

- be able to conduct outcomes-based education and training
- supply information about what modules will be utilised
- supply information on course content
- supply information on course materials. In many cases the syllabus is outlined and the training centre would therefore have to develop only the content of the course.

Policies and practices for managing off-site practical or work-site components

- There is considerable discussion and debate on this subject. Generally, it was felt that workplaces could not be accredited according to the same criteria as other providers, and that the emphasis should be placed on assessors and possibly on mentors.
- The Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA) suggested a model for cases where education and training is taking place on the construction site. There would need to be evidence that the conditions were suitable for education and training, and that the necessary material, facilities and equipment were available.

Policies and practices for learner entry, guidance and support systems

- Generally, there has been limited emphasis on matters such as learner support and guidance, although the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) does include issues such as learner selection criteria and processes.
- There is a consensus that there will need to be appeal procedures for learners built into the assessment process.

Staff selection, appraisal and development

- All SETAs argued that staff qualifications will be a key criterion.
- Providers must recognise the need for on-going professional development of staff. This has received considerable attention within SETAs, suggesting that a key priority is the training and assessing of assessors, as well as the development of qualified Education, Training and Development Practitioners (ETDPs).

Financial, administrative and physical resources

Factors include:

- financial sustainability and viability (including possible trust funds for learners)
- assessing whether the provider has the necessary premises and equipment (including software where relevant)
- facilities for students (including areas for students to relax in and for those engaged in learning activities)
- health, hygiene and safety issues.

The other SAQA-related criteria relating to the management of assessment and reporting procedures are addressed in more depth in the later sections of this report.

Learner Achievement

Previously, the approach to recognising learner achievement among providers formerly accredited by the Industry Training Boards (which now fall within the SETAs) was biased towards learner assessment. The bulk of the system revolved on the assessment tool utilised to assess the learner and on the moderation of learner achievement. Many providers used an internal assessment process that was based on nationally developed assessment tools and criteria.

Currently most SETAs are adopting different approaches to learner assessment. Some of the SETAs are likely to develop assessment tools against which learners will be assessed. For example, Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunication Technologies (ISETT) has suggested that the development of a national assessment tool will facilitate greater levels of coherence and quality within the system. There is, however, some debate on whether this is acceptable within the SAQA model or whether this is the sole responsibility of providers or assessment agencies. In cases where SETAs are not developing assessment tools, employers have agreed to develop these jointly. An example of this approach may be found in the mining sector.

There are other sectors in which the provider develops the assessment tools, or contracts an agency to conduct assessment on behalf of the provider. In some of these sectors, the approach is to quality assure the assessment tool. However, in other cases providers were regarded as competent to develop the tools and would only be audited if the SETA receives complaints. For example, the banking sector argues strongly that assessment tools and learning materials contribute to each bank's competitive advantage, and as long as the provider has been accredited, it would be unnecessary to evaluate the assessment tools.

In general, the approach to certification in the workplace has been to certificate learners on the achievement of competency, that is, what is colloquially referred to as a "go-no go" system. It was felt that as long as the qualification was legitimate, it should be considered sufficient.

Record-keeping in Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs)

From their experience in the Industry Training Boards (ITBs), the SETA interviewees commented on this issue. In some of the ITBs, the system of gathering data was more advanced and complete than in others. In some cases providers were regarded as having a sufficient database to track enrolments and completion, and it was assumed that placement rates would inform the skills planning processes. In the case of the ITIB, the provider was required to complete forms, which stated the name of the learner and the module(s) for which the learner was enrolled. Once the learner passed the course, the information would be sent to the United Kingdom so that the learner could accumulate credits and ultimately be awarded a qualification.

However, in other instances, providers were regarded as having limited experience in tracking learners through the system. There were also cases where the accuracy of the data was brought into question, and it was felt that until there was sufficient trust in the system, there would be no means of verifying learner numbers and placement figures.

It was agreed that statistics were critical indicators of where problems may exist. However, many of the SETAs stated that, in the past, data was collected but not analysed or put to use for development. Generally, there was a strong emphasis placed on the importance of good record-keeping, with some SETAs verifying data. The emphasis on verification was considered to be particularly important in the developmental phase.

Different Levels of Accreditation

There are two issues that emerged relating to the issue of whether there should be different levels of accreditation or not:

- whether there should be different criteria for provider accreditation in order to ensure that emerging sector providers and smaller providers were able to be accredited
- the extent to which different levels of accreditation could be utilised to indicate additional responsibilities for providers.

Many SETAs argued that the providers did not possess appropriate QMSs. While some providers appeared to have quality assurance people in the organisation, the majority of SETA providers did not appear to have a specific person responsible for this area of work.

Providers have an increased level of awareness of the need for quality assurance arrangements. However, it is still felt that many institutions have not understood what the requirements for a QMS should be, and that there are still insufficient resources employed for quality assurance activities. This is supported by the view expressed in the evaluation commissioned by the HEQC (June 2000). The report states that "...it also became apparent that the understanding of quality assurance as opposed to certification and accreditation at most of the institutions is a relatively new concept. Most are working on developing policies, procedures and processes to give expression to the quality assurance goal. There is no consistency in the level of preparedness at most institutions."

Many SETAs also raised a concern relating to the size of the provider organisation and the implications that this had for accreditation arrangements. An interviewee from Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunication Technologies (ISETT) raised the issue of how accreditation would work where providers were either individuals or very small organisations. It was felt that they were unlikely to have the infrastructure required for the QMS—such as the ability to keep adequate records.

The related issue of whether there should be different criteria for emerging providers compared to established providers was also raised by a number of the SETA interviewees. They argued that one should avoid the creation of a dual QA system. The Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) suggested that it would have one QMS system—that is, one set of processes and criteria—but that aspects (not requirements) of the system could differ depending on the size of the provider. For example, smaller providers could utilise the Internet, while larger providers would require their own IT systems.

These issues, coupled with the need to take into account the present situation of the set-up phase of many SETA providers, has led to the perspective that QMSs need to be introduced in phases. This is consistent with the SAQA approach, which suggests that the process must take into account existing quality assurance and accreditation practices.

This approach, favoured by the majority of interviewees, is a developmental one and allows for ongoing improvement in the system. Both the Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunications Technologies (ISETT) and the Tourism and Hospitality Training Authority (THETA) propose a system in which providers that do not meet all requirements would receive interim accreditation. This will be followed by an evaluation six months later to assess whether or not the provider is able to meet the agreed upon criteria. However, this should be carried out in a manner that takes cognisance of two factors. Firstly, where a provider cannot meet certain crucial criteria, such as health and safety measures, the provider should not be allowed to operate. Secondly, the process must ensure that learners are not disadvantaged.

While the QMS should be the same for all providers offering programmes which lead to a qualification, an interviewee from the Financial and Accounting Services SETA (FASSET) suggested that different criteria could be used for programmes which are part of continuous professional development and do not lead to a qualification.

Further, there were proposals that providers could be accredited at different levels. Thus, the quality for the learner would be consistent, but certain providers would be able to provide functions that others might not be able to provide. For example, THETA suggests that where an accredited organisation meets a range of additional criteria, such as having been accredited for at least two years, the organisation should be able to issue certificates on behalf of THETA.

The Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging (MAPPP) SETA has four levels of accreditation which relate to the capacity of providers. For example, Category 2 providers may deliver the practical component of a full qualification.

The Construction, Education and Training Authority (CETA) suggests that there may need to be different requirements for the accreditation of providers as distinct from those for workplace provision. Generally, the model of workplace provision leans towards a focus on mentoring and assessment.

SUGGESTED SCOPE OF WORK OF THE SECTOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING AUTHORITIES (SETAs)

The majority of the SETAs have not yet finalised their definition of the scope of their quality assurance responsibility. This process is complicated by the fact that most of the new qualifications and standards have not yet been finalised.

As a starting point, SETAs that have absorbed ITBs are generally using the qualifications for which they historically had responsibility, and are considering what other qualifications may fall within their scope, based on their broad sectoral focus. Project 7 (of the Department of Labour) suggests a phased approach to enable the SETAs to identify their possible scope for ETQA activities. These phases are:

- SETAs identify the broadest possible scope of coverage for their ETQA activities
- overlaps and gaps are identified
- demarcation agreements are negotiated.

Trends Emerging with regard to Defining Scope

In general, SETAs are defining their scope in relation to qualifications that prepare people for entry, or advancement within, the workplace. Thus the qualifications, and standards which fall within a SETA's scope, would be defined by their occupational emphasis—that is, those qualifications and standards that enable the learner to perform competently within a specific workplace.

Thus, even where a SETA's economic scope is based primarily on qualifications in the Higher Education and Training (HET) band, many of the SETAs, for example ETDP, regarded their primary role as the assessment of qualifications and standards where the bulk of learning takes place in the workplace. This does not suggest that they would not play any quality assurance role in other programmes, but that the role that they would play in such cases would be different from the role played in those qualifications that fall within their primary scope.

There were also a few SETAs which felt that they would wish to include in their scope those qualifications primarily offered by HET institutions. They would then utilise the relevant professional body to play the quality assurance role, in consultation with the SETA. In some cases, SETAs may work with the professional body to undertake these activities (for example, the Financial and Accounting Services SETA, (FASSETT), and the Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunications Technologies, (ISETT)). In other cases it was felt that the professional body would play a dominant role (for example, the Construction Education and Training Authority, (CETA), and the Mining Qualifications Authority, MQA).

Impact of Learnerships

SETA interviewees emphasised the role that they have to play, as defined by the Skills Development Act, in the quality assurance of learnerships. The SETA responsibility for registering a learnership includes the need to ensure that the criteria, specified in the learnership regulations and guidelines, are met. These include factors such as:

- 70% of the assessment must take place in the workplace
- there is an employer body involved in the learnership
- the learnership is in an area of need—as identified through the skills planning processes.

The extent to which this responsibility impacts upon the scope of SETA ETQA activities requires further exploration.

Some SETA interviewees argued that if a qualification was attained through a learnership programme, the SETA with which that learnership was registered must be responsible for all of the criteria for learnerships, including that of quality assuring the programme. This should be so regardless of whether the institution involved in the provision of the learnership was accredited by the SETA ETQA or by the relevant band ETQA.

Other interviewees felt that as part of their responsibility for learnerships they would need to ensure that the criteria for Learnerships are met; however, this could take different forms. The SETAs could ensure that QA activities took place without necessarily carrying out QA activities. Rather, they would need to ensure that the quality assurance activities took place.

Potential Scope of Coverage of ETQA Activities within the Higher Education and Training (HET) Band

Based on the current analysis undertaken by the SETAs there appear to be three broad clusters or types of SETA ETQAs.

Category One

In Category One, their scope would fall predominantly within the HET band—examples include Financial and Accounting Services SETA (FASSETT), Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunication Technologies (ISETT), Education, Training and Development Practices (ETDP).

Category Two

In Category Two, a number of qualifications in the HET band would fall within the SETA scope, particularly at level 5. Examples include Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging (MAPPP), Tourism and Hospitality Training Authority (THETA), and the Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA).

Category Three

In Category Three, the scope of the SETA would primarily be within the Further Education and Training (FET) band, although the SETA would have an interest in qualifications at higher levels. Examples include the Construction Education and Training Authority (CETA), the Forest Industries Training Authority (FIETA), and the Energy SETA (ESETA).

Across these three categories, the majority of SETAs expressed the view that they would value a partnership arrangement of some sort with the HEQC. Particular suggestions were made by some SETAs on the definition of such a relationship. This is explored further in the next section.

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE (HEQC)

This section explores the possible relationship that may be developed between the HEQC and the different SETAs, as well as the type of role distribution that may emerge within the context of these relationships.

Perspectives Emerging from the SETAs about Roles and Relationships between the HEQC and the Different SETAs

As stated, the nature of this relationship has generally been defined by the scope of the ETQA Body and the extent to which overlap with the HEQC was perceived. An additional key factor that impacts upon this relationship is whether or not there is a professional body within the sector. For example, in a sector such as tourism there is no professional body, and this results in a situation where the SETA may play a larger role than usual in the evaluation of programmes offered by providers within the HET band, including multi-purpose providers.

In other sectors, such as construction, the SETA regarded it as unlikely that it would have the infrastructure or capacity to take responsibility for HET programmes relating to the construction industry. The CETA suggested that while they would want a relationship with the HEQC, they would rely on ECSA to play the role of evaluating the programmes offered within the HET band.

The Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunication Technologies (ISETT) stated that the relationship they would prefer could be as depicted as follows:

	ISETT	
CHE (General QMS)	Assessing the course: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• staff• delivery• assessment• software	
	ECSA	

Where learnerships are involved, ISETT suggests that, in addition to playing the role described above, it will be critical for the SETA to play a record-keeping role, and to be extensively involved in the monitoring process.

The Mining Qualifications Authority (MQA) interviewee outlined their process, and stated that MQA had a Memorandum of Understanding with 21 professional bodies. The Memorandum creates the framework and, as standards and qualifications are generated and registered, there will be discussions to determine who would take primary responsibility for quality assuring qualifications or standards. Where programmes are offered by a HET institution, the MQA suggests that the audit team (the panel that reviews documentation and undertakes site visits) should consist of the HEQC, the MQA and the relevant professional body.

The Financial and Accounting Services SETA (FASSETT) interviewees regards the professional body in their sector as highly competent, and believe that it should continue to play a leading role in the accreditation of accounting programmes. The SETA would retain accountability for a range of qualifications (many in the HET band) but would rely on the professional bodies to undertake the bulk of the activities. They would have two types of agreements—one that applied across ETQA Bodies, and one for agencies to whom they have delegated responsibility.

The Financial and Accounting Services SETA (FASSETT) argued that they would want representation on all processes that fell within their defined scope.

The above suggests that it may be difficult to develop one *modus operandi* for HEQC-SETA relations. There may need to be a flexible approach, broadly along the lines of the three categories outlined above in the section of this report entitled *Potential Scope of Coverage of ETQA Activities within the Higher Education and Training (HET) Band*. There are, however, some underpinning issues that should define all such relationships.

An Analysis of the Roles that Education and Training Quality Assurance (ETQA) Bodies Could Play in Relation to Each Other

Relationships must be considered within the context of the roles required within the system. As outlined previously, SAQA states a number of functions and roles that an ETQA Body is required to play. This section explores some of these functions and roles in terms of the manner in which the different bodies can contribute to fulfilling these roles.

Accredit constituent providers for specific standards or qualifications registered on the NQF

The SETAs believe that the Band ETQA, in this case the HEQC, is well placed to play a key role in the institutional audit for multi-purpose providers. Certain SETAs, as well as the professional bodies where relevant, could play a more prominent role in evaluating the programmes. While these two roles will need to be performed in an integrative manner, this model allows different bodies to have different responsibilities.

The institutional audits will focus on “the efficacy of institutional arrangements to support high quality teaching and learning and research” (HEQC Founding Document, 2000: 15). It will also need to explore the overall QMS employed by the institution.

The evaluation of programmes will focus on development, delivery and evaluation of the learning programme. This will necessitate that the HEQC, in consultation with other ETQAs and SAQA, establishes a framework for the evaluation of programmes. The panels that are

utilised to evaluate the programmes will need to include the different role players, and will have to be trained to ensure that there is a consistent approach across the different panels and programmes.

There will need to be a mechanism to ensure that the institutional audit is integrated with the programme evaluation in a manner that enhances the value of the overall process. Such an approach will also assist in streamlining the process for providers—a factor that all SETAs agreed was critical.

Regularly seek, receive and act on feedback from both their “internal customers” and sector stakeholders

While there are many aspects to this role, an example is provided that illustrates the type of activity that can be undertaken. An interviewee suggests that SETAs can play an important role in assessing the impact that programmes have in the economic sector, and the extent to which they address the needs emerging from the Sector Skills Plans. Information from such a perspective can inform the monitoring system that is developed.

Contribute to ensuring the relevance, comprehensiveness and clarity of standards

The SETAs can assist to clarify what “customers” want and need, and can thereby ensure that providers have a clear understanding of the quality standard. The HEQC could play an important role in ensuring that the quality standards address all the purposes of HET, and that they are not reduced to a narrow occupational focus. This allows for a dynamic interplay between these purposes to ensure that HET institutions are able to realise their missions. This discussion will differ, depending on the context, that is, the nature of the programme and the extent to which it is foundational or more specialised.

Assessment policies and procedures

The other possible division of functions emerges from the SAQA discussion document on QMS systems. This suggests that the economic sector ETQAs may be better placed to undertake workplace assessment, and education ETQAs better placed to conduct institutional assessment. There is also the related suggestion that different assessment methods are appropriate for the different types of ETQA providers. However, it is generally felt that such an approach would undermine the integration that the NQF promises, and would lead to fragmentation.

SETA interviewees argued that while they would include standards and qualifications primarily delivered in the workplace within their scope, this should not imply that there should be a division of assessment responsibilities on the basis of theory and practice or institutional location. It was argued that this would lead to the perpetuation of the old system.

THE NATURE OF THE CONTRACTUAL AGREEMENTS

What emerges throughout this report is that there are likely to be different types of relationships developed by the HEQC with the different SETAs. This section will explore the possible arrangements that could be developed. However, underpinning all of these arrangements is the need to reach agreement on the principles that will form the basis of such relationships.

Principles that should Underpin the Relationship

Establishing trust through open communication, co-operative and developmental approaches and the shared understanding of the transformation project that lies ahead

This includes an acceptance of the value that each player brings to the partnership and the specific role(s) that each of the partners can play. There is a need to ensure that the agreement facilitates an on-going process which will allow for changes based on developments that take place. It also implies the need to establish clear mechanisms for collaboration, for example, a workshop or workshops with all parties, as well as other forms of communication.

Clear quality indicators are needed

An understanding is required of what standards of quality are used, and what type of indicators should be applied in order to ensure good quality education and training which, in turn, ensures that competent learners exit the system.

The role of standards in the development of quality indicators

The complexities of developing a common conception of quality have been raised throughout this document. An additional issue that emerged from these interviews is the specific difficulties of the transitional period, where there is an absence of registered standards. Without the registered standards, the quality criteria tend to be very broad and this makes it difficult to gauge quality. There will need to be discussion on how articulation will occur during this transitional phase.

Drivers in the system for attaining quality indicators

An issue that emerged from the SETA interviews was a concern relating to the extent to which the HEQC would be able to ensure high quality standards. It was argued that certain professional bodies—for example, the South African Institute of Chartered Accountants (SAICA)—accredit only those HET institutions that offer high quality programmes, that is, “centres of excellence”. In doing this it was argued the professional bodies encourage “best practice”. However, other HET institutions continue to offer programmes which have not been accredited by the professional body. These programmes are currently recognised by the DoE for funding purposes.

A question was raised about what, in the future, would drive the decision of whether to accredit a provider—the state subsidy or quality imperatives? Will the HEQC be able to take a firm stance on accreditation *vis-à-vis* quality? How will this be balanced with developmental considerations, where the decision about whether or not to accredit an institution may impact on the DoE decision on the funding of a particular programme? This points to the complexities that arise from the inter-relatedness of these processes, as discussed previously in this document. These issues are explored in the following sections.

An approach to attaining “good” quality

In order to meet the quality objectives that have been set for the system, it is necessary to reach a common definition of quality. This would be the standard against which all programmes would be evaluated.

It is not enough to agree upon minimum standards that represent the lowest common denominator. Rather, the concept of “threshold” needs to be deepened—and it may be useful to define a new term for this—to ensure that the standard carries with it the understanding of good quality leading to applied competence, as defined in the SAQA regulations on qualifications.

This is consistent with the approach suggested in the HEQC Founding Document that states that “it is important to ensure that the quality assurance system enhances access not simply to higher education but to high standards of provision and their concomitant intellectual and economic benefits”.

Awards for best practice

Best practice status could be awarded to providers who excel, and it might be useful to consider an award programme which publicly recognises programmes of a particularly high quality. Such awards could be made annually, and could serve as an impetus to ensure that “good practice” gradually evolves into “best practice” or, stated differently, serves as an ideal of excellence.

The need to ensure that there is a balance between accountability and improvement in the system

The HEQC Founding Document emphasises the importance of upholding the accountability requirements of higher education within the context of a strong developmental approach to quality assurance. This approach is important in the light of the concern, which was highlighted above, regarding the attainment of “good” quality.

The report commissioned by the HEQC to evaluate the Quality Promotion Unit (QPU) of the SAUVCA and SERTEC comments on the absence of clear follow-up mechanisms in the evaluation process. This resulted in a situation where problems were identified but no measures were built into the process to ensure that the institution acted upon recommendations. This has led to a perception, among some of the interviewees, that the HEQC may, in turn, be reluctant to act strongly when an institution fails to meet quality standards.

The Founding Document, however, states clearly that while the HEQC is committed to the improvement of institutions, it will not hesitate to expose and act against persistently poor provision of quality. The manner in which this issue will be dealt with will need to be built into partnership agreements that are developed. There will also need to be monies available to assist institutions to improve quality when necessary.

Protecting the Learner

A key feature of the arrangements to ensure quality in learning institutions is the need to protect the learner. This implies that learners should not be disadvantaged through any action that is taken against an institution.

In cases where an institution is given a period of time to rectify certain problems, as well as where an institution has its accreditation withdrawn, there must be agreement on how learners will be able to attain their qualification. This qualification must have the same status as the same qualification attained at another institution.

This aspect may need to be accommodated in the agreement, with an understanding of the measures taken to protect learners. This could take the form of the appointment of an assessment agency for those learners already at an institution. However, such measures may have cost implications, and the question of who pays will need to be resolved at the outset.

Need for Quality Management Systems

For the system to remain credible, and to build the trust required, it is critical that ETQAs have Quality Management Systems, and that the systems enable other players to understand the details of the QMS which an ETQA is using. This does not suggest that all

ETQAs should have the same system but, in the same way as this will be a requirement for provider accreditation, there will need to be a way of benchmarking quality approaches across ETQAs.

Recognition of the quality management systems of other ETQAs and the quality criteria utilised to evaluate providers (as discussed above) are both fundamental to ensuring that there is articulation and progression in the system. While the registration of standards and qualifications on the NQF should facilitate recognition, progression and articulation, this is dependent on the development of trust and credibility across the system.

Necessity for Meta-Evaluation in the System

Evaluators themselves need to be evaluated to ensure that their work meets stated objectives and quality imperatives. Such a process should assess how well the evaluators have been performing their duties and should point to methodological or other changes that may be required. This will build trust in the system, assist with the overall functioning and credibility of the system, and act as an important developmental tool.

Necessity for Moderation across the System to Ensure that Quality is of a Consistent Standard

The need for moderation is particularly important as the system is developing, although it should always remain an element of the system.

Possible Types of Agreements

The above discussion implies that the preferred arrangement is for a clear contractual agreement that specifies the role that each of the bodies (SETA, HEQC and Professional Body) will play in the accreditation of providers and particular programmes within the HET band. As discussed, there is likely to be a need for different levels of agreement with SETAs. This will primarily, although not entirely, depend on the scope of the SETA, and whether there is a professional body active in the sector.

An additional factor will be whether a qualification is delivered by a multi-purpose provider or a single-purpose provider. Where it is a multi-purpose provider, the programme evaluation aspects will need to be integrated with the audit of the institution so that the band ETQA will have mechanisms for exerting a positive impact on the quality assurance of programmes, if it plays this role together with sectoral ETQAs.

Where there is a single-purpose provider, accredited by a sectoral ETQA, the roles and functions are likely to change. However, the involvement of both types of ETQAs will continue to be invaluable in this quality assurance process.

Thus, the nature of the agreement would differ depending on whether the qualification:

- is within the broad (economic) sector scope, *but outside* the primary focus of the SETA ETQA, and whether the programme is provided by a multi-purpose provider or a single-purpose provider
- is within the broad (economic) sector scope *and within* the primary focus of the SETA ETQA, and whether the programme is provided by a single-purpose provider or multi-purpose provider.

Further, where a HET institution, accredited by the HEQC, is involved in the delivery of a learnership registered with a particular SETA, there will need to be a particular agreement regarding the QA arrangements pertaining to the learnership.

The contractual relationship between the HEQC and the SETA ETQA could be clustered into three broad arrangements¹⁵.

Category One

Where the major part of the SETA scope would cover programmes that fall within the HET band

In the case of a multi-purpose provider that is accredited by the HEQC, it is likely that the HEQC will take primary responsibility for the institutional audit. The SETA ETQA may be able to take a high level of responsibility for evaluating the programmes within the HET band. In some cases, the SETA ETQAs would want to play this role in partnership with the relevant professional body.

Where a single-purpose provider is involved, while the sectoral ETQA is likely to accredit the provider, it is critical that the HEQC plays a role to ensure that there is credibility and coherence across the sector. Such a scenario is likely to require bilateral and possible trilateral agreements, which specify different roles and responsibilities.

Category Two

Where a number of qualifications at HET level fall within the SETA ETQA scope—particularly at NQF Level 5

In a multi-purpose provider, accredited by the HEQC, it is likely that the HEQC will have the responsibility for the institutional audit. However, in this scenario the SETA ETQAs generally do not want to be *responsible* for the evaluation of the programmes offered by these institutions. Rather, they would want to be *involved* in the evaluation process.

This involvement could take the form of SETA ETQA representation on panels that have responsibility for the review of documentation and for site visits. They may carry out this responsibility together with the relevant professional body.

In single-purpose providers accredited by the SETA ETQA, it may be useful to have some input from the HEQC where the programmes are within the HET band.

Where professional bodies are involved as well as the SETA, this scenario would require a three-way agreement. Where only SETA ETQAs are involved, it might be possible to have a broad agreement between a number of SETA ETQAs and the HEQC. Within this agreement, there could be categories for bilateral agreements.

Category Three

Where the scope of the SETA will be primarily within the Further Education and Training (FET) band, although the SETA has an interest in qualifications at higher levels

In this scenario, it is proposed that the HEQC take responsibility for both the institutional audit and the programmatic evaluation. This may be undertaken in collaboration with the relevant professional body if applicable.

The HEQC could have a Memorandum of Understanding with the SETA ETQA that stipulates involvement at the following levels:

- broad forum to establish the framework for accreditation

¹⁵ These arrangements should be considered within the context of the discussion about possible roles and functions, as well as the importance of the underpinning principles. It should also be noted that as SETA ETQAs clarify their scope, they might change their perspective on the manner in which they relate to certain programmes within the HET band.

- bi-annual meetings to enable the SETA ETQA to receive feedback on quality provision in the sector. These forums would also serve as important opportunities for the SETA ETQA to provide feedback from industry relating to the quality of provision. There would also need to be other channels that allowed the SETA to provide the HEQC with information on problems brought to the attention of the SETA.
- joint identification of areas in which standards might need attention, and any gaps in provision that might have arisen. This would entail an integration of QA processes with Sector Skills Plans.

In this scenario it might be possible to have a broad agreement between a number of SETA ETQAs and the HEQC. Within this agreement there could be categories for bilateral agreements.

Areas for the Contractual Agreements

The following is a set of headings and list of issues that will need to be addressed in the different agreements:

- participating bodies
- introduction to the process
- purpose of agreements
- background to the issues
- scope of agreements (specifically in relation to the qualifications and standards that are covered within agreements)
- items of agreement:
 - defining vocabulary
 - approach to transformation issues—articulation, progression and articulation
 - establishing a common understanding of current and future systems for the generation of standards and qualifications. This should include an approach to recommendations for new standards and qualifications (or the review of existing standards and qualifications)
 - approach and process of quality assurance:
 - including a common understanding of quality approaches and quality criteria
 - approach to the improvement of institutions (including funding issues)
 - approach to addressing institutions in which there are persistent and unaddressed quality problems (including protecting learners)
 - approach to the quality assurance of learnerships and Skills Programmes in the HET band
 - developing a common understanding of legislative requirements such as licensing and registration
 - delineating the roles, responsibilities and functions of the different parties, including the following:
 - generation of standards and qualifications
 - Quality Assurance
 - certification of learners
 - registration of constituent assessors
 - other legislative requirements
 - rules and procedures for collaboration including:
 - financial arrangements (for example in-kind contributions or direct funding)
 - hosting of meetings, meeting procedures, chairing and secretarial services
 - keeping of records and a management information system, database of education and training standards affected by the agreement

- submission of reports
- provision for emerging developments
- procedures whereby parties can by agreement amend or add to specific sections of the agreement
- dispute resolution mechanisms.

CONCLUSION

The Sector Education and Training Authorities provided a wide range of points to inform the discussion on the potential role of the HEQC. The issues raised by the SETAs relate to the extent to which the HEQC intends to involve SETA ETQA Bodies in quality assurance discussions and whether the SETA ETQAs will be able to influence the quality assurance framework within HET institutions. Further, some SETAs are concerned that the HEQC may make quality demands that may be inappropriate for the economic sector. In essence, while the approaches within the SETAs differ vastly, the emphasis emerging throughout is that partnerships and collaborative arrangements need to be established.

Many of the interviewees suggested that they wanted the HEQC to play a role in convening the different ETQAs to begin to develop a framework for quality. At the same time, the SETA ETQA forum has agreed that SAQA must play a leading role in co-ordination. It is important that one player should not be seen as the “senior” ETQA; hence it may be preferable for SAQA to continue in the role of overall co-ordinator in order to facilitate discussions between the band ETQA, the SETA ETQAs and the professional bodies.

The HEQC Founding Document is an important step in the development of relationships, as many such issues are carefully addressed in the document. The document provides a basis for taking these quality assurance discussions further. However, there will need to be an opportunity created for SETAs to engage with the document so as to ensure that it creates a platform for future co-operation.

The key challenge is to ensure that transformation objectives remain the basis for discussion, while simultaneously developing a system that takes into account existing capacity and resources.

APPENDIX

Meaning of Acronyms

BANKSETA	Banking Sector Education and Training Authority
BS	The British Standard
CETA	Construction Education and Training Authority
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DoE	Department of Education
DoL	Department of Labour
ECSA	Engineering Council of South Africa
ESETA	Energy Sector Education and Training Authority
ETDP SETA	Education, Training and Development Practitioner SETA
ETDP	Education, Training and Development Practitioner
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurance body
FASSET	Financial and Accounting Services SETA
FIETA	Forest Industries Education and Training Authority
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HET	Higher Education and Training
HPCSA	Health Professions Council of South Africa
IIP	The Investors In People Award
ISETT	Information Systems, Electronics and Telecommunication Technologies SETA
ISO	International Standards Organisation
IT	Information Technology
ITB	Industry Training Board
MAPPP	Media, Advertising, Publishing, Printing and Packaging SETA
MQA	Mining Qualifications Authority
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSB	National Standards Body
PAAB	Public Accountants and Auditors Board
PLATO	South African Council for Professional and Technical Surveyors
QA	Quality Assurance
QMS	Quality Management System
QPU	Quality Promotion Unit
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning

SABS	South African Bureau of Standards
SACSSP	South African Council for Social Services Professions
SADTC	South African Dental Technicians Council
SAICA	South African Institute of Chartered Accountants
SANC	South African Nursing Council
SANSC	South African Natural Sciences Council
SAPC	South African Pharmacy Council
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAUVCA	South African Universities Vice Chancellors Association
SERTEC	Certification Council for Technikon Education
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	Standards Generating Body
THETA	Tourism and Hospitality Education and Training Authority