

Communiqué 5 of 2023

To: Public and Private Higher Education Institutions in the Republic of South Africa

Subject: Extension of the concession for programmes accredited for the contact mode of provisioning to continue to be offered through remote online distance and / or blended modes of provisioning, the development of a Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) and a themed review in this area.

Date: 20 June 2023

1. The CHE Communiqués of November 2020, July 2021 and July 2022 provided a concession to institutions from the HEQC regarding mode of delivery of programmes regardless of the mode for which they were accredited. This was required in order to enable continuity in learning and teaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This meant that programmes accredited for the contact mode of delivery continued to be deemed to be accredited despite the shift to emergency remote teaching and learning. The concession was extended to include the 2022 and 2023 academic years.
2. The HEQC constituted a task team to review the current situation with regard to the offering of accredited programmes by HEIs, particularly in relation to the modes of delivery for learning, teaching and assessment, and to make specific recommendations to the HEQC on how the concession can be replaced with a more sustainable process that enables new modalities for previously accredited programmes but also ensures that quality considerations have been accounted for. The Task Team submitted its evidence- and research-based report with recommendations to the HEQC which were deliberated on at the HEQC meetings of February and April 2023.
3. Higher education institutions have already begun planning for the 2024 academic year. The HEQC has therefore resolved to extend the concession referred to above to include the 2024 academic year subject to the following:

The Council on Higher Education is the Quality Council for Higher Education in South Africa

Members: Ms Vuyo Memani-Sedile (Chairperson), Prof Lesley Le Grange, Prof Angina Parekh, Prof Yusef Waghid, Adv. Nomazotsho Memani, Dr Nita Lawton-Misra, Prof Daniel van der Nest, Ms Koketjo Rebecca Magongoa, Dr Tholsie Naidoo, Adv. Matefo Majodina, Mr Mphedziseni Muluvhahotho, Dr Bheka Zulu, Mr Grant Son and Ms Dorina Ionescu

Ex-officio members: Mr Sagren Govender (Department of Labour), Mr Vijayen Naidoo (CEO: QCTO), Dr Marcia Socikwa (DDG: DHET), Dr Mafu Rakometsi (CEO: Umalusi), Ms Nadia Starr (CEO: SAQA), Dr Fulufhelo V. Nelwamondo (CEO: NRF); Dr M Simelane (DBE), Mr Imraan Patel (DSI) and Dr W Green (CEO: CHE)

- a) Teaching, learning and research remain responsive to the needs of students from diverse backgrounds; with due respect to the year of study and discipline-specific demands; and qualifications. There is continued alignment between programme/module purpose, learning outcomes, assessment criteria, learning materials, and pedagogical approaches. The integrity of assessment regardless of mode is assured.
 - b) There is ongoing monitoring and quality assurance of all teaching, learning and research activities.
 - c) Support and training of academics, support units, and students for the different modalities be enhanced.
 - d) Resourcing of teaching and learning strategies must be appropriate and sufficient to support effective and quality teaching and learning.
4. The HEQC has further decided that:
- a) The shift to blended and online learning will be brought under the ambit of the implementation of the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF).
 - b) A Higher Education Practice Standard (HEPS) as envisaged in the QAF for *Modes of provision, including blended and online learning*, will be developed by a Community of Practice (CoP) in the reflexive-generative methodology, as is being done for the other higher education practice areas in preparation for the implementation of the QAF. The HEPS will include, amongst other things, whether consultation with staff and students have taken place, in what form the consultation took place and how the feedback from these primary stakeholders was taken into account by the institution. The HEPS will also include aspects of the digital infrastructure of the institution, digital access and support for both staff and students, as well as the Continuous Professional Development of staff to provide quality education in the chosen modality.

- c) The approved HEPS will then be used to develop quality review instruments in the form of a manual for a themed review of *Modes of provision, including blended and online learning*, as envisaged in the QAF. The methodology to be used for a themed review will, in principle, be based on self-evaluation against the HEPS (in the form of a Self-Evaluation Report supported by a Portfolio of Evidence) as well as peer review.
- d) Institutions that wish to change the modality of all or some of their offerings from the pre-COVID accredited modality of contact or distance mode, to blended and online learning, will be required to participate in the themed review.
- e) Institutions may choose to not change the modality of their offerings from the pre-COVID accredited modality and will then have to revert to the previously accredited mode by 1 January 2025. Note the HEPS *Modes of provision, including blended and online learning* will include definitions of the range of modalities.
- f) The kinds of changes to modality may affect full changes across the board for whole institutions, changes to the modality of provision of some programmes, changes to the modality of some modules within programmes, or changes to the modality within components of modules. These types of differences and changes will be dealt with in more detail in the Higher Education Practice Standard and the Manual for the themed review.
- g) Based on the themed review and an HEQC decision, an institution will be deemed functional (against the HEPS) to offer programmes in the blended and online modality, or not. If deemed not functional by the HEQC to offer programmes in the blended and online modality, the institution will either be given time to complete an improvement plan or will have to revert to the accredited mode of delivery for its programmes.

5. In addition to the quality issues which will be addressed through the HEPS and themed review as expressed above, both public and private institutions have to consider the resource implications and the cost drivers of the various modalities of provision, especially also the costs that may need to be carried by students. Costs which will be carried by students have to form part of the consultation process with students referred to above.
6. Parallel to the processes described above, consultations will be undertaken to determine the resource implications for the public sector to enable public institutions to make an informed final decision.
7. **Institutions wishing to change the modality of their offerings from 2025 and therefore likely to participate in the themed review, are requested to indicate this to the CHE by 30 July 2023 by email to gaf@che.ac.za.** This will enable the CHE to plan the themed review.



Dr W. Green
Chief Executive Officer

Date: 20 June 2023