



higher education
& training

Department:
Higher Education and Training
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION



Communiqué 4

**DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING,
COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION
AND
SOUTH AFRICAN QUALIFICATIONS AUTHORITY**

**IMPLEMENTATION OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION
QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND RELATED MATTERS**

30 August 2010

1. Introduction

This communiqué is the fourth of a series that aims to inform the South African higher education community of steps being taken to prepare the higher education system for the full implementation of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF). It should be noted that this communiqué does not replace Communiqué 3, which still applies in relation to the issues addressed therein.

2. Roles and Responsibilities

In terms of section 25 of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No 67 of 2008), the Council on Higher Education (CHE) is the Quality Council for Higher Education. The functions of a Quality Council in terms of section 27 of the NQF Act are, amongst others, to “develop and manage its sub-framework” and to advise and to make recommendations to the Minister of Higher Education and Training on its sub-framework, including in relation to the policy and criteria for the development of qualifications for its sub-framework.

The CHE is therefore responsible for the development and implementation of the HEQF, including for any changes to the HEQF that it deems necessary. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) is responsible for the approval and funding of programmes. However, it also has an important role to play in the HEQF implementation process in so far as the Minister of Higher Education and Training has the overall responsibility for the NQF and its sub-frameworks, and for determining the HEQF on the basis of the advice and recommendations of the CHE. The role of the South African Qualifications Authority SAQA is to register qualifications that meet the relevant policies and criteria in terms of section 13(1) of the NQF Act on the recommendation of the CHE and to advise the Minister of Higher Education and Training on all matters relating to the NQF.

In the light of the above, any concerns and proposals regarding inconsistencies and flaws in the HEQF on the side of higher education sector, professional bodies and other interested parties and stakeholders should be directed to the CHE.

3. Review of the HEQF

The CHE, through the programme accreditation function of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), as well as representations from amongst others, the Universities of Technology and various Professional Councils, is aware of a range of concerns relating to the number, nature and purposes of the qualification types set out in the HEQF, including, inter-alia:

- The appropriateness of the nine qualification types, including the designated variants, in the light of different institutional missions and

labour market expectations, in particular, the lack of a degree variant unique to the Universities of Technology.

- The coherence and consistency in the designation, credit value and pegging of some qualifications in the context of the needs of different professions, in particular, the lack of 240 credit diplomas, which may be required, for example, in a range of auxiliary health professions.
- The articulation pathways between undergraduate diploma and postgraduate programmes in terms of the time required to complete a masters degree, for example, a student with an undergraduate diploma would require two additional years of study prior to being considered for entry into a masters programme.
- The appropriateness of a number of postgraduate qualifications in different professional fields and their international comparability such as the MMed.
- The extent to which the range of qualifications available, in particular, at levels 5 and 6 are appropriate to support the goal of expanded access.

In the light of the issues highlighted, it is clear that the HEQF needs to be reviewed. The review will be undertaken by the CHE. The framework and modalities of the review is currently under consideration and once finalised will be communicated to the higher education sector, professional councils and other interested parties and stakeholders.

4. Alignment of Existing Programmes and Qualifications

The continued offering of existing programmes and qualifications is subject to these programmes and qualifications meeting the requirements of the HEQF within a time-frame to be determined by the Minister of Higher Education and Training by notice in the Government Gazette. The CHE, DHET and SAQA recognise the anxiety within the higher education sector regarding the potential complexities and onerous burden involved in the alignment process and would like to assure the sector that the paramount consideration in determining the time-frame would be to ensure the stability of the higher education system.

The CHE is currently in the process of developing an implementation plan for the alignment of existing programmes and qualifications, which will be released for consultative purposes in September 2010. It is estimated that the re-alignment process would take at least 3-4 years with the roll-out of the implementation plan beginning in early 2011. However, while there is, as stated in Communiqué 3, “no immediate need for institutions to re-align existing programmes to conform to the HEQF”, they are not precluded from undertaking preparatory work in this regard.

5. Standards Setting

The CHE as the Quality Council for Higher Education in terms of section 25 of the NQF Act is also now responsible for standards setting and for the development of naming conventions for qualifications, including designators

and qualifiers. The CHE is currently in the process of developing a draft framework for standards setting, as well as a draft set of criteria for designators and qualifiers, which will be released for consultative purposes later this year.

6. Conclusion

The CHE is aware of the complexities involved in initiating a range of concurrent processes to address what are essentially interlinked issues relating to the review of the HEQF, standards setting, the re-alignment of programmes and the development of naming conventions. In this regard, the CHE would like to assure the higher education sector that in developing frameworks and plans for implementation, it would take into account the necessary complexity in terms of sequencing and potential overlap between the different processes to ensure their overall coherence.