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Higher Education Quality Committee

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FOREWORD

It is almost four years since the Founding Document of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) was first published in January 2001. The HEQC was formally launched in May 2001. The intervening period has been witness to a large and comprehensive agenda of work undertaken in the HEQC to translate the vision, principles and goals outlined in the Founding Document into systems, strategies and activities. At the end of 2004, the HEQC is in a phase of full scale implementation of many of its key systems. A six year cycle of institutional audits has started, following the finalisation of an institutional audit framework and audit criteria. A national review of the MBA has been completed and a second review of a selection of education programmes is in the planning phase. The programme accreditation framework and criteria have been finalised and the new system will be implemented in 2005.

A range of quality promotion and capacity development projects and activities are underway, including the development of good practice guides for the improvement of teaching and learning, and the training of institutional auditors and programme evaluators. The HEQC has established co-operative relationships with a number of role-players e.g. the associations for the heads of public higher education institutions and the association of private higher education institutions, the quality assurance co-ordinators of all public and private higher education institutions, specialists interest groups like librarians and deans of students, registrars of institutions, etc.

The HEQC has entered into co-operation agreements with counterpart quality assurance agencies in other countries and also works with international organisations like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, (UNESCO), and the Association of African Universities (AAU) in order to advance the international dimension of its quality assurance objectives. The HEQC has a well established and visible profile among higher education institutions through its consultative, information briefing and training workshops and through its communications. In the preparation and development of its systems, the Founding Document has been a live demarcator of policy and practice for the HEQC.

In a context where quality assurance in many countries has grown more accountability orientated through the shift to “accreditation-like” requirements and where ‘value for money’ demands on higher education have become sharper, the HEQC has sought to straddle the ambivalent divide between accountability and development and between quality and equity. This has been done so as not to lose sight of the way in which historical legacies still shape educational provision in South Africa but also to ensure that new developments in higher education do not create new fault lines of inequality. In terms of HEQC systems, this has meant great attention to capacity development issues at the same time as the formal requirements of audit and accreditation were being put in place. It has also meant that the HEQC has sought to link its quality assurance systems to the transformation objectives which inform the restructuring of higher education as articulated in a raft of policy documents and legislation from the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) report to the National Plan for Higher Education.

At the level of vision and strategic orientation, the Founding Document remains compelling in a phase of implementation of HEQC systems of quality assurance. New developments have been taken into account in the spirit of the Founding Document's philosophy and approach. For example, the HEQC has responded to the Department of Education's decision to merge higher education institutions with a project to support merging institutions in their preparations for HEQC audit and programme accreditation requirements. Nevertheless, some challenges remain more difficult than others, and new ones have come to the fore. Effective partnerships with some professional councils and SETAs have been difficult to establish, given jurisdictional tensions over higher education programmes and qualifications, compounded by the unsettled state of play pertaining to the implementation of the NQF. The possibility of multiple quality assurance demands on higher education institutions accompanied by spiralling costs and evaluation overload has not been satisfactorily addressed and is an issue that awaits systemic resolution. As we go deeper into the implementation of national policy for higher education, a more nuanced understanding of the complexities of the tasks and the demands on institutional leadership and staff has informed the way in which the HEQC has sought to discharge its statutory responsibilities.

The HEQC continues to seek a balance between the statutory requirements of quality assurance, the transformation requirements of social development in South Africa and the safeguarding of the integrity of the academic enterprise. In the face of existing and new challenges the values, approaches and directions signalled in the Founding Document remain as a principled as well as a pragmatic foundation for guiding and sustaining the work of the HEQC in the next phase of its operations.

Dr Mala Singh
Executive Director
HEQC

December 2004

ABBREVIATIONS AND ACRONYMS

CHE	Council on Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HET	Higher Education and Training
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SERTEC	Certification Council for Technikon Education
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority

FOUNDING DOCUMENT

INTRODUCTION

The institutionalization of quality assurance is firmly on the agenda of higher education in a number of developed and developing countries around the world. The demand for greater accountability and efficiency in respect of public financing, trends towards mass participation in the face of shrinking resources, and greater stakeholder scrutiny of education and training processes and outcomes have led to the increasing implementation of formal quality assurance arrangements within higher education institutions and systems. A quality assurance system is intended to ensure that higher education and training programmes at under-graduate and postgraduate levels are relevant and responsive to the needs of learners, employers and other stakeholders within the context of the social, intellectual and economic requirements of societal development.

The new regulatory framework governing South African education and training makes the quality of provision central to the achievement of the goals of the National Qualifications Framework. A number of legislative instruments, for example, the SAQA Act, the Skills Development Act and the Higher Education Act highlight the role of quality assurance in delivering key national objectives of equity and development. Within the context of higher education, the construction of a national quality assurance system is a critical component of the restructuring of higher education which is currently underway. The quality assurance system is intended to support the achievement of the purposes and goals for higher education identified in the Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education. Quality is identified as one of the principles that should guide the transformation of higher education, together with equity and redress, democratisation, development, effectiveness and efficiency, academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability. Given the history of discriminatory exclusion in this country, it is important to ensure that the quality assurance system enhances access not simply to higher education but to high standards of provision and their concomitant intellectual and economic benefits. A new quality assurance system for higher education will have to take into account the following issues of context:

- The imminent reconfiguration of higher education in terms of size and shape which is likely to require more explicit mission specification and its effective delivery within the context of national needs. This, in turn, will require the development of a more evenly capacitated and resourced higher education system to provide high quality education and training within a range of diverse institutional missions.
- An uneven quality assurance landscape with a range of unintegrated initiatives at national, institutional and regional levels.
- The challenges for public and private higher education in responding to the requirements of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).
- The increased demands on higher education to deliver knowledge resources and services as well as high level skills and competencies for social and economic development.

- The required role of higher education in facilitating social justice through enhanced participation opportunities in higher education for formerly disadvantaged constituencies.
- The development of a higher education system whose objectives are delivered by public and private providers in a context of competition and collaboration.
- The growing role of technology in teaching and learning, the expansion of higher education opportunities through distance and open learning, and increasing arrangements for workplace learning at higher education levels.
- The rapid internationalization of higher education and the increasing mobility of graduates and professionals across national boundaries.

Many of the above issues will require coordinated policy, planning and resourcing decisions and actions by a range of role-players in order to enable a new national quality assurance dispensation to succeed in its objectives. This is particularly true of macro level issues requiring resolution, for example, the successful reconfiguration of the higher education system and the development of a redress and equity plan to address poor and uneven capacity in higher education provision. The promotion and enhancement of quality in higher education provision will require both breadth of vision and strategic focus in order to facilitate the achievement of diverse social purposes ascribed to higher education in the current South African context.

1. POLICY AND LEGISLATIVE BASIS FOR THE HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE

1.1 *Report of the National Commission on Higher Education, A Framework for Transformation, 1996.*

The focus on quality and the role of quality assurance in a transformed higher education system is flagged prominently in the recommendations of the National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE). The NCHE made it clear that a “comprehensive, development-oriented quality assurance system is central to the creation of a single coordinated higher education system”. The Commission went on to argue that quality assurance mechanisms are “essential to tackle differences in quality across institutional programmes”. It also saw quality assurance as “an important element of the new form of governance proposed for higher education” as well as “one of the ways of drawing private higher education into the new system”.

1.2 *Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education, 1997.*

Following on the NCHE report, the White Paper also identified quality as a critical principle for the restructuring of higher education. The White Paper states the following: “The pursuit of the principle of quality means maintaining and applying academic and educational standards, both in the sense of specific expectations and requirements that

should be complied with, and in the sense of ideals of excellence that should be aimed at. These expectations and ideals may differ from context to context, partly depending on the specific purposes pursued. Applying the principle of quality entails evaluating services and products against a set standard, with a view to improvement, renewal or progress.” (Government Gazette, No 18207).

The White Paper further proposes the following:

- “2.69 The primary responsibility for quality assurance rests with higher education institutions. However, there is an important role for an umbrella national authority responsible for quality promotion and assurance throughout the system.
- 2.70 Accordingly, the Higher Education Act will provide for the co-ordination of quality assurance in higher education through a HEQC which will be established as a permanent committee of the CHE. The establishment of the HEQC, its registration with SAQA and its modus operandi will be determined by the CHE within the framework and procedural guidelines developed by SAQA.
- 2.71 The functions of the HEQC will include programme accreditation, institutional auditing and quality promotion. It should operate within an agreed framework underpinned by:
- the formulation of criteria and procedures in consultation with higher education institutions
 - a formative notion of quality assurance, focused on improvement and development rather than punitive sanction
 - a mix of institutional self-evaluation and external independent assessment.”

1.3 Higher Education Act, 1997

Following on the recommendations of the White Paper on higher education, the Higher Education Act of 1997 makes provision for the Council on Higher Education (CHE) to establish a permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), with the mandate to:

- (a) promote quality assurance in higher education
- (b) audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions
- (c) accredit programmes of higher education

The Higher Education Act stipulates that the CHE and HEQC must comply with the policies and criteria formulated by SAQA (in terms of Act No 58 of 1995). It also provides for the delegation of any quality promotion and quality assurance functions by the HEQC to other appropriate bodies, with the concurrence of the CHE.

1.4 SAQA Act, 1995

The HEQC is required to operate within the requirements of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) in its mandate of facilitating the development of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF). The objectives of the NQF are to “

- (a) create an integrated national framework for learning achievements;
- (b) facilitate access to, and mobility and progression within education, training and career paths;
- (c) enhance the quality of education and training;
- (d) accelerate the redress of past unfair discrimination in education, training and employment opportunities; and thereby
- (e) contribute to the full personal development of each learner and the social and economic development of the nation at large.”

The functions of SAQA are to

- “ (a) (i) oversee the development of the National Qualifications Framework; and
(ii) formulate and publish policies and criteria for – the registration of bodies responsible for establishing education and training standards or qualifications; and the accreditation of bodies responsible for monitoring and auditing achievements in terms of such standards or qualifications;
- (b) oversee the implementation of the National Qualifications Framework, including
(i) the registration or accreditation of bodies referred to in paragraph (a) and the assignment of functions to them;
(ii) the registration of national standards and qualifications;
(iii) steps to ensure compliance with provisions for accreditation; and
(iv) steps to ensure that standards and registered qualifications are internationally comparable.”

1.5 SAQA Regulations, 1998 (Government Gazette, No 19231)

Section 14 of the SAQA Act makes provision for regulations governing the accreditation of Education and Training Quality Assurance bodies (ETQAs). ETQAs are a part of the NQF quality management system. In seeking accreditation from SAQA to be an ETQA in the Higher Education Training (HET) band, the CHE will have to meet the criteria and guidelines laid down by SAQA. In the regulations, the functions of the ETQA are to

- “ (a) accredit constituent providers for specific standards or qualifications registered on the National Qualifications Framework;
- (a) promote quality amongst constituent providers;
 - (b) monitor provision by constituent providers;

- (c) evaluate assessment and facilitation of moderation amongst constituent providers;
- (d) register constituent assessors for specified registered standards or qualifications in terms of the criteria established for this purpose;
- (e) take responsibility for the certification of constituent learners;
- (f) co-operate with the relevant body or bodies appointed to moderate across Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies including but not limited to, moderating the quality assurance on specific standards or qualifications for which one or more Education and Training Quality Assurance Bodies are accredited;
- (g) recommend new standards or qualifications to National Standards Bodies for consideration, or modifications to existing standards or qualifications to National Standards Bodies for consideration;
- (h) maintain a data-base acceptable to the Authority;
- (i) submit reports to the Authority in accordance with the requirements of the Authority; and
- (j) perform such other functions as may from time-to-time be assigned to it by the Authority”.

The addendum to the Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs states the following.

“..... it is appropriate for the CHE, through the HEQC, as the ETQA of primary focus for higher education i.e. universities, technikons, colleges and private higher education institutions, in terms of the ETQA regulations, to perform the co-ordinating function to enable the establishment of the required partnerships with other ETQAs working in the band. The CHE then will:

- Facilitate a common interpretation of quality assurance policy for the HET band by ETQAs operating in the band;
- Co-ordinate the establishment of a common set of ground rules for the practice of quality assurance including the inter-relationship between quality assurance promotion, institutional audits and programme assessment;
- Provide a platform together with SAQA for regular discussion on quality assurance policy and implementation issues by ETQAs in the HET band;
- Co-ordinate and facilitate discussions to enable the required agreements between ETQAs to be established;
- Set up in consultation with the other relevant ETQAs, co-ordinated timeframes for quality assurance visits to providers and facilitate other administrative quality assurance measures common to all ETQAs.”

2. VISION AND MISSION

The HEQC is committed to a quality driven higher education system that contributes to socio-economic development, social justice and innovative scholarship in South Africa. To achieve this end, the HEQC will support the development, maintenance and enhancement of the quality of public and private higher education provision in order to enable a range of stakeholders to benefit from effective higher education and training. The central objective of the HEQC is to ensure that providers effectively and efficiently deliver education, training, research and community service which are of high quality and which produce socially useful and enriching knowledge as well as a relevant range of graduate skills and competencies necessary for social and economic progress. The policies and programmes of the HEQC will be guided by the above commitments and objectives.

3. PRINCIPLES AND VALUES

- 3.1 The quality assurance system of the HEQC will seek to advance the related purposes and goals of the White Paper on higher education.
- 3.2 The quality assurance system of the HEQC will contribute to the role of higher education in the building of the National Qualifications Framework.
- 3.3 The HEQC will link the achievement of quality to equity and the fostering of innovation and diversity in higher education in order to ensure that quality requirements do not constrain higher participation rates or inhibit creativity and variety in higher education provision. The pursuit of excellence in relation to specified mandate and mission is assumed to be an imperative for all provision.
- 3.4 The HEQC will uphold the accountability requirements of higher education provision within the context of a strong developmental and formative approach to quality assurance. However, the HEQC will, where necessary, expose and act against persistent and unchanging poor quality provision.
- 3.5 The HEQC is committed to independence, objectivity, fairness and consistency in all its quality assurance activities. In the interest of transparency, appropriate audit and evaluation information will be available in the public domain, subject to the agreement of the HEQC.
- 3.6 The HEQC will work in a consultative and cooperative mode with partners and stakeholders in the attempt to develop a principled consensual or negotiated approach to quality and quality development.
- 3.7 The HEQC will strive to complement and enhance the internal quality development initiatives of providers in order to encourage and support their search for continuous performance achievement.
- 3.8 The HEQC will seek to facilitate the delivery of high quality education and training in relation to the relevant values and objectives of policy frameworks like the White Paper on Transforming Public Service Delivery.

4. MANDATE

In accordance with the Higher Education Act, 1997, and the ETQA responsibilities of the CHE, the HEQC will

- 4.1 Promote quality among constituent providers in higher education in order to facilitate the development of quality awareness and quality responsiveness in public and private provision
- 4.2 Audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions
- 4.3 Accredite providers of higher education to offer programmes leading to particular NQF-registered qualifications by certifying that they have the systems, processes and capacity to do so. In relevant cases, this will be done cooperatively with professional councils and SETAs.
- 4.4 Co-ordinate and facilitate quality assurance activities in higher education within a partnership model with other ETQAs

The above functions will be conducted within the framework and requirements of SAQA's Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs. The primary responsibility of the Council on Higher Education as an ETQA will be to ensure that the quality of the provision of qualifications in higher education is maintained and enhanced through evaluating and monitoring the capacity of higher education providers to deliver those qualifications effectively and efficiently. This will include:

- Evaluating the assessment and moderation arrangements of providers.
- Registering assessors for specified standards and qualifications in accordance with criteria which will be developed in consultation with providers and other stakeholders.
- Evaluating the responsiveness, relevance and coherence of provider qualifications in relation to their specified institutional mandates and missions.

5. GOALS

5.1 A more coordinated and diversified public higher education system is under construction in South Africa. The requirement to demonstrate the quality of provision measured against institutional mandate and mission will be common to all higher education institutions.

The HEQC will put in place a framework to support quality provision across a differentiated higher education landscape in order to ensure that mission specification is accompanied by quality improvements in the whole system. The framework will include a developmental approach to the quality requirements of mission achievement where appropriate and affordable.

5.2 A comprehensive accountability framework for quality assurance is also under construction in the country. This requires concurrent responsiveness by higher education institutions to the quality demands of SAQA and its structures, professional councils, Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs) and the HEQC. Meeting the quality demands of these bodies should not be confusing and unnecessarily burdensome for providers, especially in a context where quality systems are in the process of formation and numerous other restructuring demands are being made on providers and educators.

The HEQC will seek to develop a sensible accountability regime for providers through partnerships with other quality assurance bodies and the coordination of the quality assurance activities of multiple agencies in higher education. The active promotion of quality in the early stages of the HEQC's work will form the basis for developing the appropriate benchmarks for accountability.

5.3 South African higher education manifests a legacy of uneven quality in a sector divided along the lines of historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions, universities, technikons and colleges, contact and distance education institutions, public and private providers, etc. The entry into the higher education environment of private providers, both local and foreign, has opened up many new opportunities for learners but also raised concerns about the quality levels of private provision. The delivery of education through new technologies is also challenging traditional forms of quality assurance.

Within the context of the criteria and guidelines of standard setting bodies in higher education, the HEQC will focus on and ensure threshold levels of quality for public and private higher education within a common national framework. The intention is to instill public confidence in the quality of higher education provision, facilitate articulation between higher education institutions and programmes, and provide the foundations for the development and support of excellence at all levels of higher education and training. The identification of threshold levels of quality and their appropriate exit level outcomes will take into account level descriptors which have been established for higher education. Established threshold levels will be reviewed periodically in response to changing notions and expectations of quality.

5.4 The effective functioning of a National Qualifications Framework to enable articulation and progression between the further and higher education bands and within the higher education band requires clear quality specifications for the different levels of qualifications.

The HEQC will seek to ensure that the quality, integrity and appropriateness of qualifications are maintained at all levels of the NQF relevant to higher education in order to guarantee the national and international credibility of South African qualifications. This task will include the evaluation of qualifications and making appropriate recommendations to the National Standards Bodies concerning modifications to existing qualifications as well as the development of new qualifications.

5.5 Debates and initiatives around the transformation of higher education have largely focused on issues of governance, financing, access, etc., and not sufficiently on crucial issues of teaching and learning, research, and knowledge based community service.

The HEQC will develop a quality assurance framework that includes an explicit focus on the quality of teaching and learning activities, research and community service in order to deepen and extend the process of higher education transformation.

6. APPROACH TO QUALITY

In the face of differing conceptualisations and expectations of quality among different stakeholders in higher education, the HEQC's understanding of quality must be clear enough to:

- Allow providers to engage with and operationalise such understandings within their own institutional contexts and missions.
- Provide stakeholders with a framework within which to make judgements about the quality of higher education and training.
- Enable the HEQC itself to develop the appropriate policy and procedures for the ETQA responsibilities of the CHE.

The HEQC will develop a quality assurance framework and criteria based on:

- 6.1 Fitness for purpose in relation to specified mission within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity.
- 6.2 Value for money judged in relation to the full range of higher education purposes set out in the White Paper. Judgements about the effectiveness and efficiency of provision will include but not be confined to labour market responsiveness and cost recovery.
- 6.3 Transformation in the sense of developing the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth.

Given the complex and socially embedded nature of quality claims, external judgements about the achievement of quality in respect of the above will be based on a rigorous but non-reductive approach which takes into account different degrees of emphasis on the above elements as well as different approaches to their achievement. In relation to teaching, learning, research and community service, quality will be determined on the basis of the ability of the provider to offer qualifications, programmes and learning experiences which are responsive to the broad development needs of learners, thereby also addressing the knowledge, skills and service needs of the country at large. The criteria indicated above will be located within a fitness of purpose framework based on national goals, priorities and targets.

7. APPROACH TO QUALITY ASSURANCE

In the context of a complex regulatory environment in the country as well as vastly uneven levels of experience of and capacity for quality assurance in the current system, the successful introduction of a new national quality assurance dispensation in higher education requires the HEQC to phase in its work over a period of time. The first phase will include quality promotion, the development and pilot testing of quality assurance instruments and criteria, the development of quality relevant capacity, the incorporation of existing quality assurance arrangements where appropriate, and the forging of partnership arrangements with other role-players (including HEQC participation in evaluation activities arranged by professional councils and SETAs). The second stage, based on the preparatory activities of the first, will be a full operational phase where the HEQC will validate the quality offerings of providers, using rigorous accountability criteria and invoking sanctions where required. The second phase is likely to be further differentiated between an initial focus on auditing the quality assurance systems of providers followed by more substantive programme evaluations.

The HEQC supports the view that the primary responsibility for the quality of provision and appropriate mechanisms to assure that quality rests with higher education providers. The role of the HEQC will be to provide external validation of the judgements of providers about their quality levels, based primarily on self-evaluation reports. It will also provide a comparative framework for quality judgements across the system.

In its full operational phase, the HEQC will engage in rigorous external validation through site visits and the judicious use of peer review and qualitative and quantitative performance indicators. Once the HEQC is satisfied that demonstrable quality assurance capacity has been established across a spectrum of higher education providers, it will use a 'light touch' approach to quality assurance, based on an increasing measure of reliance on the self evaluation reports of providers.

During the developmental phase, the HEQC will provide support and guidance to strengthen the quality assurance capacity of providers, enhance their ability to engage in rigorous self evaluation and establish and monitor baseline information on the quality assurance systems, targets and achievements of providers. This support is intended to prepare providers to respond to rigorous accountability requirements at the end of the development phase.

Both public and private providers are subject to the quality assurance requirements of the HEQC and similar arrangements for external validation and self-evaluation will apply. Discussions with relevant stakeholders on the capacity development needs and responsibilities of public and private providers will be initiated in the first phase of the HEQC's work.

8. SCOPE OF WORK

8.1 The needs and interests of a number of stakeholders are served by quality assurance in higher education – learners, educators and researchers, parents, employers, the government and other funders, society at large. Learners want opportunities for personal development as well as certification from high quality providers to enhance education and training progression as well as employment possibilities.

Higher education providers want an enabling regulatory environment and sensible accountability costs to be able to deliver high quality education and training.

Educators and researchers want an enabling work dispensation which allows them to focus on the core activities of teaching, research and community service and which also allows for their own professional development.

Employers want flexibly skilled graduates who do not need a long settling in period before they contribute to productivity and competitiveness.

Government and society in general want value for money in the production of an increasingly high skilled work force necessary for economic competitiveness and social development.

The HEQC will have to ensure that the assurance and information needs of these different stakeholders are addressed through the scope and focus of its work. Because of the responsibility to accredit providers through the ETQA role of the CHE, the HEQC will focus on providers and their ability to develop and enhance quality in their under-graduate and post-graduate learning programmes leading to NQF-registered qualifications. It is the intention of the HEQC to conduct its work in a way that will serve the quality assurance interests of all major stakeholders. The inclusion of a range of relevant stakeholders on audit and evaluation panels will ensure that providers are addressing the quality assurance interests of different constituencies.

8.2 The quality of research is assumed to be an integral part of the CHE and HEQC's overall responsibility for quality assurance in higher education. However, the development of an assessment framework for research as well as the actual assessment of research where relevant will be conducted cooperatively with other organizations, such as the National Research Foundation, within the context of a policy framework that is acceptable to the CHE.

8.3 The quality of knowledge-based community service programmes is assumed to be an integral part of the CHE and HEQC's overall responsibility for quality assurance in higher education. Many countries have seen an increase in the inclusion of community service programmes in higher education curricula and in their assessment and certification as part of formal learning processes. The co-operative education model in the technikon sector is one such example. The quality assurance of community service programmes will be conducted cooperatively with other bodies, such as SETAs, within the context of a policy framework that is acceptable to the CHE.

8.4 The NQF is premised on the achievement of a range of competencies as the outcomes of education and training systems. This will require the HEQC to develop appropriate quality assurance measures to validate specified outcomes in relation

to the different purposes of higher education. However, within the context of a developmental approach to quality outcomes in the first phase of its work, the HEQC will also address the systems and processes of quality assurance of providers with a view to providing formative support for the successful delivery of outcomes.

9. AREAS OF RESPONSIBILITY

The HEQC will engage in and take responsibility for the following areas of activity, many of them in partnership with institutional and system level role players. The list which follows constitutes a comprehensive and ambitious agenda of work for the HEQC. Priorities and areas of focus among and within them will be established in the business plan and in the operational programme, depending on available financing and human resource support. Some programmes in these areas of work will be introduced in a phased and incremental way. Certain areas of work may also be delegated or outsourced to other organizations or agencies, within the context of a policy framework that is acceptable to the CHE and with appropriate monitoring arrangements in place.

9.1 Accreditation and evaluation

- (a) The accreditation of public providers to offer stipulated learning programmes leading to NQF-registered qualifications.
- (b) The accreditation of private providers to offer stipulated learning programmes leading to NQF-registered qualifications.
- (c) Collaboration with professional councils and SETAs on the accreditation and evaluation of professional and workbased programmes leading to NQF-registered qualifications.
- (d) The development and implementation of an evaluation framework for learning programmes leading to NQF-registered qualifications which are not covered by professional councils and SETAs.

9.2 Certification

Under current legislation, the Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC) is responsible for the certification of technikon qualifications. The private acts of universities allow them to certify their own qualifications. SAQA regulations assign responsibility for certification to the relevant ETQA with the possibility of delegation. The CHE may delegate certification responsibility to providers where necessary, with the appropriate monitoring arrangements in place.

9.3 Auditing and institutional review

The review of the effectiveness of quality assurance policies and systems of all public and private providers of higher education, with particular emphasis on teaching and learning, research and knowledge-based community service arrangements.

9.4 Capacity development

The development and implementation of initiatives to build and strengthen the capacity for high quality provision at institutional, learning programme and individual levels. Capacity development will be undertaken where appropriate in partnership with relevant national and regional agencies and organizations.

9.5 Quality promotion

The development of a programme of activities to institutionalise a quality culture in higher education and the commitment to continuous quality improvement.

9.6 Quality assurance coordination

The establishment of a forum for discussion, exchange of information and joint initiatives among relevant ETQAs and other national and regional agencies concerned with higher education.

9.7 Quality assurance research

The development of a research programme to stimulate and support quality development in higher education provision. This will include good practice and benchmarking information. Analyses of HEQC databases and other information sources will form part of the research programme.

9.8 International liaison

Membership of and the development of linkages with international quality assurance organisations and networks in order to share information as well as participate effectively in international debates and initiatives on quality provision and articulation in higher education across national boundaries. Where appropriate, the HEQC will also facilitate international accreditation of South African providers for specified programmes and qualifications.

9.9 Information

The development of a database containing information on higher education providers and the programmes for which they have been accredited. The database will be accessible for public use and will be co-ordinated with the SAQA and DoE databases in order to minimize duplication.

10. STRATEGIES

The HEQC will seek to support and strengthen the quality of higher education provision through

- 10.1 Forming appropriate relationships with higher education institutions as well as partnerships with national and regional higher education organisations, professional councils, SETAs, and other relevant stakeholders with quality assurance interests. This will also include liaison with quality assurance structures in the Further Education and Training band.
- 10.2 Coordinating the quality assurance activities of a range of ETQAs in higher education through bilateral and multilateral contractual agreements, exchange of information and setting up a forum for dialogue.
- 10.3 Facilitating and/or implementing quality relevant capacity development programmes at institutional and individual levels.
- 10.4 Facilitating the sharing of good and innovative practice in higher education provision from local and international experience in order to foster the achievement of national and international benchmarks.
- 10.5 Facilitating the development of a system of regular learner satisfaction surveys and surveys of other higher education stakeholders and users. Such surveys could help identify quality related concerns which could be taken up by the HEQC.

11. QUALITY ASSURANCE, FUNDING AND ACCREDITATION

- 11.1 Decisions on funding for providers of programmes leading to NQF-registered qualifications is a Department of Education (DoE) responsibility. Reports of the HEQC will be available to the CHE and the higher education branch of the Department of Education for appropriate advice or action with regard to quality related funding decisions.
- 11.2 When the HEQC begins programme evaluations (either jointly with professional councils and SETAs or on its own), learning programmes with quality problems will be referred to their providers for quality improvement within a stipulated timeframe. In the face of persistent and unaddressed quality problems, such providers could lose their accreditation to offer learning programmes leading to the NQF-registered qualifications concerned.

- 11.3 All programmes leading to NQF-registered qualifications of public providers, irrespective of whether or not they receive DoE funding, will be subject to the quality assurance requirements of the HEQC. All private providers will require accreditation by the HEQC and registration by the DoE in order to offer education and training programmes.
- 11.4 The HEQC supports the principle of competitively based incentive funding for quality development, for innovations in quality assurance and for the sustaining of good practices in teaching and learning, research and community service.

12. GOVERNANCE

- 12.1 The HEQC will be responsible to the CHE in all policy and operational matters and report annually to the CHE about its work.
- 12.2 The HEQC will operate within the framework of the SAQA Act and regulations, and in accordance with the Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs. This makes provision for the monitoring of the work of the ETQA by SAQA. The HEQC will also work closely with the DoE, especially in relation to issues concerning the registration of private providers and regulations governing their operation.
- 12.3 The HEQC will consist of thirteen members who will encompass a broad spectrum of expertise, knowledge and competence and who will be appointed by the CHE following an open call for nominations. Co-option of additional members will be possible, if necessary. Members will serve on the HEQC in their own individual capacities. Members will be appointed for a three year term with the possibility of serving one additional three year period. In the first phase, one third of the members will be appointed for a four year term to ensure continuity of membership.
- 12.4 Approximately half of the members will come from the higher education sector.
- 12.5 The chairperson and one other member of the HEQC will be members of the CHE.
- 12.6 The Executive Director of the HEQC, the Executive Officer of the CHE and an official from the higher education branch of the DoE will be ex-officio members of the HEQC.

13. FINANCING

- 13.1 All core set up and operational costs will come from the CHE budget since the development of a national quality assurance system for higher education is part of the responsibility of government. Appropriate resourcing is critical to the achievement of the goals and objectives of the HEQC, especially if the ideals of equity and excellence are to have substance.
- 13.2 Fees will be levied for accreditation and for institutional and programme reviews, taking into account the fee structures of other agencies.
- 13.3 To supplement public funds, donor funding will be sought, especially for capacity development and research projects.

14. CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

The HEQC's ability to contribute to the development of an effective differentiated higher education system will depend on:

- 14.1 Strategic partnerships with key role players at national, sectoral, regional and institutional levels.
- 14.2 Identification of priorities and programmatic objectives within stipulated timeframes and in accordance with resourcing capacity.
- 14.3 The development of clear and user friendly policies, procedures and requirements of the HEQC's quality assurance system.
- 14.4 An effective communications strategy around the above.
- 14.5 An appropriate number of competent professional and administrative staff to carry out a diverse range of activities and responsibilities.
- 14.6 Financial resources adequate to the quality promotion, evaluation and development needs of the higher education system, especially within the context of a formative agenda of work.
- 14.7 An innovative multi-pronged capacity development programme which takes account of the differentiated nature of the higher education system.
- 14.8 The development of an analytical and self-reflective approach to quality assurance premised on continuous self-assessment, both within the HEQC and the providers which it accredits. An external evaluation of the HEQC's policies, programmes, and implementation strategies will be conducted in every 5th year of its work.