



CELEBRATING 25 YEARS AND BEYOND OF THE CHE STORY

COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

By Rivonia Naidu-Hoffmeester



CHE Staff and Deputy Minister Manamela

As it grows in its dynamism and vibrancy, the South African Council on Higher Education (CHE) aims to continue being flexible and agile, remaining relevant in attending to the needs of the country's higher education (HE) sector.

While focusing on its past and where it finds itself today, "looking ahead" formed a core theme of the CHE's 25th anniversary gala dinner held in September this year. The evening, which brought together various role-players of the CHE story, acknowledged the Council's humble beginnings in Cape Town and traced the journey of how the CHE came to be the organisation that it is today. The occasion also formed the backdrop for the official launch of the new [Quality Assurance Framework \(QAF\)](#).



Celebratory moment

Welcoming guests, Chief Executive Officer of the CHE, Dr Whitfield Green said it was significant for the CHE to launch the QAF in its 25th year, and in so doing set the scene for its collective quality assurance (QA) work over the next 15 to 20 years. He said it was particularly gratifying to report that in the year of its 25th anniversary, the CHE has been able to maintain its high standards of performance as an organisation, achieving a clean audit and achieving 47 of 48 performance targets that were set for the past financial year.

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“The entire staff of the organisation, Council members, and the management team that leads the work must be acknowledged. For the first time in quite a while, we have a full complement of senior managers in position, and this bodes very well for the stability of the organisation going forward.”



Dr Whitfield Green

Dr Green also thanked Professors Saleem Badat and Mala Singh as well as Mr Ahmed Essop for their effort, expertise and time when they worked at the CHE. Their dedication, he said, has shaped the organisation and set it on a firm trajectory. Similarly, he also thanked the Department of Higher Education, Science and Innovation, which was represented by its Deputy Minister, Honorable Buti Manamela. “Your support over the years for the CHE and its work has been strong and consistent and has enabled the organisation to fulfil its varied mandate in the higher education sector in South Africa.”

In celebrating the efforts of all former staff in the building of the CHE into the organisation that it is today, Dr Green remembered the late Professor Narend Baijnath who served as CEO from 2015.

DHET COMMENDS CHE FOR SUSTAINED CORPUS OF CRITICAL ADVICE



Dep. Min. Buti Manamela

In congratulating the CHE on its anniversary, Deputy Minister Manamela said the organisation was a product of the political imagination of the post-apartheid democratic vision, as expressed in our democratic Constitution. “This makes the CHE one of the most important regulatory instruments as contemplated in the Higher Education Act of 1997... We mark the CHE’s 25th anniversary against the backdrop of a number of significant milestones. These are milestones in crucial areas such as quality assurance, accreditation, and its impact on the broader transformation project within South Africa’s higher education system.”

He said across the African continent and globally, the CHE is recognised as a reputable standard bearer for quality in the service of democratic transformation and development. “As government and as a country, we are rightfully proud of this prestigious position that the CHE occupies.”

Deputy Minister Manamela added: “We wish to commend the CHE for providing a sustained corpus of critical advice covering many important aspects of South Africa’s post-apartheid higher education system for the past 25 years.”



CHE COUNCIL COMMITTED TO CONTRIBUTING TO STRONG LEGACY

Recently appointed Council Chairperson, Reverend Vuyokazi Memani-Sedile, described the Advisory function of the CHE as central to its identity, stating that in recent years the CHE has refocused its efforts towards strengthening this facet of its work, as well as on the research and monitoring capabilities that underpin it.

She said the CHE’s advice is always carefully compiled, based on research, data obtained through its monitoring activities, and extensive consultation. “In line with its independent nature, the CHE strives to compile objective, robust advice, with no bias, with no fear or favour, and always in the interests of the higher education system and in adherence to the current organisational values of social justice, quality, integrity and accountability.”

She also assured the DHET that the CHE is committed to serving the country and the HE system through this advisory role, both proactively, and in response to DHET requests.

In celebrating the launch of the new QAF, she said the Framework represents a bold, innovative approach to QA, responsive to the current rapidly changing context and to emerging futures. “It is great that in celebrating 25 years of contribution to quality assurance in higher education in South Africa, we step into the next 25 years with a strong new direction and approach.”



Reverend Memani-Sedile said the CHE is clear that it has made much progress since 1994, much also remains to be done. “We are not yet where we need to be in higher education. There are significant pressing challenges that need urgent attention.”

Some of these challenges include students not progressing to postgraduate studies in sufficient numbers to meet the needs of our country; student fees; acts of racism and institutional cultures that continue to privilege some and exclude others; the slow pace of curriculum transformation; security, safety and sustainability issues such as gender-based violence; and weakness in leadership, management and governance of higher education institutions.

“Working to address these challenges is the responsibility of all of us. The CHE commits to supporting the efforts of government and other role-players in finding solutions to address these issues. We remain optimistic that we will overcome... We commit to contributing to the strong legacy that has been built over time and to ensuring that the organisation fulfils its mandate at this critical juncture in our history, when higher education has an immense role to play in strengthening our democracy, and in contributing to the development of our economy.”

OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF THE NEW QAF

Speaking on behalf of Professor Angina Parekh, Chairperson of the Higher Educational Quality Committee (HEQC), Professor Lesley Le Grange, also a member of the HEQC and Council, provided a brief history of the HEQC and its current status and objectives. In launching the new QAF, he thanked colleagues across the sector who assisted to conceptualise the Framework and who are assisting with the preparations for its implementation. “This is in line with the identity of the CHE as a peer-based organisation, drawing from and working with the sector.”

He said the development of the QAF was formally initiated during 2019 after extensive conceptualisation and consultation work and forms an integral part of the Strategic Plan of the CHE in the 2020 to 2025 planning cycle. It will continue to be a strategic driver for the organisation beyond 2025.



Prof. Lesley Le Grange

“In the CHE’s Strategic Plan, the National Plan for Post-School Education and Training is quoted as follows, ‘setting out the policy goals for the sector for the next ten years, [which] seek[s] amongst others to streamline regulation – this has implications for the CHE in contributing to increased efficiency, the reduction of complexity, removal of duplication and a refined regulatory system overall’. The new Quality Assurance Framework moves us in this direction.”

The new QAF is underpinned by seven key principles, which must infuse and guide QA at sectoral and at institutional level. These are: (1) institutional responsibility and accountability for IQA; (2) integration; (3) fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose; (4) differentiation; (5) simplification; (6) collaboration; and (7) innovation.

Professor Le Grange said the QAF requires a fundamental shift in how QA is perceived and undertaken – seeking to move the sector away from a compliance-based, one-size fits all approach, reliant strongly on a policing model. “There is a move towards a differentiated approach based on trust, consultation, collaboration and support, but in an environment where institutions realise that trust must be earned through continuous improvement and by continuously being able to show that their IQA systems are not only functional but are on an upward trajectory to excellence.”



ARTWORK COMMEMORATING 25 YEARS

A highlight of the evening was the reveal of an artwork to commemorate the 25th anniversary of the CHE. The painting was done by CHE staff member, Ms Carina Oelofsen. She said it was an honour for her to contribute the story of the CHE. She said the painting reflected casting a light on education. "When I think of education, the first thing that comes to mind is a book. Before I began the painting, I thought to myself, what does education mean to me and others and I thought it would be apt if the painting reflected how going forward, we can all shine a light on education. We all have a role to play in the education space – we are the light."



Ms Carina Oelofsen –
Celebratory artwork artist



Ms. Maria Mmako

In the image above, we see Ms. Maria Mmako, the Council on Higher Education's longest-serving employee. Maria has witnessed the inception of the CHE and the numerous transformations it has undergone, to where we are today. As we mark 25 years of the Council on Higher Education's existence, we wholeheartedly honour and appreciate her unwavering commitment, recognising her as an invaluable member of the organisation.