



## National Review Manual: Doctoral Qualifications

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April 2019

### Note

This manual should be used in conjunction with the  
*Framework for National Review of Higher  
Education Programmes (CHE, 2015)*

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# Chapter 1

## Introduction

### 1.1 Purpose and scope of the national review

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) as the Quality Council for higher education is, among other things, responsible for the quality assurance of the qualifications on its sub-framework, the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF), which it discharges through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC).

A national review of Doctoral qualifications arose from discussion between the CHE and the National Research Foundation (NRF). In fulfilling its mandate of Human Capital Development (HCD), the NRF has several funding instruments that support the doctoral degree. However, in making these investments, the NRF needs to be assured that Doctoral qualifications offered by South African public and private higher education institutions meet national quality standards for Doctoral degrees. The NRF proposed that the CHE undertake a review of Doctoral qualification in South Africa. The NRF suggested that, while there was a need to increase the number of Doctoral candidates and graduates nationally, the emphasis ought to be placed primarily on quality assurance at this level of post-graduate study.

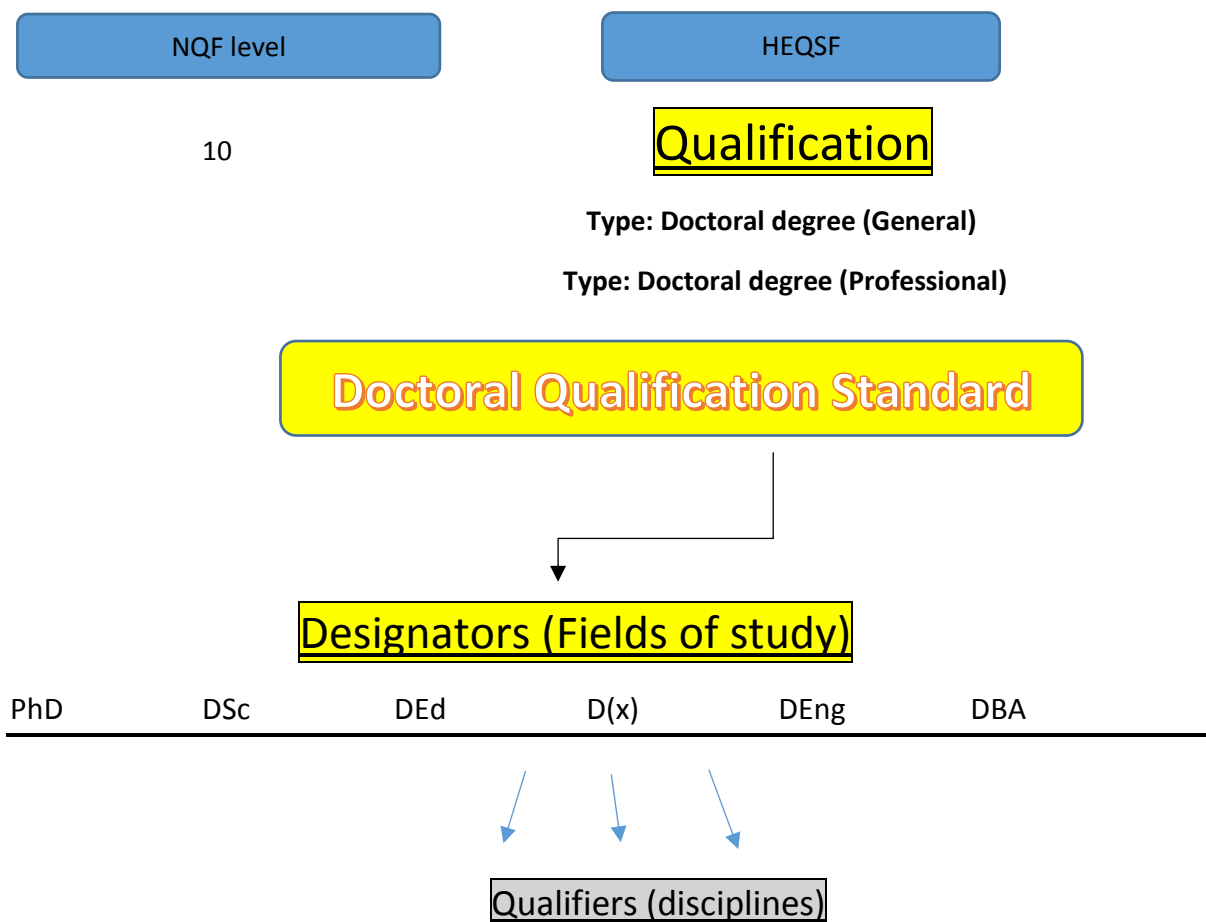
The quality of the Doctoral qualification is of critical importance, not only to the NRF and the CHE, but also to the public, the institutions awarding Doctorates, and their students. Quality has impact in a number of ways: on international comparability, competitiveness and mobility; on the preparation of future researchers and their likely research output; and on national capacity to respond, through research, appropriately and innovatively, to the various demands of globalisation, localisation and transformation, in the context of a rapidly changing knowledge economy. A national standard for the Doctoral qualification will be used by higher education institutions to inform and guide their delivery and quality assurance of Doctoral studies, and by students and the public alike as a threshold against which the quality of each offering of the qualification can be evaluated.

Prior to commencement of the review, a Doctoral Review Reference Group (hereafter, the Reference Group) coordinated by the CHE Directorate of Standards and National Reviews, and comprising academic experts in higher education, designed a national *Qualification Standard for Doctoral Degrees*. Following dissemination for public comment and subsequent revision, the Standard was approved by the Higher Education Quality Committee on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2018. It is this Qualification Standard that establishes the benchmark against which Doctoral qualification offerings are judged.

The fundamental purpose of a national review is two-fold: it enables an institution to evaluate its offering(s) in relation to a national standard for the qualification, and it enables the HEQC, through an evaluation of all institutional reports, to assess the general state of the qualification at a national level.

A way of defining the focus of the review is represented in the diagram below.

## Diagrammatic representation of the process



The focus of the review is on the **qualification**. For the purposes of the review, information relating to degree qualifiers (akin to disciplinary, inter-, multi- and trans-disciplinary specialisation) and designators (akin to broad fields of study) is aggregated at an institutional level, and the primary aim of the review is to assess the extent to which institutional policies, protocols and procedures ensure that the national Doctoral Standard is met in respect of the Doctoral qualification awarded by the institution.

For the purpose of the review, Doctoral degrees are distinguished in terms of the qualification type (General Doctorate, Professional Doctorate)<sup>1</sup> and designator. A Doctor of Philosophy (PhD) awarded without a qualifier is regarded as a single qualification variant. Different designators are regarded as different variants: Doctor of Philosophy, Doctor of Science and Doctor of Business Administration are therefore, for the review purposes, three qualification variants. Different qualifiers (for example, Doctor of Science in Microbiology, Doctor of Science in Physics, PhD in Microbiology, PhD in Physics) will not be considered as different variants, but the aggregated institutional evaluation would take into account all such qualifiers. The Standard applies to all variants, as does the review.

<sup>1</sup> For more detail on these variants, refer to the *Qualification Standard for Doctoral Degrees*.

The object of the review is not the higher education institution per se, but the offerings leading to the award of the Doctorate. The institutional context is of significance insofar as it should create an environment for good quality Doctoral studies. The primary task of the review is to evaluate the offering of Doctoral degrees according to the national Standard and make an informed judgement both in terms of the provisions of the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) – the *fitness-for-purpose* of the offering(s) – and the national and institutional context for Doctoral studies (their *fitness-of-purpose*). The latter implies that the qualification is consonant with the mission, vision and goals of the institution.

The review has the following aims:

- collection, analysis and assessment of data related to relevant aspects of Doctoral qualifications;
- an institution-level self-evaluation of the quality of its Doctoral qualification(s) using the Doctoral Standard as a benchmark;
- identification, as and when appropriate, of above-threshold practice and of areas in need of improvement;
- provision, as and when required, for monitoring by the CHE of institutional improvement and development plans;
- a national report on the state of Doctoral studies.

## 1.2 The review process

This national review differs from previous national reviews in two significant ways. Firstly, whereas previous reviews focused on discipline-based programmes leading to a specific qualification designator (Business Administration, Education, Social Work, Law), this review addresses the Doctoral qualification itself; an aggregated institutional evaluation embraces all offerings, in all fields of study and disciplines that lead to the award of the Doctoral qualification, with its variants, at level 10 on the National Qualifications Framework.

The second difference is that this review comprises a multi-phase process. In the initial phase, an institutional self-evaluation of Doctoral offerings, followed by a peer review, forms the core of the review process. The reference point for the review is the *Qualification Standard for Doctoral Degrees*. The self-evaluation is intended to determine whether or not the current offerings meet the qualification Standard, which is a threshold standard. It requires institutions to conduct a thorough, transparent self-evaluation of its Doctoral qualification(s), including the identification, where it applies, of above-threshold practice as well as areas in need of improvement and plans for improvement. The institution is encouraged to include in its self-evaluation its own judgement on the extent to which the Doctoral Standard is met. The Standard is included as Annexure 1.

A self-evaluation report (hereafter SER) on the quality of the Doctoral qualification(s) offered, completed by the relevant institution, will receive a desktop screening by the CHE to gauge the extent

to which it addresses all aspects of the Standard. The institution may, at this stage, be asked for additional information or data.

This will be followed by a site visit conducted by a review panel comprising experts in Doctoral education selected by the CHE. The panel examines the current Doctoral offering(s) by pursuing lines of enquiry based on the SER, to determine whether the Standard is met, and makes a recommendation accordingly. The resulting draft report provides an overall recommendation on the extent to which, at institutional level, the Standard is met. All draft reports are scrutinised by a National Standards and Reviews Committee (NSRC), a sub-committee appointed by the HEQC, for adequacy of evidence to support the conclusions made and recommendations reached, and to ensure that there is consistency in the application of the Standard across the findings of the reports. The NSRC recommendations are, in turn, presented to the HEQC.

The Qualification Standard forms the sole basis for the assessment of Doctoral degrees awarded. Since this phase is a review of a qualification at aggregated institutional level, not a programme review, programme accreditation criteria are not used.

The site visit panel reports, once approved by the HEQC and complemented, where necessary, with detail from the institutional SERs, form the basis of a national report on the state of the Doctoral qualification.

### **1.3 The outcomes**

The second phase of the review process commences. The HEQC determines the outcome in the case of each institution. One possible outcome is confirmation that the Doctoral qualification meets, or exceeds, the Qualification Standard in all respects. Another is a decision that the Standard has not (yet) been met. In a case where there is need of improvement before the Standard is met, the HEQC may decide on a set of requirements to be addressed by the institution, together with timelines for improvement plans and progress reports. The areas of improvement may coincide with, or differ from, those identified by the institution itself. The process of reporting to the HEQC would continue until such time that the HEQC is satisfied that all requirements pertaining to the Standard have been met.

### **1.4 Summary: stages in the review process**

The following steps are followed in the review:

#### Phase one

1. The CHE informs institutions of the scope of the review, and provides them with the national Doctoral Qualification Standard, a Review Manual and a template for the SER, all three documents designed by the Reference Group and, after consultation, approved by the HEQC. The template is included as Annexure 2.
2. The CHE holds a workshop to which institutional representatives are invited. The aim of the workshop is to discuss and clarify any outstanding procedural issues.
3. After consultation with institutions, the CHE announces a timeline for events occurring in the review process.

4. The first date on the timeline is a date for submission of the SER. The CHE recognises the need for institutions to be given adequate time to engage in a critical and reflective evaluative process.
5. The institution submits its self-evaluation report (SER), using the national Standard as the point of reference, together with a map of a portfolio of documentary evidence supporting claims made in the SER, that will be made available during a site visit.
6. Internal desktop screening of the institutional SER by the National Standards and Reviews Directorate (the Directorate) staff assisted, as required, by external experts in higher education. The Directorate may, at this stage, request further information or data from the institution.
7. Development by the CHE of a schedule for site visits by review panels.
8. The institution is informed of the site visit, the proposed date and duration, and the proposed composition of the review panel. The institution may consult with the CHE on the date, but the duration is at the discretion of the CHE.
9. The review panel includes persons with relevant expertise in higher education who have been trained as reviewers. Institutions have the opportunity to object to panel members if there is a perceived conflict of interest. (For guidelines on 'conflict of interest', refer to section 4.2 of this Manual.)
10. A schedule for the institutional site visit is developed by the Directorate in consultation with the institution.
11. The site visit is conducted by the panel, accompanied by a representative of the CHE, who has observer status and does not participate in arriving at findings. A report on the institutional qualification(s) is prepared by the review panel and submitted to the CHE.12. . The CHE appoints a group of experts to draft a national report on the state of Doctoral studies in relation to the Qualification Standard. The report is approved by the CHE for publication.

#### Phase two

1. A check on comprehensiveness and coverage of all sections of the SER template in each draft report is completed by Directorate staff, with external assistance if and as necessary.
2. The NSRC ensures adequacy of evidence to support the panel recommendations and monitors consistency across the reports.
3. The NSRC submits its recommendations to the HEQC.
4. The HEQC arrives at a decision whether the Standard has been met or not, and informs the institution accordingly.

#### Phase three

In the event that the Standard has not (yet) been met, a process aimed at improvement unfolds as described in Chapter 5.2 below.



## Chapter 2

### The self-evaluation report (SER)

#### 2.1 Preparing for the report

The report should reflect on and represent all faculties/colleges, schools, departments and any other units involved in Doctoral studies. The institution is encouraged to use a cumulative approach to gathering information for the SER, in order to ensure that an aggregated level of reporting on institutional policies, protocols and procedures fairly reflects their application in all fields of study and disciplines. Where discrepancies or significant differences between units arise, they should be identified and accounted for.

For this reason, preparation for the SER should ensure appropriate opportunities for participation in its drafting by all parties involved in Doctoral studies. At the discretion of the institution, this may include participation by senior institutional, faculty/college and school management, postgraduate and/or research officers, quality assurance officers, supervisory and (if relevant) teaching staff, support staff, data management staff, current students and alumni. Throughout the preparatory process, the SER template should be the point of reference. The template includes a section in which the preparatory process is summarised, with details of any meetings and/or workshops that accompanied the drafting, together with the scale of participation.

#### 2.2 Developing the SER

The format of the SER template follows closely the format of the *Qualification Standard for Doctoral Degrees*. Responses to the sections of the Standard are followed by an opportunity for the institution to identify and describe, where relevant, above-threshold practice as well as areas in need of improvement together with plans to address such areas and proposed timelines. A number of appendices require from the institution quantitative data relating to important aspects of the Doctoral qualification(s).

The SER should take the form of a narrative reporting of findings of its Doctoral qualification(s) at an aggregated institutional level (that is, for the institution as a whole), based on analysis and evaluation against the Standard. Reference to offerings in specific fields of study or disciplines, and in different faculties and schools, should be included where there are discrepancies or significant differences in the ways institutional policies, protocols and procedures are interpreted or applied.

For each section and sub-section of the template, the SER should include sufficient description and analysis, backed up with requisite quantitative data (as specified in the appendices to the SER template) to support claims made in the institutional self-evaluation. An initial purpose of the SER is to enable a review panel to prepare adequately for a site visit. Annexures to the SER should be limited to those that are essential for a comprehensible reading of the report. Supplementary documentation should be made available during the site visit itself – see Section 4.3 of this Manual.

The SER should be endorsed by the executive authority of the institution.

## 2.3 General characteristics and organisation of the SER

The numbering of sections and sub-sections of the SER template (following the numbering in the Doctoral Standard) is intended to ensure, firstly, that all aspects of the Standard are addressed and, secondly, to ensure a reasonable similarity in structure between different institutional SERs that would enable a consistent pattern of information for external evaluation by review panels and CHE quality assurance structures.

The CHE does not prescribe the length of a SER, either by way of a minimum or maximum length. The general principle is that each section of the template is adequately addressed, with sufficient evidence provided or referred to. Ideally, Sections 1 -5 of the template are answered separately. If, for reasons of coherence, it is deemed advisable (such as in Section 5) to integrate responses to more than one sub-section, it should be made clear exactly which sub-sections are being addressed collectively.

Narrative cohesion, succinctness of argument, and accurate referencing to relevant documentation and data are important. Duplication of content and padding with extraneous detail, data or diversion, anecdotal or otherwise, should be avoided.

Where claims made require reference to institutional policies, protocols and procedures or other relevant documentation such as internal review reports, minutes of meetings or publications addressing aspects of institutional praxis, such reference should be made preferably in footnotes. The footnote should identify the document, and indicate where it is to be located in the documentary display prepared for the site visit.<sup>2</sup>

In cases where Doctoral studies are offered on different campuses or sites of delivery, the SER should show how equivalence between the sites is maintained. Likewise, in the case of joint, dual or co-badged degrees, evidence should be provided showing the inter-relationship between policies and procedures of each awarding institution.

## 2.4 Submission of the SER

The CHE sets a date by which the SERs are to be submitted. The date is the same for all institutions. The CHE establishes a Doctoral Qualification National Review portal on its website, on which SERs are uploaded. Access for uploading to the portal is provided to a *review coordinator* appointed by the institution. The institutional coordinator has access only to her/his institution's SER.

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<sup>2</sup> Examples: 1) Minutes of Senate meeting, <date>, item 4.2 (or page no.). Site visit document file 2.1; 2) Policy on Postgraduate External Examination, approved by Senate on <date>, paragraph 16. If there is more than one reference in the SER to a document, the document need not be duplicated in the site visit material.

## Chapter 3

### The site visit

#### 3.1 Preparatory steps

The site visit is an integral aspect of the national review. The CHE liaises with the institution and reaches agreement with the institution on the timing of and schedule for the site visit.

The institution is allocated a CHE *contact person*. The institution liaises with that person in connection with all matters related to the setting up, organisation and administration of the site visit, including all logistical arrangements. The CHE will communicate the details of the contact person to the institution. The role of the CHE contact person for administrative support is described in Section 4.3 of the Manual.

The institution is required to appoint a *site-visit coordinator* who is the liaison person between the institution and the CHE. The name, status and contact details of the site-visit coordinator are communicated timeously to the CHE. The site-visit coordinator may be the same person as the review coordinator, or a different person.

The site-visit coordinator acts on behalf of the institution before and during the site visit. All site visit-related preparations and arrangements are the responsibility of the site-visit coordinator and s/he must also be available throughout the duration of the site visit to address requests from the review panel in relation to the review process.

The responsibilities of the site-visit coordinator, in addition to maintaining an ongoing liaison between the institution and the CHE, are defined and discussed below.

#### 3.2 Format of and schedule for the site visit

The duration of a site visit is normally 2-3 days. Activities of the review panel are normally scheduled between 9 am and 4 pm. The site-visit panel may require additional time earlier or later for its private deliberations.

A site visit schedule comprises a series of time slots and includes the following:

- meetings of the panel with senior institutional management: an introductory meeting during which senior management presents to the panel an overview, in relation to its Doctoral qualification(s), the institutional mission, vision and strategic plan; and a further meeting that concludes the site visit, the purpose of which is for the panel to seek clarification on any outstanding issues;
- interviews with select groups of academic heads, supervisory staff, (if relevant) staff involved in coursework or/and work-integrated learning, administrative and support staff, Doctoral alumni and current students;
- periods allocated to the panel for reading of documents and private reflection;

- visits to selected facilities, such as the library, and dedicated post-graduate student facilities;
- lunch and tea breaks.

The CHE liaises with the institution before finalisation of the site-visit schedule. In good time before commencement of the visit, the institution informs the CHE of the composition of each meeting/interview group (titles, names and institutional positions).

In the event that an institution offers doctoral studies at more than one campus, the CHE will at its discretion, and following the submission of the SER, determine whether the site visit is limited to one campus or will include panel visits to additional campuses. The same principle may apply where infrastructure fundamental to research activity is located off campus.

To prevent unnecessary disruption of institutional and personal activities, the site visit schedule is normally adhered to strictly, although modifications may be made on agreement between the institution and the panel.

### 3.3 Site-visit requirements

The site-visit coordinator will ensure that logistical arrangements are in place for the panel to proceed with its deliberations in as convenient a manner as possible. The provisions should include:

- a map of campus, indicating the venue for the panel's initial meeting with senior management;
- parking for panel members;
- venue(s) suitable for the panel's activities. Ideally, the same venue is suitable for further meetings/interviews, confidential panel discussion, and a document display;
- furniture appropriate for those activities;
- access to electricity and the internet, a computer providing access to all relevant electronic institutional data and policy documentation, a printer and photocopier;
- tables for a well-categorised and -indexed document display;
- name tags for interviewees and desktop name labels for panel members;
- catering for lunch and tea/coffee breaks, and bottled water.

### 3.4 Document display

In general, documentation is limited to matters relevant to the Doctoral qualification(s) and that elaborates on matters contained in the SER. The document display should be well arranged and categorised, in alignment with the Doctoral Standard and the SER, so that the panel is easily able to access information that has been referred to in the SER.

Of fundamental importance is the documentary display map, indicating the source of each documentary item. Access to online items should be available to the panel at all times. The panel may need to print certain online items. The document display should, as far as possible, be aligned with references made in the SER which, in turn, is aligned with the format of the Standard.

The panel may also need to have access to certain documents after conclusion of the site visit, as part of its report drafting. If that is the case, the institution will have to upload additional documentation on the CHE Doctoral Review portal.

### **3.5 Interviews and interviewees**

A key element in a site-visit schedule is the interviewing of personnel from the different relevant parts of the institution. Categories of relevant personnel groups are set out above. Before the visit the CHE will consult with the institutional site-visit coordinator on a draft schedule that the CHE has designed, including proposed interview group categories, and any changes will be made in consultation with the coordinator. The coordinator will then provide the CHE with details of the interviewees.

Apart from the initial meeting with senior management, interviews do not include formal presentations by the interviewees. The panel pursues lines of enquiry, and interviewees respond accordingly. The panel will assume that the interview groups have been adequately informed of the purpose and scope of the site visit. Discussion in interviews is confidential; the panel's reporting on any statement made during an interview will cite the group category (for example, faculty deans, library staff), but not an individual respondent.

### **3.6 Catering arrangements**

In addition to the provision of tea, coffee and water on a regular basis, the institution is requested to provide a light lunch on the days of the site visit. Arrangements should be such that the panel has the option of breaking for, or having a working, lunch. The CHE will notify the institution in advance of any special dietary requirements.

### **3.7 Post-site visit arrangements**

On conclusion of the site visit, the coordinator ensures that:

- a post-site visit evaluation form is completed and returned to the CHE;
- any requests by the panel for post-site visit documentation are addressed.

### **3.8 Costs**

The institution is responsible for the following costs:

- production of its SER and the provision of related documentation;
- the venue(s) required for the activities of the review panel;
- on-site catering for the review panel during its site-visit activities;
- printing and copying of documents requested by the panel during the site visit.

All other costs are borne by the CHE.

## Chapter 4

### The review panel

#### 4.1 Selection of the review panel

The CHE selects a panel of reviewers to conduct the site visit on its behalf.

The panel typically comprises a minimum of three people, one of whom serves as chairperson. The chairperson, among other things, acts as the official conduit between the panel and the institution during the site visit.

The review panel members are drawn from a list of nominations received from institutions involved, to which the CHE may add candidates on the basis of their experience in related quality assurance processes. The nominees are requested to provide evidence of their expertise in higher education, with the emphasis on experience in matters relating to Doctoral qualifications. Because the review is a review of a qualification, embracing all fields of study and disciplines, the area of disciplinary specialisation of the nominee will not be a determining factor, but appropriate scholarly expertise and reputation in a discipline will be important considerations.

A condition for appointment to a review panel is that the candidate has not had any recent involvement with the institution concerned. The candidate has not been in the employment of the institution for the last five years, and has not been involved as supervisor or co-supervisor of a Doctoral or other postgraduate candidate from the institution for the last three years. Involvement as external examiner will not disqualify a candidate. A nominated panel member is required, before appointment, to sign a declaration confirming the absence of any other form of conflict of interest.

The CHE trains review panel members in all aspects of site-visit evaluation. The training aims to ensure that review panels approach their work within the framework of the CHE's approach to quality assurance, that panels fully understand the purpose, aims, scope and intended outcomes of the national review process, and conduct their activities in an objective, impartial and congenial manner.

#### 4.2 Institutional right of objection

Before the site visit, the CHE communicates its proposed review panel composition to the institution.

The institution has the right to object to the composition of the panel and to communicate its *reasoned* objection to the CHE. As a general rule, a demonstrable *conflict of interest* is the only valid ground for objection. The CHE deals with any adjustments made to the composition of the panel resulting from an objection by an institution, or from a reviewer withdrawing from the panel and being substituted, and notifies the institution accordingly. While consultation with the institution will take place throughout this process, a final decision on the panel composition rests with the CHE.

## **4.3 Terms of reference, roles and responsibilities: panel chairperson, panel members and CHE observer**

### **Chairperson**

The chairperson is the senior trustee of the CHE's national review process for the duration of the panel's mandate. As such, the chairperson is responsible for maintaining contact with the CHE before, during and after the site visit. During the site visit, the chairperson is the official conduit for all communication between the institution and the panel, including requests for and submission of any additional documentation. Any problems or uncertainties encountered by the institution during the site visit should be brought directly to the attention of the chairperson.

Panel members report directly to the chairperson and, outside of scheduled meetings and interviews, engage with members of the institution only through the chairperson. Should any conflicts arise during panel deliberations that cannot be resolved through consultation aimed at consensus, the chairperson's decision on any conflictual matter will be final. A panel member who has reasonable grounds for feeling aggrieved by such decision may refer the grievance to the CHE representative, who would consult with CHE senior management in that regard.

The chairperson presides over the site visit meetings and interviews, ensuring that all proceedings are conducted in a fair and courteous manner. During the interviews, the chairperson will ensure that panel members and respondents restrict themselves to matters that are within the scope of the review process. It is within the chairperson's discretion to rule a particular question or response out of order, or to re-direct it appropriately. Out-of-order contributions by the panel would include opinionated or advisory statements, or comparisons between different institutional contexts and practices. In order to manage time effectively, the chairperson ensures members stick to the agreed time slots. The chairperson should ensure that discussion is focused and appropriately sequenced, that facts are distinguished from opinions and feelings, that questions posed by the panel are pertinent and clearly expressed, and that important verbal evidence is accurately captured. S/he should also ensure that time is well managed, allowing for an appropriate balance between the range and number of questions posed by the panel and opportunity for adequate response by the institution. Another responsibility of the chairperson is to ensure that all aspects of the Doctoral Standard on which the panel's findings and recommendations will be based are adequately covered, not just separately but with a composite overview as well.

### **Panel members**

Each panel member contributes to the proceedings, helping the panel achieve its objectives. Panel members must accept the coordinating authority of the chairperson, and be guided by her/him with regard to the organisation and tenor of each site visit interview session. Panel members should ensure that any enquiry or request they may wish to make to the institution is conveyed to the institutional site-visit coordinator solely by the chairperson. Each panel member should make a summary record of proceedings so that, when a report is drafted, points made can be justified by reference to specific documentary or verbal evidence.

### **CHE observer**

The CHE representative has observer status throughout the site visit, but does not participate in the panel's process of arriving at findings and recommendations, nor in the writing of the site visit report. Her/his role is to provide administrative support to the panel, to liaise on logistical matters

with the institution, to monitor the panel's adherence to CHE policy on national review site visit protocols and, should the protocols be breached, to bring the matter to the attention of the chairperson, in the first instance and, should it remain unresolved, to the attention of CHE senior management.

Another responsibility of the CHE representative is ensuring that travel and accommodation arrangements for panel members are completed and communicated to them in good time.

#### **4.4 The site-visit report**

The site-visit review panel report is an important element of the review process. This report together with the institutional SER provides the NSRC and the HEQC with a holistic qualitative judgement on the Doctoral qualification(s) awarded by an institution. The writing of this report and the submission thereof to the CHE signals the conclusion of the site visit for the review panel.

Typically, the chairperson will assign, after consultation, specific sections of the report to different members of the panel. This would be to ensure that all aspects of the Standard are adequately addressed during the site visit. A draft report is normally compiled before the review panel disbands at the end of the site visit. The panel uses a CHE report template that had been introduced to panel members during training. The aim of the report template is to ensure that all institutional reports can be assessed and evaluated using a common format. The template does, at the same time, provide sufficient discretion for each panel report fairly to represent the distinctive character of each institution's Doctoral offerings.

Ideally, all the key elements that inform the report will have been agreed on by panel members during face-to-face discussion. The chairperson strives to achieve consensus in the panel on all matters included in the report. In cases where there are unresolved but significant differences of opinion between panel members on substantive matters, the chairperson may decide to include the conflicting points of view as part of the report. The panel report is then completed by a date set by the CHE, after consultation with the panel. The chairperson scrutinises the final version to ensure consistency, accuracy, even-handedness, stylistic and tonal suitability, and linguistic precision. The chairperson is responsible for the completion and submission of the final report, which is uploaded by the chairperson on the CHE portal.

#### **4.5 Review panel judgements and recommendations**

The panel report is evidence-based, and includes sufficient descriptive content to ground and justify the panel's findings. The findings may range from identification of above-threshold practice, to confirmation that the Doctoral Standard is met, to the identification of areas that are in need of improvement. The findings are, where deemed necessary, accompanied by recommendations for consideration by the NSRC and the HEQC.



## Chapter 5

### Decision-making by the CHE

#### 5.1 The National Standards and Reviews Committee (NSRC)

The NSRC is a sub-Committee of the HEQC. Its mandate includes making recommendations to the HEQC on matters relating to qualification standards and national reviews. Review panel reports are considered, in the first instance, by the NSRC. The NSRC assesses the clarity, coherence and consistency in each report of the panel's judgement using the Standard as its reference point, and similar aspects across all the reports. The NSRC may endorse the panel report without amendment, or propose different or additional areas recommended for improvement on the basis of the evidence provided in the report. The NSRC may refer the report back to the panel chair in respect of specific matters.

The NSRC recommendation is presented to the HEQC.

#### 5.2 The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC)

The HEQC is the sub-Committee of the CHE mandated to set criteria for and monitor quality assurance in higher education.

The HEQC considers the recommendations of the NSRC. It may decide, on the basis of a recommendation, that the institution meets, or exceeds, the Doctoral Standard. Alternatively, the HEQC may decide that all aspects of the Standard are not (yet) met, and identifies areas in need of improvement. The institution is required to submit to the CHE an improvement plan, based on the areas identified. The HEQC also sets a timeline within which the improvements ought to have been made and the Standard met. Depending on the scale of improvement required and the timeline set, the institution may be required, during the period for improvement, to submit periodic progress reports.

## Chapter 6

### Confidentiality and professional conduct

#### 6.1 Guidelines on professional conduct during the site visit: panel members

6.1.1 National reviews, including site visits, provide the HEQC and its review panels with much institutional information. All material, including institutional submissions and documentation provided as evidence, is treated as confidential and may only be used for the purpose for which it was obtained.

6.1.2 Review panel members are required to sign an undertaking that they will treat all information as such and agree to destroy any documentation taken off site or return it to the CHE by a specified date.

6.1.3 Panel members should strive to ensure that all engagement with members of the institution is objective, impartial, and conducted in a professional manner.

6.1.4 During the site visit itself, panel members may not divulge to any member of the institution, or by allusion hint at, the findings and recommendations the panel will make.

6.1.5 Panel members should ensure that all notes, comments and recommendations are secure, and that nothing is left in institutional spaces (or in institutional documents) that could be accessed by non-members.

6.1.6 Reviewers are, in particular, prohibited from disclosing the contents of the panel report submitted to the CHE to anyone and may not contact the institution or other parties to discuss matters relating to the site visit. The panel report is the exclusive property of the CHE. Any attempt by a member of the institution to elicit information that is confidential to the panel must be reported immediately to the CHE.

#### 6.2 Guidelines on professional conduct during site visit: members of the institution

In addition to the required compliance by reviewers with the ethical and confidentiality requirements of the CHE, the CHE has compiled a list of professional guidelines, related to site visits, for which it seeks compliance by institutions. These guidelines are as follows:

6.2.1 The institution is not permitted to make contact with review panel members prior to or after the site visit on issues related to the review process. Any attempt outside of the site visit schedule to influence the outcome of the site visit must be avoided.

6.2.2 It is the responsibility of the institution to ensure that personnel required to be present for the CHE site visit are available at the appointed times and are properly informed of the purpose and scope of the visit.

6.2.3 The institution recognises the need for the panel to hear evidence, during interviews, representing the full spectrum of relevant academic experience and opinions that exists within the institution.

6.2.4 The institution should ensure the review panel, is afforded, on request; access to all facilities and resources relevant to Doctoral qualifications.

6.2.5 No audio-visual recording of formal site visit proceedings (video, photograph, audio) may be made by the institution without express permission from the CHE. Unless by prior agreement with the institution, the CHE panel does not make audio-visual records of proceedings.

6.2.6 In terms of CHE policy, no gifts, rewards or financial incentives may be offered to panel members prior or during and after the site visit.