



***HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE***

**REPORT ON THE  
HEQC CONSULTATIVE  
MEETING ON MOUS**

**12 FEBRUARY 2004**

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The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) recently held a consultative meeting with Deputy Vice-Chancellors, Registrars and Quality Assurance Managers. The main purpose of the meeting was to present the HEQC's proposed MoU strategy, and to consult public Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) on the implications of the strategy for institutional preparations for external quality assurance. This opportunity was also used to brief higher education institutions on key plans and schedules of the HEQC regarding the new audit and accreditation systems, which are due to be implemented in 2004, and other issues related to quality assurance (QA) in higher education (HE).

**Executive Director's briefing:**

In her update on the HEQC's key plans for the year, the HEQC Executive Director, Dr Mala Singh outlined the activities of the three directorates: Accreditation and Coordination, Audit, and Quality Promotion and Capacity Development (QPCD). She mentioned that for the Accreditation and Audit directorates, 2004 is a key year, as it will usher in the implementation of the new audit and accreditation systems. The Audit directorate will conduct official audits in the last quarter of 2004 to mark the start of the 1<sup>st</sup> audit cycle (2004-2009). One public provider (Free State Technikon) and five private providers will be audited in 2004. The Accreditation and Coordination directorate will launch the new system with a focus on accreditation of new programmes from all private and public providers. Merging institutions will be given a "three year settling down period" before full audit and accreditation activities begin in these institutions, even though one-day visits after the first year of the merger will be carried out to ascertain institutional preparations for institutional and programme quality management. The HEQC is in the process of finalizing its policy framework for Quality Promotion. The QPCD directorate plans to carry out the following activities in 2004: Quality Assurance Managers' forum, Auditor Preparation workshops, Evaluator Preparation Pilot training, the Vocational Higher Education Project, and the finalization of Good Practice Guides for Teaching and Learning.

Dr Singh also briefed the meeting on other issues related to QA such as progress and next steps in the MBA review, the next national review, which will focus on Teacher Education, the HEQC's partnerships with other QA agencies, such as the Australian Universities Quality Agency and the Indian National Quality Assurance Agency, and the securing of funding from the Finnish government by the HEQC to assist merging institutions and Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDIs) with QA planning and implementation, and also to provide some incentive funds to (Historically Advantaged Institutions (HAIs) for the development and/or improvement of specified QA areas.

She informed the meeting that all these plans, schedules and information will be sent out to all higher education institutions in greater detail in the form of a communiqué.

Key issues which were raised in response to Dr Singh's briefing included:

- The need for a stricter definition of satellite campus
- The need to know in advance which programme areas are next in line for national reviews.

- A comment was made about the multiple benefits of the MBA review.
- It was suggested that it was necessary to include all QA managers in the auditor training workshops.

### **Presentation and consultation on the HEQC's MoU Strategy**

The Director: Accreditation and Coordination, Dr Prem Naidoo provided background information on issues that necessitated the development of a MoU strategy. He outlined the different pieces of legislation that have led to the establishment of many Education and Training Quality Assurors (ETQAs) in Higher Education. He explained that the HEQC, as the ETQA for the higher education band, is legally mandated to coordinate QA in higher education. In order to carry out this function effectively, the HEQC first undertook a study to determine the number, nature, systems and criteria of other ETQAs for QA in higher education.

He reported that the study identified 74 bodies that would have an interest in QA in HE, and also highlighted some areas of concern from this study. These included: proliferation of ETQAs in higher education, which could easily lead to duplication of functions and subjecting HEIs to different and conflicting QA demands, legislative tensions in implementing QA functions by each body, lack of uniformity in use of QA terminology and accreditation criteria, lack of uniformity in the type of evaluators used, e.g. assessors versus peer evaluators, lack of uniformity in accreditation fees, increase in the scope of ETQAs that is similar to HEQC's scope, professional councils' increased involvement in accreditation rather than registration of professionals, etc. Dr Naidoo emphasized that in the light of these differences, and in the interest of creating a single, coherent and coordinated HE system as spelled out in the Higher Education Act, there was a need for coordinating QA in higher education and aligning different organisational interests. He then presented the HEQC's overall plans and activities for expediting the MoU process and bringing it to the signing stage.

Mrs Mary Mwaka, Manager: Coordination at the HEQC then presented the MoU models, the criteria to choose any model and the procedures and processes to operationalizing the MoUs. The MoU models included: the Delegation model, the Partial Delegation model, the Partnership model and the Association model. Dr. Naidoo completed the presentation by highlighting the implications for institutions of signing the MoUs, particularly the delegation model. These included:

- Cost implications – Dr Naidoo illustrated the cost implications by using a case study of DIT where all the programmes that need to be accredited either through SETAs or professional councils were identified and costed, at R 30,000 per programme (the cost of a site visit). This example indicated that it would cost DIT over 2.5 million rands over a 4 year period to be accredited by other ETQAs (however, this calculation is work in progress, and is used only as an example).
- Multiple visits - if the institutions are happy with the delegation model – they should expect multiple visits from different ETQAs and professional councils throughout the year.
- Coordination – adequate and efficient coordination would be required both from the HEQC's side, and the institution's side.

- **Gazetting** – the Higher Education Act states that any QA functions delegated by the HEQC must be approved by the CHE and gazetted. This means that each delegation will have to be written separately for each ETQA, approved by the HEQC Board, the CHE Board, and then gazetted. This will be a tedious, laborious, complex and expensive process, particularly for the HEQC.

### **Discussion and comments:**

- *MoU Models:* There was a general consensus on adopting the MoU delegation model. However, some operational issues were raised and some suggestions proposed. These included:
  - Rationalization of the accreditation process by professional councils, for example, carrying out evaluations at the same time, rather than each going separately
  - Rationalization and alignment of criteria by other ETQAs to be in line with HEQC's accreditation criteria
  - Rationalization of accreditation cycles to be in line with HEQC's cycles.
  - Amendment of certain sections of the Higher Education Act, for example, section 7(3), stipulating that the HEQC must gazette delegated functions, and the section stipulating that the Higher Education Act supersedes any other legislation in terms of QA in higher education – in order to allow statutory professional councils and other ETQAs to operate autonomously.
  - A moratorium should be placed on accreditation of ETQAs
  - Concern was raised about the ability of institutions to deal with many SETAs that approach HEIs, particularly in the area of short course provision.
- *Evaluators:* The issue of the HEQC's decision to have a diverse group of evaluators who are representative of the demographic profile of the country was discussed at great length. Some participants felt that this should not be a requirement for the choice of a delegation model, as it would be difficult to satisfy this requirement. Dr. Naidoo explained that the HEQC has a broad transformation agenda, which permeates all its policies and is committed to highlighting the issue of equity and redress at every level of its operations. Other participants were irritated by the constant discussion of this topic, which has been raised at many meetings. They felt that this is an issue that is non-negotiable and should not even be brought up as an issue any more, at any future meetings.

### **The Way Forward:**

- *Wider legislative and systemic issues:* A formal report will be written and presented to DoE and SAQA (legislative changes to the Higher Education Act, and accreditation of ETQAs), while another report on SETA recognition of

programmes already accredited by the HEQC will also be written and submitted to DoE and DoL.

- *Interim:* In the interim, institutions were requested to submit their comments and suggestions on the models and their implementation and implications to the HEQC by the 12th of March 2004.
  
- *Interim arrangements for evaluation of professional and SETA based qualifications*
  - *Professional councils:* In 2002, professional councils were requested to be submitting their yearly schedule of visits to institutions to the HEQC, and also write a letter to the Vice- Chancellors and Deputy Vice-chancellors informing them about the intended visit. From time to time, the HEQC also sends a representative to accompany the professional councils to such visits.
  - *SETAs:* The HEQC, in conjunction with some SETAs, has developed an interim-processing framework for SETA based qualifications.