



Higher Education Quality Committee

***A FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING
TEACHING & LEARNING PROJECT***

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A Framework for the HEQC's Improving Teaching & Learning Project

1. Towards a Political-Philosophical Framework

In his book, 'Between Facts and Norms: Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy' (1996), Habermas provides a political-philosophical framework for the problem of law-making and law enforcement in modern democracies. I suggest that some of his ideas and arguments are pertinent to the establishment and implementation of a national quality assurance system for higher education; and in particular to the perceived tension in the HE quality discourse between improvement and accountability.

Before discussing Habermas' discourse theory of law and democracy and its application to QA, we need to briefly re-cap on his earlier work and in particular on his 'Theory of Communicative Action', on which this later work builds.

This theory suggests that social coordination is effected through language (i.e. discourse). It asserts that any competent speaker should, under suitable conditions, be able to make truth claims and moral claims (validity claims) that hearers can accept, solely on the basis of good reasons (rational argument). This 'ideal speech' situation is based on three assumptions:

That members of a discourse community share a common understanding of the meaning of words, phrases, etc.,

- That they consider themselves rationally accountable,
- That they assume that when they reach a mutually agreed resolution, that this is based on defensible arguments that will not subsequently be proven to be false or mistaken,
- That if any of these conditions are shown not to have been met, this is sufficient grounds for re-opening the discussion.

Habermas makes a distinction between 'communicative action', where social coordination and agreements are reached 'communicatively' by meeting the conditions spelt out above, and 'strategic action'. The latter occurs when one party tries to force its will on another through bargaining, threats or promises ¹. However, he points out that reaching agreements communicatively (as opposed to strategic bargaining or coercive enforcement), normally requires background consensus on a large number of matters that are unproblematic for members of both parties, in other words, 'lifeworld' background which is built on shared identities, cultural and intellectual resources, etc. is a significant factor in enabling communicative action. But, in modern societies, 'pluralisation and disenchantment' mean that the conditions for reaching such consensus are diminishing. This has led to a process of 'societal rationalisation' in which there is a need to reach explicit agreements on issues (such as the quality of educational provision), whereas in the past, the more homogeneous nature of societies allowed these to remain implicit.

I suggest that the applicability of Habermas' theory of communicative action to the conceptualisation of a system of quality assurance lies in understanding that if those designing and implementing the system wish it to lead to genuinely improved practice, as opposed to compliance and 'playing the system', then they need to ensure that as far as possible, the system operates in the academic community via communicative action, both for internal and external QA practices. For example, the interactions between the members of an audit panel and those they engage with in an institution should aim to meet all of Habermas' conditions for ideal speech (above). The shift to strategic action by the HEQC or by institutional managers should be used only as a last resort, when communicative action breaks down and when it is clearly in the interest of students in the system to do so.

¹ Habermas suggests that capitalist markets operate via strategic action using the medium of money, whilst bureaucratic administrations do so via the medium of power. (Both media are non-linguistic).

Habermas' (1996) 'discourse theory of law and democracy' builds on his theory of communicative action and on the notion of 'deliberative democracy' in which there is a concern that citizens' participation in the democratic process is rational in character. He notes the paradoxical duality in modern law, namely a tension between 'facts' (facticity) and 'norms' (validity). 'Facts' are commands backed by threats or compulsory laws backed by sanctions, whilst 'norms' are laws or standards which embody a claim to legitimacy and which are based on an appeal to reason that all citizens (ideally) find acceptable. Habermas explains the tension between facts and norms as follows:

Modern law presents itself as Janus-faced to its addressees: it leaves it up to them which of the two possible approaches they want to take to the law. Either they can consider legal norms simply as commands (factual constraints on their personal scope for action) and take a *strategic* approach to the calculable consequences of possible rule violations; or they can take a *performative* approach in which they view norms as valid precepts and comply 'out of respect for the law'. (Habermas, 1996:448)

Habermas explains that law is constituted by this tension between facticity and validity. He aims to produce a theory of law that 'situates the idealizing character of validity claims in concrete social contexts'. For him 'the challenge is to maintain the tension between the context-transcending claims of reason and the always limited contexts in which human reason must ply its trade' (1996: Translator's introduction (xiii-xiv)).

In answer to the question 'How is a legitimate system of law possible?' Habermas suggests that,

Only those norms are valid to which affected persons could agree as participants in rational discourse. (Habermas, 1996:107)

This is linked to the idea of self-determination,

Citizens should always be able to understand themselves also as authors of the law to which they are subject as addressees....

The legal community constitutes itself on the basis of a discursively achieved agreement. (Ibid: 449)

All reasonable affected persons of good will should be able to agree that it is in the interests of all that these norms prevail in society (Ibid: 458-9).

Habermas' theory replaces the old contract model of the law with a discursive, deliberative model. He suggests that the settling of norms by means of public argument should play a central role in any attempt to realise the possibility of legitimate law. Thus law-making (read quality assurance) should be based on democratic processes of opinion and will formation in the public sphere, drawing on citizens' cognitive resources, but also on their interests, values and identities, such that these become institutionalised as expressions of 'political will' (Ibid: Translator's Introduction, xxviii). Thus it is the practice of self-legislation that becomes legally institutionalised.

Habermas concludes that

The paradoxical achievement of law thus consists in the fact that it reduces the conflict potential of unleashed individual liberties (read institutional autonomy) through norms that can coerce only so long as they are recognised as legitimate on the fragile basis of communicative liberties ... Social integration thereby takes on a peculiarly reflexive shape: by meeting its need for legitimation, with the help of the productive force of communication, law takes advantage of the permanent risk of dissensus to spur on legally institutionalised public discourses' (Ibid: 462).

Applications of Habermas' discursive theory of law to the establishment of a national quality assurance system might be the following:

- As suggested above, the HEQC should strive in all its interactions with HEIs to operate via 'communicative action'. 'Strategic action' or the exercise of its bureaucratic power should only be used as a last resort.
- In establishing the system, the emphasis should be on building consensus around 'norms' for QA (e.g. the Good Practice Descriptors and Guides to Good Practice). These norms should be negotiated with the academic community so that they are acceptable to and owned by that community². The HEQC's promotion of norms should inspire people to work towards improvement. Minimum quality thresholds (threats or 'facts') should be back-grounded.
- In order to cater for the diversity and uneven levels of development in the system, those designing the system should create a large 'gap' or distance between the 'norms' of the QA system (e.g. as operationalised in the HEQC's proposed Guides to Good Practice) and the 'facts' of the system (e.g. the proposed specification of Threshold Descriptors or minimum quality standards). This should enable the system to cater for a wide range of institutions. It may also prevent those with less developed QA systems from focusing strategically on avoiding being caught out by the 'facts' of the system, whilst the high standards enshrined in the 'norms' would mean that all institutions would be challenged to improve. There should, certainly in the short-term, be no punitive sanctions linked to not meeting the thresholds (apart from the disgrace and loss of fact involved). But, there should be incentives to reward those institutions that attain the norms (e.g. the granting of self-accreditation status).
- Habermas' last point about allowing 'the permanent risk of dissensus' suggests that the QA system should encourage what is termed in organisational development discourse, 'double loop learning'³. In other words during interaction between the HEQC and HEIs, for example during an institutional audit, the academic community should be encouraged to not only to allow their practices to be challenged by the 'facts' and 'norms' presented by the HEQC, but also to critique these and thus contribute to their on-going revision and improvement.

2. Legislative Context⁴

The CHE has three main responsibilities in terms of the Higher Education Act of 1997, to:

- Promote quality assurance in higher education;
- Audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education providers; and
- Accredite programmes of higher education.

The CHE performs these duties through its permanent subcommittee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), which was formally constituted in 2001. The HEQC's Directorate of Quality Promotion and Capacity Development has recently established the Improving Teaching and Learning Project (ITLP). The purposes of the project are:

² Writing on the political dimension of evaluation research, Carol Weiss (1991) states that both the subjects and stakeholders of evaluation tend to be willing to accept even negative results of an evaluation, provided that the criteria that are used are in keeping with their own values, beliefs and worldviews.

³ In single loop learning, if social actors carry out action strategies that fail to attain the outcomes they intended, they then change their action strategies in order to improve the outcomes, but they continue to operate under the same governing variables (e.g. QA norms). In double loop learning, the governing variables themselves are questioned and if necessary changed, as a means of solving a particular problem. (Argyris, C. et al, 1987: 85-88)

⁴ This section is taken from Ian Scott's 'Outline of Current Higher Education Policy Goals' which serves as Annex 3 of the HEQC Improving Teaching and Learning Project's Needs and Capacity Analysis Report (2002).

1. To develop for the HEQC criteria, minimum quality standards and guides to good practice on teaching and learning for the HEQC's institutional audit and programme accreditation and evaluation systems with the aim of ensuring that these contribute to the enhancement and valid evaluation of teaching and learning. This work will be done through engaging the academic community in discussion on the suitability of the proposed criteria and minimum quality thresholds, and by carrying out selected pilot studies.
2. To enhance the capacity of the HE system to respond appropriately to agreed Codes of Practice for teaching and learning.
3. To operationalise the HEQC's Directorate of Quality Promotion and Capacity Development's commitment to promoting and enhancing effective teaching and learning practice.

The ITLP's identification and definition of the Codes of Practice for teaching and learning practice will be informed by current system level policy goals. The following system-level policy goals are taken mainly from the NPHE, which contains the 'framework and mechanisms for implementing and realising the policy goals of the White Paper' (NPHE: Foreword), but some come indirectly from the draft New Academic Policy and the recommendations of the National Working Group.

The policy goals are divided into two broad groups, namely goals and targets related to student access and output, which have a direct bearing on teaching and learning (referred to here in shorthand as 'output goals') and goals that relate to the nature and functioning of the system as a whole but have significant implications for educational practices and development. The categorisation is not critical and there is no intention to make fine distinctions between the divisions. It might be argued, however, that the output goals can be seen as substantive goals whereas the 'system and process' goals might best be seen as means of meeting the output goals rather than as ends in themselves.

Goals and targets related directly to output

1. **Size:** Increase overall participation in HE to 20% (from current approx 15%) of 20-24 age group in 10-15 years. (NPHE 2.2)

Note: Implications for individual institutions not clear.

2. **Shape:** Enrolment to be 40% Humanities, 30% SET and 30% Bus/Com in 5-10 years (current distribution is approx. 50%; 25%; 25%). (NPHE 2.6)

Note: Different implications for different institutions: not all institutions will be expected to play, or have the capacity to play, the same role in contributing to this goal.

3. **Equity:**

* '*Equity of access*' (ref White Paper): Continue to move towards race and gender representivity in enrolment across the system; address (racially) skewed representation in SET, Bus/Com and postgraduate programmes in particular. (NPHE 3.2)

Note: The implication is that this goal applies to each institution but this is inferred from general statements and from comments on specific institutions – e.g. in the NWG report – rather than spelled out. Will government be satisfied with less than full representivity in each institution? Is representivity a goal for HDIs? The implications for individual programmes is not clear.

* *'Equity of outcomes'* (ref White Paper): Address the disproportionately high black failure and drop-out rates; ensure that representivity in enrolment leads to representivity in graduate output. (NPHE 3.2) The implications for individual programmes is not clear

4. **Efficiency:** Improve graduation rates significantly over next 5-10 years to 25% of total enrolment in the case of three-year degree and diploma programmes (similar benchmarks given for other undergraduate and postgraduate programmes). (NPHE 2.3) The implications for individual programmes is not clear

Note: This goal recognises current inefficiencies as well as ongoing problems with the output of the school sector. It is the goal that has probably attracted most attention from institutions as it is quantified and is likely to have direct implications for funding.

5. **Broadening the social base of students:** Increase the intake of 'non-traditional' students: workers, mature learners and the disabled. (NPHE 2.4)

Note: The NPHE regards this as an important goal 'in its own right' but it may also be seen as a means of increasing participation, particularly given ongoing problems with school output.

6. **Quality of graduate output:**

* *Quality and standards:* General government commitment to maintaining/raising quality and standards. (NPHE 2.3.3)

* *Enhancing cognitive skills of graduates:* Graduates must have the 'skills and competencies required ... in the modern world'. The reference is particularly to the Gibbons listing of key skills but presumably should also refer to enhancing subject knowledge. (NPHE 2.7)

* *Increase postgraduate enrolment:* Increase postgraduate enrolment to build research capacity. (NPHE 5.3)

Note: This goal is included under this heading because of its implications for undergraduate curriculum design and delivery.

7. **Increase recruitment from SADC:** Target 10% of enrolment. (NPHE 2.5)

Note: This goal is both political and pragmatic (using existing capacity, increasing participation and revenue). It does not in itself have serious implications for teaching and learning except perhaps in relation to admission requirements.

System and process goals

The NPHE generally does not make clear distinctions between means and ends, though establishing such distinctions may be important in devising and implementing effective educational strategies. The following are examples of goals relating to the nature and functioning of the system that appear to be seen by the MoE as ends in themselves but might arguably be more appropriately regarded, from an educational perspective, as means to the end of meeting the key output goals. Provided that the 'means' are appropriate, they will of course merit analysis and breaking down into actionable strategies in the same way as the output goals, particularly in so far as they apply at institutional level.

This is not intended to be a comprehensive list (for more detail see for example NPHE section 4).

1. **Foster diversity of institutions and provision:** ‘To diversify the system in terms of the mix of institutional missions and programmes that will be required to meet national and regional needs in social, cultural and economic development’. (NPHE section 4; 4.3)

Note: The implications of increasing institutional diversification or differentiation include, for example, more specialised curriculum design, increasing attention to the interface between HE and work, and enabling inter-institutional articulation. Institutional planning and ‘niche’ selection will need to be convincing to the MoE and the market.

2. **Rationalisation:** Regional institutional and programme rationalisation, including institutional mergers, are seen as ways of increasing efficiency as well as altering the apartheid ‘landscape’. (NPHE section 6; NWG report)

Note: As with diversification/differentiation, there are considerable implications for curriculum design and delivery, particularly in respect of harmonising curricula and delivery across previously fully independent institutions.

3. **Inter-institutional articulation:** Establish effective inter-institutional articulation mechanisms and arrangements to allow for student mobility and progression. (NPHE 2.7; SAQA regulations for registration of qualifications on the NQF; should have been discussed in NPHE sections 4 and 6 and NWG)

Note: This goal is increasingly important in an increasingly differentiated system. It is seen to be difficult to achieve in a system that allows for ‘whole qualifications’ and encourages institutional diversity. There are major implications for assessment, quality promotion and quality assurance, particularly in view of current institutional inequalities.

4. **Outcomes-based curriculum design:** Establish outcomes-based/‘outcomes-focused’ approaches to provision and assessment. (NAP)

Note: The qualifications framework proposed in the NAP and the SAQA level and qualifications descriptors for HE open the way for a ‘whole qualifications’ approach, including assessment at the programme level. This has major implications for curriculum development (probably favouring ‘coherent’, structured programmes), delivery and assessment (of key skills as well as overall programme outcomes – ‘integrated’ assessment).

5. **Quality assurance:** Establish effective quality assurance systems at institutional and national level. (NPHE 2.3.3; HEQC Founding Document; SAQA; etc)

Note: Potentially major implications for design, delivery and assessment.

Some observations on the policy goals

1. There are real or potential tensions between some of the goals, for example: (a) between equity and efficiency, (b) between efficiency and changing ‘shape’, in that SET and Bus/Com programmes generally have higher failure and attrition rates, (c) between institutional diversification and the need for inter-institutional articulation, particularly in the context of a ‘whole-qualifications’ approach.
2. The application of certain goals (e.g. increasing participation, representivity in access) in individual institutions and programmes is not clear.

3. There is little if any recognition of the curriculum, delivery and assessment implications of key access goals (including access for ‘non-traditional’ students) and quality-related output goals such as ‘enhanced cognitive skills’ and preparing more students for postgraduate studies. For example, enhancing graduate skills requires careful reassessment of the educational process which takes some considerable time – between five and ten years.
4. The consequences of quantifying only the efficiency-related output targets, and indicating that there will be financial implications attached, cannot yet be known but there must be concern about the effects of this on institutional behaviour relating to equity and quality.
5. The NPHE is widely seen as favouring efficiency over equity. However, the indications are that, unless there are radical and rapid improvements in school results, the NPHE’s output goals cannot be met without extensive use of equity-related measures such as extended curricula.

3. Definitions of Teaching & Learning

In our project proposal, we defined teaching and learning as follows:

Teaching and learning and research are the core business of higher education. HEIs have traditionally been called “institutions of learning” – they exist in order to make learning happen. The two concepts teaching and learning should not be separated, they are two sides of the same coin, i.e. an interactive process that requires the active cooperation of both learner and teacher. A definition of teaching might be the inspiration and facilitation of learning, whilst a definition of learning might be conceptual and cognitive change as a result of (direct or indirect) interaction with a more knowledgeable and experienced other. Research in cognitive psychology suggests that learning is a complex process and there is certainly no agreement on any one theory of learning. But there is agreement that learning is not only a cognitive, rational process, but also an affective, social and cultural process - thus there are no simple recipes for its success, and personal, cultural and contextual factors cannot be ignored. Learning happens within the inter-subjectivities of learners and teachers as they work together to make common meanings and as learners are inducted into various professional or academic communities. In HE, learning is enhanced through the process of students being inducted into communities of research, scholarship and in some cases, community service, or a professional community. ...

But for the purposes of the project we have defined teaching & learning more broadly:

For the purposes of this project, **we will define teaching and learning broadly to include** not only the actual teaching-learning processes that go on in classrooms, but also, **the policies, plans, procedures and activities that an HEI undertakes to provide for its students the conditions necessary for learning to take place.**

4. Scope

The scope of the project is to generate, legitimate and pilot test Codes of Practice for teaching and learning for the South African higher education sector – namely universities, technikons and colleges in both the public and private sectors. For audit, the unit of analysis will be an institution (HEI), whilst for programme evaluation it will be individual academic programmes. In developing the Codes of Practice we will distinguish the level (institutional, programme or module) and also the moment in the quality cycle, (planning, implementing, monitoring or improving) to which they apply.

We have conducted a scoping exercise (see Diagram Appendix 1) and a Needs and Capacity Analysis in order to guide our work. As a result of these two investigations we have

determined the following focus areas for which the ITL Working Group should develop Codes of Practice (see Appendix 2):

1. Curriculum Management: Programme Planning & Design
2. Curriculum Management: Programme Review & Evaluation
3. Access & Admissions
4. Staff Development
5. Student Development
6. The Evaluation of Teaching
7. Postgraduate Supervision
8. The Assessment of Students

Links with the Audit and Accreditation Frameworks

The Codes of Practice developed by the ITLP will be used by the HEQC in both its Audit and Accreditation procedures and activities. The ITLP will also develop *Guides to Good Practice* to underpin each Code of Practice and to offer practitioners guidance and suggestions on how to develop strategies and practices that will meet the Codes of Practice.

In its policy documents, the HEQC attempts to hold ‘fitness of purpose’ and ‘fitness for purpose’ and also ‘accountability’ and ‘improvement’ together in ‘creative tension’. This is illustrated in the following paragraphs from the Audit Framework Discussion Document (2002:7):

The notion of quality employed in the audit framework is premised on the principle that institutions have the primary responsibility for QA. In arriving at audit judgements, therefore, the HEQC will use as a starting point the criteria based on the institutions’ own specification of mission and objectives. It will be assumed that institutional missions have taken national imperatives into account as articulated in the Higher Education Act, the National Plan for Higher Education, the Human Resource Development Strategy and other policy frameworks.

In developing audit criteria, the HEQC will operate within the minimum standards requirements for institutional efficiency set by the DoE and institutional governance structures. With respect to quality assurance for effective teaching and learning, research and service learning, the HEQC has initiated a number of national projects to generate criteria for QA. These will be developed in consultation with providers in time to be used during pilot audits in 2003. The HEQC will also take into account institutionally set requirements and guidelines for teaching and learning, research and service learning.

This means that the Codes of Practice (which are judgment-orientated instruments largely for evaluating ‘accountability’ and ‘fitness of purpose’), will always need to be interpreted contextually and applied sensitively to different institutional contexts, with due regard for institutional missions and goals, in order to cater for the ‘fitness for purpose’ and ‘improvement’ aspect of the HEQC’s conceptualization of quality.

According to the Audit Framework, the first purpose of audit is to make judgments on the effectiveness of the institution’s internal quality systems for teaching, learning, research and service learning programmes, and to make recommendations for improvement (2002:7). The ITLP’s Codes of Practice will be useful in the audit process insofar as they define and describe good practice and threshold practice for QA systems for teaching and learning. To this end all of the planned Codes of Practice listed above will relate to ‘policies, systems, structures, resources and activities to support and enhance the quality of teaching and learning’ (Audit

Framework, 2002:8). In particular, Codes No.s 1, 2, 4 & 6 will apply to the evaluation of internal QA systems. Under the Scope & Focus' for institutional audits, the Audit Framework Discussion Document (2002:9) further specifies the following areas, (the relevant Code of Practice is indicated in brackets):

- Staff development (No.4)
- Student Access & Development (No.s 3 & 5)
- Programme Planning, Design & Review (No.s 1 & 2)
- Student assessment, throughput and completion rates (No. 8).

The proposed Codes of Practice will thus be used as guidelines by the Audit Panels when evaluating institutional practices in these areas. The specified *Good Practice Descriptors* will be important for guiding Audit Panels in determining whether an institution meet the standards for self-accreditation status. Those HEIs failing to meet the Threshold Descriptors will need to develop an improvement plan to rectify the situation which will be monitored by the HEQC.

With respect to Accreditation, according to the Accreditation Framework Discussion Document, the ITLP's Codes of Practice will be used in the following procedures and activities:

- The threshold descriptors will provide a base-line for making judgments on whether providers meet minimum standards for provision leading to the accreditation of particular new programmes. The Code of Practice which relates particularly to the accreditation of new programmes for Phase 1, leading to candidature status for new programmes, is No.1 on Curriculum Management: Programme Planning & Design, (this contributes to describing 'General provider Standards').
- Code of Practice No.2 on Curriculum Management: Programme Review & Evaluation will be useful in Phase 3 of the Accreditation process, leading to full accreditation status (by providing HEIs with criteria against which to conduct their internal reviews and to weigh up the strengths and weaknesses of their programmes).
- Code of Practice No.2 can also be used in evaluating an HEI's internal programme review system with a view to judging whether or not it meets the standards for self-accreditation status via audit.
- Other Codes of Practice will also be used as the context dictates, given that 'the HEQC has a focus on teaching and learning and consequently the accreditation process will emphasize all those elements that relate to student achievement' (Accreditation Framework Discussion Document, 2002, 19).

5. Understanding QA as an Empirical Research Exercise

Here we discuss the implications of understanding quality assurance as an empirical research exercise. For each of the steps involve we comment how this relates to our project and also what [types of validity] we need to ensure:

1. Identify Research Problem/ Question

Broadly this involves asking "What is the quality of x educational provision?" Below we discuss the importance of clarifying which stage of curriculum provision/ programme implementation is involved here (i.e. is it planning, implementing, monitoring or improving), as this alters the research question and therefore the research design and methods. (We should beware of jumping straight to methods!)

Determine Research Design

Here we make a distinction between whether the evaluation design should be judgment or improvement-orientated. According to Patton (1997), the purposes of evaluation can be summarised into three categories:

- to judge the merit or worth of a programme (an social intervention)
- to improve the programme
- to generate knowledge (for wider application).

Patton (1997) in Babbie & Mouton (2001:338) outlines a 4 stage pattern for judgement-orientated evaluation:

- define or select criteria
- set standards of performance
- measure performance
- synthesise results into a judgement of value.

In contrast, improvement-orientated evaluations tend to focus on the start-up and implementation phases of the programme or project cycle to provide feedback to programme managers and providers on the strengths and weaknesses of the programme. Whereas knowledge-driven evaluations aim to understand how an intervention works.

These different purposes of evaluation are linked to the different stages/ moments in the quality cycle and also to the division of labour between internal and external evaluation (see below).

2. Conceptualisation – clarification of concepts and definitions, links to existing literature – [theoretical validity]

This was done for the HEQC in the Founding Document. However, the 3 concepts of quality identified there: *fitness for purpose*, *transformation* and *value for money* are not being taken up equally. We suggest that this is mostly due to capacity and feasibility constraints when it comes to operationalising the concepts (see below). We also suggest that *fitness of purpose* (linked to the concept of accountability) has crept in as a major quality consideration in the HEQC's work, hence the need for the Codes of Practice.

3. Operationalisation – turning the constructs into measuring instruments – [construct validity]

Here we stress the importance of designing valid instruments that are adequate measures of the construct being operationalised. Different conceptualizations of quality inevitably lead to different research designs, instruments and methods for measuring/ judging quality (see below for further discussion).

4. Data Collection – methods and processes of data collection – [reliability of data]

The key to obtaining reliability in evaluation research is triangulation. This is essential as the research designs tend to be weak (causal relations can seldom be proven conclusively due to the many variables involved in a social project like education and to the impossibility of controlling for them). It is also important to design the evaluations so that only useful, useable data is collected.

5. Analysis - interpretation of data, conclusions to be warranted by the data/ evidence – [inferential validity]

The key to a good internal evaluation is making only those claims that are backed by evidence.

6. Conclusions – [are they valid, justified?]

This is the role of the external evaluator (the HEQC). Audit panels will need to be trained to make judgments about the *inferential validity* of the claims made in internal evaluation reports.

6. The Operationalisation of Quality

Value for money: We think that due to lack of capacity, this conceptualization of quality should be dropped at this phase of the HEQC's work; it may be more appropriate for the DoE to take up the matter of the cost- effectiveness of institutions and programmes.

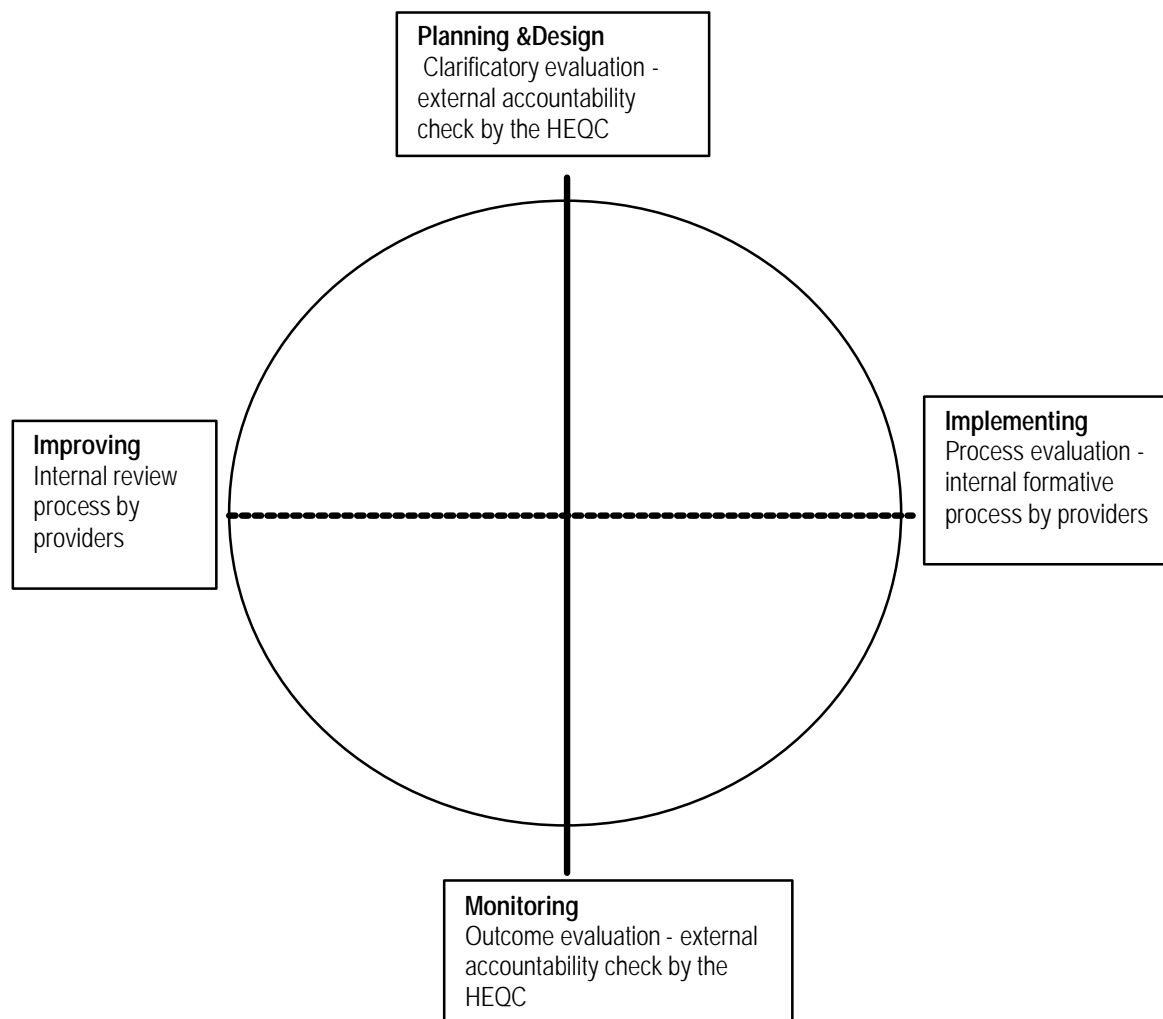
Transformation: This is an appropriate concept for our context, but, as it is a relative concept (i.e. it tries to measure the extent of change) it is difficult to operationalise – one first needs base-line data for each provider against which to make self-comparisons. This means that the HEQC should consider asking questions relating to transformation in the 1st round of audits and document base-line data – to be followed up in the 2nd round. With respect to T&L, *transformation* could be understood to mean ‘the extent to which students develop cognitively during the course of a programme’. One can measure student improvement/ development by comparing individual assessment results over time, (assuming that the assessment methods are valid and reliable).

Fitness for Purpose: A strong version of this conceptualization of quality would mean that HEIs operationalise *for themselves* what they want quality to mean in their own institutional context. They would then develop their own instruments and methods for measuring and assuring quality and simply report the results of this process to the HEQC. (This could apply to self-accrediting institutions). This would make it impossible to make direct comparisons between HEIs and the central standardization of instruments, such as the Codes of Practice, would not be required. (The Audit Framework seems to prefer this conceptualization of quality). In this model the HEQC’s job would be to evaluate the self-monitoring capacity of providers, but not necessarily the quality of their provision *per se*.

Fitness of Purpose: This is the conceptualization of quality that is operationalised in the Accreditation Framework document. It involves making absolute quality judgments on the basis of pre-defined, generic and standardised criteria. The accreditation function of the HEQC means that it is obliged to develop generic, system-wide standardized instruments in order to run a reliable, transparent and fair accreditation system.

Clearly there is a tension between this understanding of quality and that promoted in the Audit Framework document (often referred to as the tension between improvement and accountability). As we have seen, this tension becomes even more apparent as the contending notions of quality are operationalised. For example, improvement-orientated evaluation should be owned by those who are going to use its results (i.e. improve) and so it is the *users* of the evaluation who should be involved in its design and analysis – which will therefore tend to be context-specific giving results with low levels of reliability (but high levels of construct validity). On the other hand, judgement-orientated evaluation requires criteria against which judgments can be made. HEIs could carry out their own outcome evaluations and define the criteria for themselves (self-accrediting institutions could be given this scope). However, the fact that the HEQC has to run an accreditation system for the country means that it is obliged to use generic standardized criteria and instruments which can be used across sites and contexts. An issue for the T&L project has been the degree of specificity that these generic criteria should take. (Bearing in mind the unhappy example of SAQA’s recent attempt at over-specifying standards and qualifications in its standards-generating processes). This issue will have to be addressed through the Consultative Panel discussions and through piloting of the Codes of Practice in different institutional contexts.

A possible solution to combining both *fitness of* and *for purpose* and improvement and judgement-orientated evaluation is suggested below. This model distinguishes between the different moments of the quality cycle and suggests that different types of evaluation are appropriate at each of the different moments – leading to a range of evaluation designs and methods that could be used by the HEQC and by internal evaluations. The model also suggests a division of labour between internal and external evaluation and therefore has implications for the ways/ methods in which Audit and Accreditation are conducted.



The implications of this model are spelt out in more detail below:

a) Planning & Design – Clarificatory Evaluation:

This type of evaluation asks the following questions:

- Are the purposes and intended outcomes of the intervention clear; can it be evaluated against these later?
- Have the needs of the target population been adequately identified? (e.g. learning needs of students entering a programme)?
- Has the intervention/ programme been conceptualised, planned and designed so that it will meet the needs of its intended beneficiaries & stakeholders?
- Is the programme ready to run, is it feasible, does it have adequate management, human, physical and financial resources?

An external judgment-orientated evaluation is appropriate

Standardised Criteria could be:

1. Management & planning competence of the provider

e.g. Is there evidence that the provider has adequate management and planning & monitoring competence to run the programme?

2. Relevance

e.g. Is the programme relevant to the needs of its stakeholders (students, the HEI mission & P&Q mix, employers, DoE, etc.) Will the programme design and structure adequately serve students' learning needs?

3. Coherence

Is the design of the programme coherent? Are the learning pathways clear? Does it conform to the NAP requirements? Does it facilitate **articulation** with other qualifications and programmes?

4. Feasibility

Is the delivery of the programme feasible? Does the provider offer evidence that it has the capacity and resources and to offer it?

Method of Evaluation

Criteria 1 & 4 could be ascertained via the 1st round of audits i.e. internal report and site-visit. Criteria 2, 3 and also 4 could be ascertained via the accreditation process – i.e. a paper exercise as described in Step 1 of the Accreditation Framework doct.

A follow-up site visit (observation) might be required but only where the HEQC is concerned about provider capacity and resources in order to verify claims made on paper.

b) Implementing - Process Evaluation

This type of evaluation asks the following questions:

- Is the programme being managed & delivered according to its design?
- Does the programme serve its target population as intended?
- Are the necessary teaching-learning, management and administrative systems in place to deliver the programme effectively?

An internal formative improvement-orientated evaluation is appropriate

At this moment in the quality cycle we suggest that it is best to allow the providers to develop their own context-dependent criteria for evaluating implementation. This is because the closer one gets to actual teaching practice, the more context-specific, varied & confounding the variables become, & the softer the data. (The T&L Project have agreed that it would be inappropriate to develop standardized system-wide criteria for good T&L practice at module level). Furthermore, if we want to get improvement here, then those who are going to use the evaluation results should be involved in its design and analysis – they must own the process if improvement is going to happen. This should be done within a safe institutional space, no threats or punishments.

Method of Evaluation

The aim here should be to develop the professionalism and self-monitoring capacity of academic staff. We would recommend the 'reflective practitioner' model and the promotion of theory-based teaching, learning & assessment via self-evaluation and staff development. This means for example, that lecturers should design their own questions to ask students their opinion about their own teaching practice. Lecturer reflection on say student opinion and assessment results should be discussed with peers and teaching experts with no consequences for the staff member concerned, except that they develop an improvement plan which should be monitored.

Typical methods of evaluation and review would be student opinion data and a teaching portfolio. Typical questions asked are:

- Do the students think the programme/ module is meeting their learning needs?
- Do the teaching staff think they are meeting students learning needs?
- What are they doing to improve if it appears that they are not?

The HEQC should give this space to providers to conduct internal evaluations. The HEQC should check via institutional audit that the management of QA either encourages or requires the self-monitoring and improvement of teaching practice. It could audit the management

structures and processes to ensure that this happens. Wrt to accreditation, Step 2 should only require a report showing that some form of internal, formative evaluation has taken place and that it is geared to improvement. A visit from a programme evaluator should only be necessary if the report raises alarm or doesn't materialize.

c) Monitoring - Outcome Evaluation

This type of evaluation asks the following questions:

- Did the intended changes happen and can they be attributed to the programme or intervention?
- Was the programme effective?
- To what extent did it meet the expectations of its stakeholders?
- Crucially, wrt to T&L, to what extent did the students attain the intended learning outcomes?

An external judgment-orientated evaluation based on generic criteria is appropriate

Standardised Criteria could be:

1. Acceptable through-put results

Here quantitative data on student assessment results, graduation rates, retention rates, postgraduate throughput, etc. could be scrutinized and compared to specified norms and standards. NB These are usually an absolute judgments, but if we want to emphasize transformation, then we would need to include student input data and ask "How much value was added, how much did students develop during the course of the programme?"

2. The quality of student performance/ achievement

If we are concerned about the quality of teaching & learning and about the effectiveness of programmes, then this is a crucial criterion to use. However, it is a labour-intensive exercise and the HEQC would have to rely on the judgments of experienced peers.

3. Stakeholder satisfaction

Here the results of graduate and employer surveys could be used.

Method of Evaluation

Criteria No.1 & 3 could be included in an institutional audit which focuses on the teaching and learning effectiveness of the institution. Audit trails to the programme level could look at the findings of criteria No.2, i.e. at programme review reports.

Criteria No.s 1-3 could all be used in Step 3 of the accreditation process, leading to full accreditation status. However, because we believe that the validation of assessment results and the scrutiny of student achievement at key exit levels is crucial in an outcome evaluation of a programme, we suggest that it is particularly Criteria No.2 which should be the focus of Step 3. We suggest that the only way it would be feasible for the HEQC to do this is to use peer review by subject specialists. However, these people would need to be trained in curriculum and assessment theory and practice, and programme review methods. Those completing such training could be registered on an HEQC data-base by the HEQC (as *verifiers* in SAQA-speak) and eventually the data-base could become sufficiently comprehensive for the HEQC to insist that a programme review leading to accreditation status would have to use a programme evaluator from the HEQC data-base. We suggest that the HEQC set guidelines for the conducting of internal programme reviews by providers which would include the use of registered programme evaluators. The guidelines should also insist that representative samples of student work are assessed, the assessment system for the programme as a whole is evaluated and that the assessment methods are judged valid and reliable, (aligned with the learning outcomes for the programme etc.). A programme review report from an HEQC accredited programme evaluator (or verifier) could be sufficient for granting full accreditation status to the programme concerned.

d) Improving – Review Process

This type of evaluation asks the following questions:

- Is there an adequate quality management system and processes in place to ensure that evaluation results are turned into plans for improvement?

An internal formative process with external validation is appropriate

At this moment of the quality cycle, the HEQC should simply check that such systems and processes are in place and at the next audit/ accreditation step it should verify that the implementation of the plans for improvement have taken place. The ‘what’ and ‘how’ of this process should be left to provider discretion.

Method of Evaluation

This stage of the quality cycle should be included in the institutional audit’s scrutiny of internal quality management systems. No generic standards need to be written.

7. Methods for Codes of Practice Generation

The IT&L Working Group has agreed that:

- The Codes of Practice used to judge the HE system should be **legitimate** in the eyes of the academic community
- The manner in which judgment evaluations are carried out should be **acceptable** to the academic community
- Although we are designing a judgment-orientated system, it should, as far as possible, **encourage improvement**
- The external QA system should **complement** (rather than dominate) the internal self-evaluation systems that should be orientated to improvement (see below for suggested division of labour between internal and external evaluation)
- We should ensure that the findings from the HEQC’s audit and evaluation processes **generate knowledge about teaching & learning practice** in the South African context.

A key to our approach is that the criteria and codes of practice which the HEQC uses to judge HEIs and their programmes must have legitimacy and buy-in from the academic community. This principle has informed the design and research methods of our project. The IT&L Project will be launched with a workshop for senior managers responsible for QA at institutional level. The workshop will focus on the establishment of QA systems for the planning, review and improvement of teaching and learning. The Codes of Practice listed above will be developed via the following process. Draft Codes of Practice will be presented to ‘Consultative Panels’ of senior academics and managers for discussion and revision. Once these are finalized, they will be circulated to all public and some private providers and professional ETQAs for formal comment. They will be revised in the light of the comments received. The Codes of Practice will then be piloted during the HEQC’s institutional pilot audits to be run in 2003. At the same time the ITLP will run Regional Workshops to build capacity in institutions to meet the demands of the Codes of Practice. The Working Group will also run a series of case studies on the implementation of the Codes of Practice, with a view to developing Guides to Good Practice to assist HEIs in developing strategies and practices to meet the HEQC’s standards.

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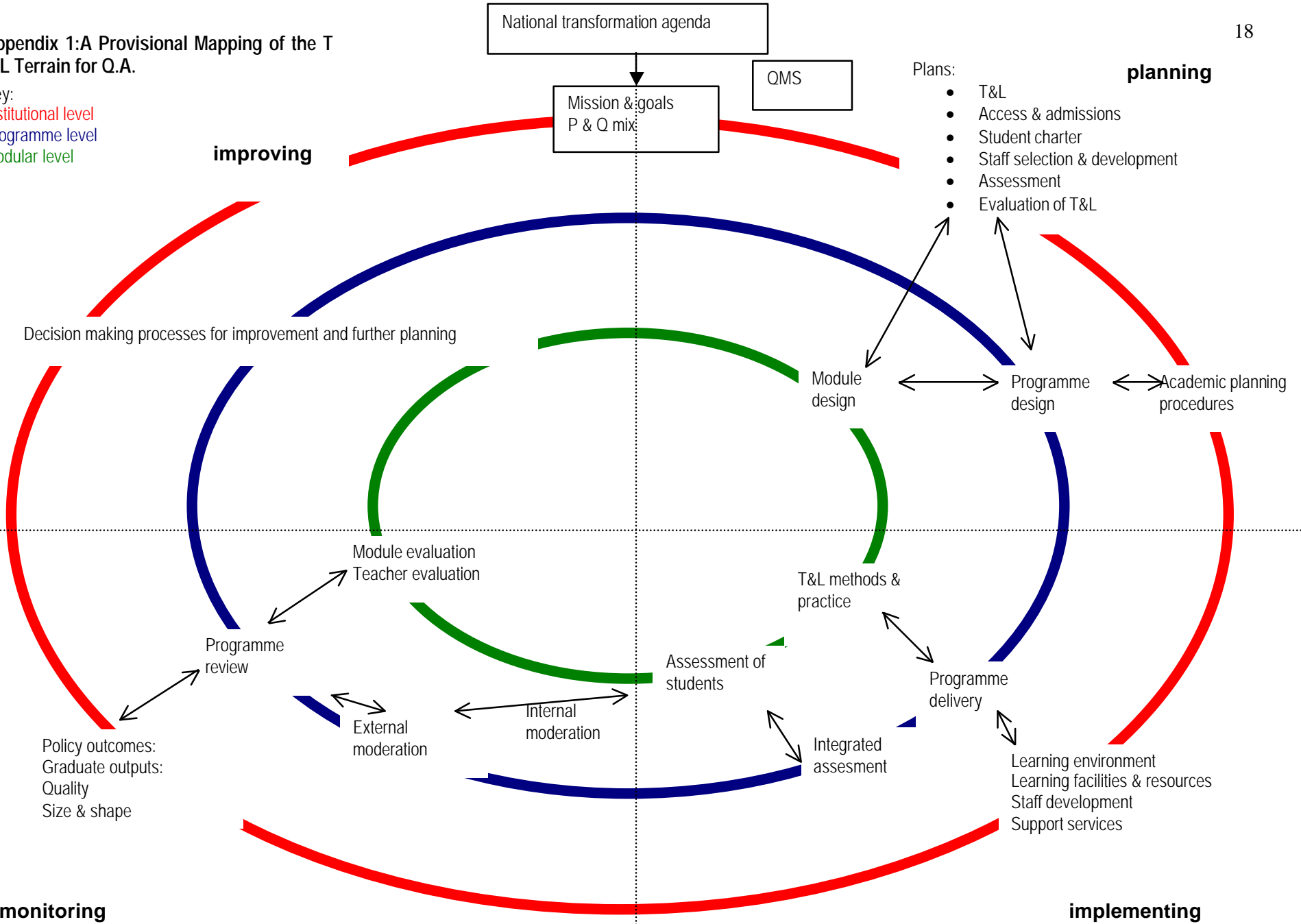
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Appendix 1:A Provisional Mapping of the T & L Terrain for Q.A.

Key:
Institutional level
Programme level
Modular level



Appendix 2:

Improving Teaching & Learning Project: Format for the HEQC's Codes of Practice

The Purpose of the Codes of Practice

The HEQC 'Codes of Practice' are intended to provide common reference points for the internal evaluation processes of higher education providers and for their preparation for institutional audit. Some of the Codes of Practice will also be used in the HEQC's Accreditation and Programme Evaluation exercises. The Good Practice Descriptors are intended to capture best possible practice and to suggest improvement goals that providers can work towards. The meeting of the Good Practice Descriptors will serve as benchmarks against which the HEQC's audit panels will make judgements on the granting of self-accreditation status to particular providers. The Threshold Descriptors are intended to indicate minimum standards for acceptable practice. Where providers are judged not to meet the Threshold Standards, serious negotiations between the HEQC and the institutional management concerned will be undertaken to agree on improvement plans within reasonable time-frames to rectify the situation. With respect to the accreditation of programmes, failure to meet the relevant Threshold Standards (as identified by the Accreditation Committee) will mean that accreditation status will either be withdrawn or not granted.

However, it is important that those who use the Codes of Practice understand that they should be interpreted flexibly and sensitively, with due regard for the institutional mission and the context in which a particular institution operates. In setting up their internal quality assurance systems, providers should not be expected to rigidly follow the Standard Descriptors; instead, they should be encouraged to use those that are appropriate to their needs and context and to adjust or ignore (for good reasons) those that are not. Furthermore, the Codes of Practice should not be taken as final; the Codes of Practice should be open to constant questioning, review and revision through the processes of audit and evaluation.

The Structure of the Codes of Practice

Focus Area

This describes the scope of the Codes of Practice and provides key definitions. It also indicates at which level the Code is applicable (institutional, programme or module) and which moments of the quality cycle it addresses (i.e. planning, implementing, monitoring or improving).

In its First Phase, the Improving Teaching & Learning Project will write for the following 8 focus areas:

- Curriculum Management: Programme Planning & Design
- Curriculum Management: Programme Review & Evaluation
- Access & Admissions
- Staff Development
- Student Development
- The Internal/ Self Evaluation of Teaching & Courses/ Modules
- Postgraduate Supervision
- The Assessment of Students

Rationale

Here we give a rationale as to why the HEQC should take an interest in this area through its external auditing and accreditation exercises.

Criteria

These are posed as questions about the key qualities or attributes that the HEQC will look for in operationalising the meaning of quality in the focus area under consideration.

Good Practice Descriptors

These are descriptors of best possible practice that can be used as goals for improvement and as indicators against which the HEQC can make judgments about the quality of higher education practice and for the granting of self-accreditation status to a provider.

Threshold Descriptors

These are minimum standards that all providers will be required to meet within negotiated and reasonable time-frames. The meeting of certain of the Threshold Standards will be a condition for the granting of accreditation status to a programme.

Intermediate Descriptors

These will attempt to describe levels of practice that sit between those descriptors describing Good Practice and the Threshold. The rationale for these intermediate or developmental descriptors is the HEQC's commitment to a transformative and relative (value-added) as opposed to an absolute understanding of quality. The writing of developmental descriptors is intended to enable the HEQC to measure and make judgments on improvement gains, rather than against absolute standards. However, the standards described in the Threshold Descriptors are absolute in that they are intended to provide a 'bottom line' which providers will be obliged to meet.

Suggested Sources of Data Collection

Here suggestions are made on what sources of data the HEQC advises providers to offer as evidence for meeting a particular code of Practice. As far as possible, use will be made of information that institutions are likely to have collected already for internal purposes. The lists of data sources should not be used as checklists, but rather to assist and guide providers on what may be appropriate sources of data. These lists will need to be adjusted depending on the nature and context of the institution and/or programme under consideration.

Comments

These include additional suggestions on how a particular Code of Practice should be interpreted and applied – e.g. particular adjustments may be necessary for certain types of institution, such a private or distance providers, or they may need to be applied differently for Technikons as opposed to Universities, etc.