

## PREFACE



In her first budget speech, the Minister of Education indicated that her focus would be on ‘stability and **consolidation** linked very directly to our existing positive policies and to any necessary adjustments that strengthen the framework of education, so that it provides the opportunities for transformation and development set out in various acts and policy instruments’.

The theme of consolidation was repeated at a CHE function: ‘Given the significant changes that have taken place over the past ten years, it is now time for a period of **consolidation** in the policy arena over the coming two to three years’. The Minister, however, added that ‘I must emphasize that this will provide us the opportunity to strengthen the system and build up public confidence in our universities and technikons.

Indeed, after an initial period of considerable flux and policy changes in higher education, in recent years there has been considerable certainty, consistency and continuity of national policy, which has been welcomed by the CHE and the higher education sector as a whole.

Just prior to the Minister proclaiming her focus on ‘consolidation’, the CHE itself had stated that

The higher education ‘system’, and its constituent parts and actors continue to be in flux and to face major challenges. Priorities are for the Ministry to purposefully effect the restructuring that is necessary and to build and **consolidate** the *system* through planning, funding and quality assurance activities. There is considerable stress, strain and anxiety within higher education and a further and urgent priority is to work diligently to create **system and institutional stability**. The system, institutions and actors are at the limits of their capacities to absorb further policy changes. It would be prudent not to make any further major demands on institutions and actors beyond the necessary structural restructuring, institutionalization of a new academic policy system and the consolidation and enhancement of quality. The overall approach of the CHE takes this as its frame of reference’.

In recent years, therefore, and after an initial period of extensive policy advice to the Minister of Education, the CHE began to focus more on developing a framework for effective monitoring and evaluation of policy goals, the extent to which such goals are being effectively realized, and with what outcomes. In addition, concerted attention began to be given to completing the HEQC’s quality assurance system (policies, mechanism, procedures, etc.) building activities in preparation for effective implementation of the system, as well as to the quality promotion and capacity building dimension of the HEQC’s mandate.

Having consultatively finalized a monitoring and evaluation framework, the CHE is investigating a number of important issues related to the functioning of HE, its progress in achieving defined policy goals and objectives, and the necessary conditions for its enhanced performance. These issues include access and equity, postgraduate education, institutional culture and financing and funding. In due course, attention will be given to whether the mergers will indeed result in more equitable, higher quality, more effective and efficient, and more responsive HEIs.

The CHE is also working diligently to improve the quality of HE core functions, programmes and institutions through its accreditation of all new HE programmes, the re-accreditation of select programmes, and its audits of institutions. In addition, there have been and are numerous quality promotion and capacity development initiatives, including special projects related to merging institutions and the historically disadvantaged institutions.

Through this work the CHE will continue to draw the attention of institutions, government and other key actors to critical shortcomings and pressing challenges, and also seek to work with HEIs to address these through its mandates for quality promotion and capacity development and for contributing to the development of higher education through specific initiatives.

In the coming years, the key tasks and challenges of the CHE include:

- Consolidating the ability of the CHE to provide informed, considered and strategic advice to the Minister
- Effective evaluation and monitoring of higher education and demonstrating the value of these for higher education development
- The refinement of its quality assurance systems with a keen eye on their sustainability
- Ensuring that a culture of self-regulation takes root within HEIs
- Ensuring effective working relationships with key stakeholders and HEIs around quality promotion and capacity development
- Building and consolidating the consultative, integrated, interlocking and coordinated functioning of the various responsibilities and organizational components of the CHE (advice, quality assurance, monitoring and evaluation, and HE development)
- Effectively addressing through appropriate strategies the key risks that are embodied in its mandate and its organizational character.

On the basis of the intellectual and organizational expertise that it possesses, the wise counsel that is available to it through the CHE Council and the HEQC Board, its capacity for critical self-reflexivity and its experiences of the past eight years, the support of numerous academics and researchers, and the funding that has been secured through the National Treasury, the CHE is well positioned to continue to effectively discharge its mandate and responsibilities for many years to come.



**Prof. Saleem Badat**  
*Chief Executive Officer*  
*Council on Higher Education*