



**COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION  
HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE**

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**AUDIT REPORT  
ON  
OVAL INTERNATIONAL COMPUTER  
EDUCATION**

**Report of the HEQC to Oval International Computer  
Education**

**May 2005**

**Didacta Building, 211 Skinner Street, Pretoria, 0002, P O Box 13354, The Tramshed, 0126,  
Telephone: +27 12 392 9132, Fax +27 12 392 9120, E-mail: [singh.m@che.ac.za](mailto:singh.m@che.ac.za)  
Visit our website at <http://www.che.ac.za>**

HEQC Audit Report Number 2

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211 Skinner Street  
Didacta Building  
P.O Box 13354  
The Tramshed  
0126  
South Africa

Tel: +27 12 392 9132

Fax: +27 12 392 9120

Website: <http://www.che.ac.za>

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The audit visit to Oval International Computer Education (hereafter referred to as Oval) was conducted by the HEQC between 14 and 16 September 2004. In all, the Audit Panel interviewed about 75 people during the site visit, either as a full panel or as subgroups of the panel. The interviewees included:

- ❑ Management staff
- ❑ Academic and academic support staff;
- ❑ Undergraduate students from the Durban campus
- ❑ External representatives from different advisory panels;
- ❑ Local civic leaders;
- ❑ Representatives from community engagement projects;
- ❑ Employers of graduates; and
- ❑ Alumni.

In May 2005, the HEQC Board approved and released the full report of this audit to the head of the institution. The audit report reflects conclusions reached about the quality management arrangements evident at the institution at the time of the audit visit. The HEQC publishes the executive summary of this report, which provides a brief overview of Oval and a summary of the main findings from the audit, including a list of the commendations and recommendations.

### Overview of Institution

Oval International Computer Education registered with the DoE as a private higher education provider in 2002, and was given conditional registration to offer the Certificate in Computers and Management (NQF level 5), the Diploma in Information Technology (NQF level 6) and the Diploma in Management (NQF level 6). As a private higher education institution, Oval offers programmes in information technology, but has expanded its provision to include tourism and business studies. Oval has additional delivery sites for its programmes in Cape Town (established 1995), Pietermaritzburg (established 1996) and Johannesburg (established 2002).

In 2004, 1606 students were registered for programmes at Oval, supported by 46 full-time academic staff as well as 18 academic support and administration staff. In 2004, 795 students were enrolled at the Durban campus, 115 students at the Pietermaritzburg campus, 308 students at the Johannesburg campus and 406 students at the Cape Town campus. Each of the campuses had the following fulltime academic staff: Durban (19), Pietermaritzburg (8), Johannesburg (10) and Cape Town (9).

### Summary of Findings

The audit visit to the institution by the Panel, and its consideration of Oval's audit portfolio and other documentation provided, enabled the Panel to satisfy itself that Oval is taking steps to formalise and institutionalise its quality assurance systems. The Panel noted the commitment by staff to facilitate the quality of the student

learning experience. The SWOT analysis provided by the institution indicates a good awareness by Oval of critical areas of institutional operations in need of systematic quality-related attention.

The Panel noted Oval's stated commitment to national priorities and the intention to contribute to the development of the communities and local economies in which it has situated itself, both through its educational programmes, its investment in sites of urban renewal and the investment of staff time and institutional resources in some community initiatives. The Panel found evidence of this commitment in both the institution's planning and in a range of activities undertaken by staff and students.

The Panel noted Oval's intention to make learning more accessible to disadvantaged learners, and found this goal reflected in the diversity of students enrolled at the institution. In interviews, students generally expressed satisfaction with their learning experience at Oval.

The academic staff expressed their enthusiasm for their work, and their positive orientation toward the institution. The Panel acknowledged that Oval had made progress in facilitating the skills development of academic staff, and in making arrangements for the improvement of staff qualifications. The Panel acknowledges Oval's progress in achieving better communication and co-operation between the key institutional role players including management, staff and students and its setting up of a consultative committee to address this issue.

Given the nature of the institution and its stated objectives and commitments, the Panel flagged three general areas in need of development attention.

1. The Panel observed that one of the major challenges that the institution faces is the development of academic capacity and leadership among its fulltime staff to enable them to give fuller effect to Oval's mission and goals. This includes improving the qualifications and professional development of academic staff, particularly the specialist expertise required to ensure academically rigorous content and appropriately informed approaches to teaching and learning. Issues of staff diversity also require ongoing attention.
2. A further area for attention is the development of a clearer account of the nature of academic disadvantage experienced by some of its students, especially the effects of various forms of educational under-preparedness, and the need for systematic measures to address this under-preparedness. The close monitoring of Oval's programme offerings for the purposes of academic enhancement and institutional planning, and the facilitation of access by students to library resources at each of the centres should ensure significantly strengthened academic support for Oval's diverse student population.
3. Oval is also urged to attend to areas requiring further development, which include attention to a more systematic approach to benchmarking, the development of its management information system, and the development of a more coherent policy and model for community engagement which is better integrated with teaching and learning.

The HEQC makes recommendations in a number of areas to signal to Oval those issues that may require attention with regard to quality provision. The HEQC notes that Oval has itself identified some of these for attention, but these and a number of other issues identified in the full report will need to be incorporated into the overall quality assurance planning and practice at Oval. A summary of the commendations and recommendations follows.

## **Commendations**

1. The HEQC commends Oval for creating the Staff and Student Consultative Committee as a mechanism for consultation and feedback on quality management issues. The Committee is working to promote good relations in the institution and to elicit suggestions for improvement that could benefit both the institution and the communities that it serves.

## **Recommendations**

1. The HEQC recommends that Oval continue to strengthen the ways in which it responds to the academic needs of its diverse student intake. Oval should develop clear and coherent plans and strategies to facilitate the access and success of disadvantaged students, and in particular to address the various forms of academic under-preparedness.
2. The HEQC recommends that Oval continue to consolidate and strengthen the quality and consistency of its current programme offerings, as well as academic student support systems across all learning sites. Oval needs to assure itself of the robustness of its academic provision before planning any institutional expansion.
3. The HEQC recommends that Oval continue to consolidate and institutionalise its quality management system and strengthen its communication strategies for all levels of staff, so that staff at all learning sites are fully acquainted with the requirements of all policies and procedures.
4. The HEQC recommends that Oval develop its management information system and other systems to provide comprehensive data and information on programmes and students (including students at risk) as a basis for institutional planning, and the monitoring and tracking of progress in quality enhancement.
5. The HEQC recommends that Oval further develop its framework for ensuring consistent and commensurate delivery of educational programmes at the various campuses, and that implementation of the framework is closely monitored.
6. The HEQC recommends that Oval continue to formalise and integrate work-based learning into its programmes, where appropriate, and ensure that a system for the administration, supervision, monitoring, and assessment of work-based learning is put in place for all sites of delivery.
7. Given the role that diversity could play in widening and enriching quality, the HEQC recommends that Oval take active measures to achieve a staff complement that is more representative of the South African demographic profile.
8. The HEQC recommends that Oval continue to develop and implement a comprehensive approach to staff development, which provides for deepening the intellectual and professional strength of the academic staff at every level, as well as providing for the needs of support staff. This approach should also ensure that staff at all sites of delivery are acquainted with Oval's financial opportunities for study support.

9. The HEQC recommends that Oval develop a sustainable model for providing library resources at each site of delivery, including the development of the capacity of library staff to support academically under-prepared students and staff research activities.
10. The HEQC recommends that Oval develop a comprehensive approach to the support services which it provides to its diverse student body, for both their learning and psychological support needs.
11. The HEQC recommends that Oval formalise and document its approach to benchmarking and ensure its consistent application across all learning sites in order to assure itself of the quality and standard of its educational provision.
12. The HEQC recommends that Oval continue to strengthen its current education provision and the development of its teaching and library staff, as well as library facilities, as first steps towards building its capacity for its intended research focus.
13. The HEQC recommends that Oval develop a coherent policy and model for community engagement, which is integrated into teaching and learning activities and future research, and consistently implemented.