

FOREWORD

The Higher Education Act of 1997 assigns responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in South Africa to the Council on Higher Education (CHE). This responsibility is discharged through its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The mandate of the HEQC includes quality promotion, institutional audit and programme accreditation. As part of the task of building an effective national quality assurance system in a context of restructuring and transformation, the HEQC Board has also included capacity development and training as a critical component of its approach and its programme of activities.

The aim of the HEQC quality assurance system is to move higher education institutions to a greater level of self-regulation within a framework of external validation by the HEQC. Consistent with this, and with the fact that the South African higher education system is characterised by uneven quality of provision, the HEQC's approach to quality assurance combines institutional accountability with a developmental philosophy that relies on improvement strategies. Given the effect that different historical trajectories have had on all South African higher education institutions, the improvement dimension of the HEQC's approach is supported by an extensive capacity development and quality promotion programme that has as its main purpose the preparation of the higher education system for the implementation of the new quality assurance dispensation and the actual enhancement of the quality of provision.

The process of building the policy foundations of the HEQC is almost complete. The development and finalisation of a Framework for quality promotion and capacity development will complete the process started in 2001 to develop the policy foundations of a new quality assurance system for South African higher education. The finalisation of Framework will provide a coherent and integrated set of parameters to locate these capacity development programmes and activities.

In order to inform the finalisation of the HEQC's Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Framework, research was commissioned to inform and enrich the development of a policy framework for the HEQC's functions of quality promotion and capacity development in South African higher education. This document encompasses the findings of the researcher and does not necessarily reflect the policy positions of the HEQC.

As has been the case with a great deal of its research and development work, the HEQC makes this document available for discussion and use by stakeholders in the higher education sector. It is to be read together with the HEQC's draft Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Framework when it becomes available next year.

I hope that this resource document will be of use to colleagues and stakeholders in higher education and will help to inform the discussion on the HEQC's Framework for quality promotion and capacity development when it becomes available early in 2006.

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