CHE

Higher Education Quality Committee

Framework for Programme Accreditation

NOVEMBER 2004

CHE

Council on Higher Education
Higher Education Quality Committee

Framework for Programme Accreditation

The Higher Education Quality Committee is a permanent committee of the Council on Higher Education

Published by:
The Council on Higher Education
Didacta Building
211 Skinner Street
Pretoria
South Africa

PO Box 13354
The Tramshed
0126
South Africa

Tel. +27 12 392 9132
Fax. +27 12 392 9120
Website: http://www.che.ac.za

ISBN: 1-919856-43-9
Date of Publication: November 2004

Material from this publication cannot be reproduced without the CHE's permission.
© Council on Higher Education, Pretoria

CONTENTS

FOREWORD **1**

ACRONYMS **3**

1 QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM **4**

1.1 National policy and legislative context 4

1.2 Restructuring and transformation context 5

2 THE HEQC'S PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION MODEL **7**

2.1 Introduction 7

2.2 Rationale for the programme accreditation model 7

2.3 Principles of the programme accreditation model 9

2.4 Objectives of the programme accreditation model 9

2.5 Use of criteria in the programme accreditation model 9

2.6 Accreditation arrangements for new programmes 10

2.6.1 Overview 10

2.6.2 Phases of the accreditation process 11

2.6.2.1 Candidacy phase 11

2.6.2.2 Accreditation phase 12

2.6.3 Period of accreditation 12

2.7 Re-accreditation arrangements for existing programmes 12

2.7.1 Re-accreditation arrangements for existing programmes where no statutory councils are involved 12

2.7.2 Re-accreditation arrangements for existing professional programmes 13

2.8 Judgements and the outcomes of accreditation 13

2.9 Reports on the outcomes of accreditation 15

3 CROSS-BORDER PROVISION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE 16

3.1 Foreign providers in South Africa 16

3.2 South African higher education institutions abroad 16

APPENDIX A Elements of the HEQC's programme accreditation model 17

APPENDIX B HEQC accreditation process for new programmes 18

APPENDIX C HEQC accreditation process for existing programmes 19

APPENDIX D Programme accreditation within the HEQC's schedule of activities: 2004 – 2009 20

GLOSSARY 22

FOREWORD

The Higher Education Act of 1997 assigns responsibility for quality assurance in higher education in South Africa to the Council on Higher Education (CHE). This responsibility is discharged through its permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The mandate of the HEQC includes quality promotion, institutional audit and programme accreditation. As part of the task of building an effective national quality assurance system, the HEQC has also included capacity development and training as a critical component of its programme of activities.

In addition to the requirements of the Higher Education Act, the HEQC's quality assurance mandate is carried out within the framework of the Regulations for Education and Training Quality Assurers (ETQAs) of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), which has overall responsibility for overseeing standard setting and quality assurance in support of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

Programme accreditation is a form of quality assurance which is practised in many countries and is usually associated with purposes of accountability and improvement in programme quality. In common with higher education systems in many parts of the world, South African higher education faces multiple stakeholder demands for greater responsiveness to societal needs through enhanced student access and mobility, through research and innovation that address social and economic development, and through engagement with local, regional and international communities of interest. Stakeholders also require that higher education institutions are able to provide the public with comprehensive information on the manner in which they maintain the quality and standards of their core academic activities, and to demonstrate sustained improvement in this regard.

The HEQC's approach to programme accreditation is strongly shaped by the complex challenges facing higher education institutions in an era of radical restructuring within South African higher education. The programme accreditation system seeks to be responsive to the objectives of higher education transformation as reflected in various policy and legislative documents that have been published since 1994. Ensuring that improved and sustainable quality is part of the transformation objectives of higher education institutions is, therefore, a fundamental premise of the HEQC's approach to quality assurance in general and to programme accreditation in particular.

In line with the vision of the White Paper 3: *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* of a single, coordinated higher education system, this document sets out a common programme accreditation policy framework for universities, universities of technology, agricultural colleges, private providers and other providers whose programmes and qualifications fall under the jurisdiction of the HEQC. The specific needs and circumstances of various sectors within higher education will be taken into account within the parameters of the common policy framework.

The main focus in the HEQC's programme accreditation system will be on the evaluation of new programmes, which will be carried out by the HEQC itself, or through partnerships with other statutory ETQAs in higher education on the basis of memoranda of understanding (MoUs). This is intended to ensure that only programmes that meet the necessary quality requirements are able to enter the higher education system. Existing programmes will be re-accredited through different arrangements, including HEQC national reviews and self-accreditation by the institutions themselves, provided the HEQC's quality requirements are met.

The objectives, criteria and procedures for programme accreditation have been developed on the basis of extensive comparative research and pilot tests, and in consultation with key stakeholders in the higher education community.[1] The implementation of programme accreditation will be closely monitored and appropriate adjustments made where necessary. Policy issues in higher education which are still evolving will also be taken into account.

Dr Mala Singh
Executive Director
Higher Education Quality Committee, Council on Higher Education
September 2004

1 This document should be read in conjunction with the HEQC's *Criteria for Programme Accreditation*, 2004.

ACRONYMS

AUT	Universities and Technikons Advisory Council
CESM	Classification of Educational Subject Matter
CHE	Council on Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSB	National Standards Body
PQM	Programme and Qualifications Mix
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority

1. QUALITY ASSURANCE AND THE SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION SYSTEM

1.1 National policy and legislative context

The HEQC is a permanent committee of the CHE, established by the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997. The CHE's responsibilities are to:

- Advise the Minister at his/her request or proactively on all matters related to higher education.
- Assume executive responsibility for quality assurance within higher education and training.
- Monitor and evaluate whether the policy goals and objectives for higher education are being realised.
- Contribute to developing higher education through publications and conferences.
- Report to parliament on higher education.
- Consult with stakeholders on higher education matters.

The specific functions of the HEQC are to:

- Promote quality assurance in higher education.
- Audit the quality assurance mechanisms of institutions of higher education.
- Accredit programmes of higher education.

The Board of the HEQC has added quality-related capacity development to the above functions.

The nature, purpose and scope of the HEQC's work relate to a range of policy documents and legislation that shapes and regulates the provision of higher education in South Africa,[2] in particular the requirements of the Higher Education Act as amended, and White Paper 3: *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education*. The HEQC further operates within the framework of the relevant policies and regulations of the Department of Education (DoE), including the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) and the regulations governing the registration of private providers.

As the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) with primary responsibility for the Higher Education and Training Band of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF),[3] the HEQC also operates within the requirements of the South African Qualifications Authority

2 Higher Education Quality Committee, *Founding Document*, Pretoria 2001, pp. 3-8.
3 South African Qualifications Authority Act No. 58 of 1995, Section 5 (1)(a)(ii) and Higher Education Amendment Bill, 2001, Section 7 (1) (a).

(SAQA) Act and its regulations.[4] According to the regulations, the functions of ETQAs are to:

- Accredit constituent institutions for specific standards or qualifications registered on the NQF.
- Promote the quality of constituent institutions, and monitor their provision.
- Evaluate, assess and facilitate moderation among constituent institutions, register constituent assessors for specified registered standards or qualifications in terms of the criteria established for this purpose, and take responsibility for the certification of constituent learners.
- Cooperate with the relevant body or bodies appointed to moderate across ETQAs, including, but not limited to, moderating the quality assurance on specific standards or qualifications for which one or more ETQAs are accredited.
- Recommend new standards or qualifications, or modifications to existing standards or qualifications, to the National Standards Bodies (NSBs) for consideration.
- Maintain a database acceptable to SAQA.
- Submit reports to SAQA in accordance with its requirements.
- Perform such other functions as may from time to time be assigned to it by SAQA.[5]

The accreditation function of the HEQC is related to specific DoE and SAQA functions and activities:

- The DoE approves the programme and qualification mixes (PQMs) of public higher education institutions. It funds programmes which are accredited by the HEQC. It registers all private higher education institutions before they are allowed to operate.
- SAQA registers each learning programme offered by an institution of higher education that leads to a qualification on the NQF.
- The HEQC accredits institutions of higher education to offer programmes leading to particular NQF-registered qualifications. In relevant cases, this is done in cooperation with statutory professional councils and Sector Education and Training Authorities (SETAs).[6]

The Board of the HEQC determines policy and procedures for the quality assurance work of the HEQC and has final responsibility for approving accreditation and audit reports. It makes its judgements independently of other national agencies, but seeks to complement their work where issues of quality and standards are involved. The judgements are based on evaluation reports from peer and expert review panels.

1.2 Restructuring and transformation context

In South Africa, where the higher education system has been characterised by decades of fragmentation, uneven provision and racial segregation, the challenges of higher education transformation are part of the demand for social and economic justice that is at the core of the agenda for democratic change in South African society. The restructuring of public higher education to produce a more just, effective, efficient and responsive system has been

4 Regulations under the South African Qualifications Authority Act No. 58 of 1995.
5 South African Qualifications Authority, *Criteria and Guidelines for ETQAs*, p. 27.
6 HEQC *Founding Document*, 2001, paragraphs 4.1-4.3. Institutions are permitted to offer programmes only after all the relevant DoE and SAQA processes have been followed. The sequence of these processes and required actions on the part of institutions will be set out in more detail in the HEQC's *Programme Accreditation Manual*.

under way at systemic and institutional levels for a number of years. Developments in higher education also encompass the growth of the private provider sector (including a small number of foreign providers) and its associated challenges of building quality in a relatively new sector of higher education provision and of improved articulation with the public higher education sector.

Specific quality-related goals facing the South African higher education sector include increased access and equity opportunities for previously marginalised groups, especially women and black students and staff; greater responsiveness to local, regional and national needs in and through teaching and research; improved institutional efficiencies, leading to increased throughput, retention and graduation rates in academic programmes; and increasing the pool of black and women researchers, and the pool of basic and applied knowledge, to enhance understanding and social application. The mergers and incorporations, and the development of universities of technology and comprehensive institutions in public higher education, bring the additional challenge of developing new institutions, the academic functions and products of which are characterised by improved quality and standards.

The work of the HEQC, including its programme accreditation activities, will be conducted within the context of ongoing reform and restructuring, in order to produce a transformed higher education system of high quality which is able to address the complex knowledge development needs of South African society. Programme accreditation, together with institutional audits, will take into account the continuing uneven development that characterises the South African higher education sector, and the HEQC will seek to assist institutions in identifying effective approaches to maintaining and enhancing programme quality.

Programme accreditation will also address quality-related issues pertaining to the adaptability, responsiveness and innovativeness of academic programmes in the production of new knowledge and skills and the utilisation of new modalities of provision.

2. THE HEQC'S PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION MODEL

2.1 Introduction

Programme accreditation entails the evaluation of higher education academic programmes[7] in accordance with the HEQC's programme accreditation criteria,[8] which stipulate the minimum requirements for programme input, process, output and impact,[9] and review.

Institutional audit, on the other hand, which is also within the HEQC's jurisdiction, evaluates an institution's policies, systems, strategies and resources for quality management of the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, using the HEQC's audit criteria. Quality management encompasses arrangements for quality assurance, quality support and enhancement, and quality monitoring, and covers aspects of input and process as well as outcomes.

The HEQC's accreditation and audit systems form part of an interconnected quality assurance system. This connection is evident in institutional requirements for achieving self-accreditation status.[10] The HEQC's decision about self-accreditation status will be informed by evidence of programme quality deriving from a range of sources, including evidence from audits. Self-accreditation is one of the HEQC's key strategies for facilitating the move of the higher education system towards a greater measure of quality assurance self-regulation.

2.2 Rationale for the programme accreditation model

Protecting students against poor quality programmes and maintaining the credibility of qualifications are key objectives for the HEQC. Accordingly, the HEQC's accreditation model entails a rigorous programme accreditation process, on the basis of a fundamental distinction

7 A programme is defined as a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification. A qualification is the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement

8 The HEQC's criteria for programme accreditation are set out in its *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (September, 2004).

9 Minimum requirements refer in this case to the tracking of impact.

10 Higher education institutions can apply for and be granted self-accreditation status for a period of six years after an HEQC evaluation has found that the institution satisfies its audit requirements, successfully manages internal and external programme evaluations, and satisfies other quality-related requirements of the DoE and SAQA. Self-accreditation status will enable institutions to accredit all existing programmes where no statutory council is involved.

between the accreditation of new and existing programmes.[11] In the case of new programmes, the HEQC will use a two-phase accreditation process, consisting of a candidacy and a final accreditation phase. In the candidacy phase, an institution has to demonstrate that the programme meets the minimum input standards for infrastructure, activities, resources, etc. as specified in the HEQC's programme accreditation criteria. Alternatively, the institution has to demonstrate its potential to meet these standards in a stipulated period of time. It also has to submit a plan on how it intends to implement the new programme. The candidacy phase also entails a compliance and progress evaluation midway through the programme.

Within one year of the first cohort of students graduating from the programme the institution must demonstrate compliance with conditions set during the candidacy phase and perform a self-evaluation of the programme using the HEQC's criteria for the accreditation phase. This will be evaluated by the HEQC.[12] The new programme is only accredited in the final accreditation phase.

Through this programme accreditation model the HEQC encourages the building of institutional and programme capacity in developing new programmes, particularly at historically disadvantaged institutions and new institutions. At the same time, the model protects students from poor quality programmes that run indefinitely once they are initially licensed to be offered.

In relation to the re-accreditation of existing programmes, the programme accreditation model allows for the awarding of self-accreditation status to institutions under certain conditions. This status will enable them to evaluate and monitor the quality of provision in programme areas where there are no statutory councils involved. Self-accreditation status will enable institutions to take the initiative and responsibility for programme re-accreditation on the basis of trust in their commitment to and internal arrangements for continuous quality maintenance and improvement.

Where programmes have to meet the licensure and other professional and work-based requirements of statutory councils, the HEQC will enter into cooperation agreements with these bodies. The agreements will be regulated by means of MoUs setting out the terms of the cooperation. The HEQC will ensure that its partnership and delegation agreements will allow it to discharge its own legal obligations for programme quality.

In the context of accreditation, accountability requirements for the observance of minimum standards are at the forefront. However, the programme accreditation model also allows for various opportunities for continuous improvement and development. For example, one of the important purposes of the mid-term evaluation in the candidacy phase is to provide an opportunity for development on the basis of areas identified for attention.

11 A new programme is a programme which has not been offered before, or a programme whose purpose, outcomes, field of study, mode or site of delivery has been changed considerably. An existing programme is a programme that is registered on the NQF and has been accredited by the Universities and Technikons Advisory Council (AUT), or SAQA or the HEQC.
12 Details of the candidacy and accreditation phases are provided in 2.6.2 below.

2.3 Principles of the programme accreditation model

The following principles guide the HEQC's programme accreditation model:

- Academic programmes in the higher education system should be of acceptable quality. Only those programmes which satisfy at least minimum quality requirements will be allowed to enter and remain in the higher education system.
- The primary responsibility for programme quality rests with higher education institutions themselves. Institutions should seek to establish and sustain effective mechanisms that facilitate programme quality and yield reliable information for internal programme-related planning and self-evaluation, external evaluation, and public reporting.
- The HEQC's responsibility is to establish a value-adding external system of programme accreditation that can validate institutional information on the effectiveness of arrangements for ensuring the quality of academic programmes.
- The HEQC will use a system of peer and expert review in order to ensure credible and consistent programme evaluations.

2.4. Objectives of the programme accreditation model

The objectives of the programme accreditation model are to:

- Assure and enhance the quality of higher education programmes by identifying and granting recognition status to programmes that satisfy the HEQC's minimum standards for provision, or demonstrate their potential to do so in a stipulated period of time.
- Protect students from poor quality programmes through accreditation and re-accreditation arrangements that build on reports from self-evaluation and external evaluation activities, including HEQC audits, and other relevant sources of information.
- Encourage and support providers to institutionalise a culture of self-managed evaluation that builds on and surpasses minimum standards.
- Increase the confidence of the public in higher education programmes and qualifications.
- Facilitate articulation between programmes of different higher education sectors and institutions.

2.5 Use of criteria in the programme accreditation model

The HEQC has developed a set of programme accreditation criteria which specify minimum standards for academic programmes.[13] The criteria take into account national policies and regulatory frameworks, the institutional quality landscape, and international trends with respect to quality and standards in higher education. They were finalised after taking stakeholder comments into consideration.

The HEQC's programme accreditation criteria serve as quality indicators for institutions which are undertaking self-evaluations in preparation for the accreditation of new

13 See the HEQC's *Criteria for Programme Accreditation*, 2004.

programmes or re-accreditation of existing programmes. Institutions may set additional requirements in order to further enhance the quality of their programmes.

Programmes will be evaluated by HEQC-appointed peer review panels of subject specialists, using the accreditation criteria. The criteria are formulated in a generic manner so as to be applicable to all academic programmes. The HEQC recognises the need for flexibility in the interpretation of the criteria, since the relative importance and weight to be attached to specific programme areas and their related criteria may differ between programmes. For example, the availability of advanced computer hardware and software would be more crucial for a programme in computer science than for one in philosophy. Members of the peer review panels have the responsibility for using their discipline and subject knowledge to make appropriate judgements within the context of the programme that is evaluated.

2.6 Accreditation arrangements for new programmes[14]

2.6.1 Overview

The accreditation requirements for new programmes are intended to ensure that only those programmes which satisfy at least minimum standards of quality, as stipulated in the HEQC's *Criteria for Programme Accreditation*, or can demonstrate the potential to do so in a stipulated period of time, will be allowed to enter the higher education system. Besides meeting the HEQC's minimum standards, new professional programmes must meet the licensure and other professional and work-based requirements of statutory councils. The model of cooperation agreed upon by the HEQC and statutory councils, as set out in the individual MoUs, will determine the nature of the statutory councils' involvement.

The methodology followed in the accreditation process for new programmes will include a self-evaluation report by the institution on the proposed programme, judged against the HEQC's programme accreditation criteria for the relevant accreditation phase, and additional benchmarks which the institution may wish to use. This will be followed by an external evaluation, which will include peer review and a site visit where necessary.

The process of accreditation of new programmes will consist of a candidacy and an accreditation phase, in which the HEQC's programme accreditation criteria for the particular phase have to be met. In both phases, a site visit may take place, if necessary. A sliding scale taking into account the nature of the provider (e.g. niche-based institution, private or public, distance or contact) and its period of existence may also be used.

14 It should be noted that, in addition to the HEQC's accreditation arrangements, institutions intending to offer new programmes have to satisfy the following before they can do so:

- DoE registration requirements for private institutions offering specific learning programmes leading to qualifications registered on the NQF.
- DoE approval requirements for public institutions for activities in specified CESM fields and in specified fields and levels (PQM), as well as the need to obtain funding approval for any new qualifications.
- SAQA requirements for the registration of qualifications on the NQF.

2.6.2 Phases of the accreditation process

2.6.2.1 Candidacy phase

In its submission for candidacy status for a new programme, an institution has to demonstrate, firstly, that it fulfils the HEQC's criteria for the candidacy phase, i.e. the minimum standards for activities which should take place, or resources, conditions, etc. which should be available or present, in order to offer the programme (input criteria). Alternatively, the institution has to demonstrate its potential and capability to meet these standards in a stipulated period of time. The institution's application for candidacy status should be based on a critical self-evaluation of the new programme judged against the requirements of the HEQC's programme input criteria.

Secondly, the institution has to submit a plan for the implementation of the new programme. The plan could specify, for example:

- Implementation steps for the new programme, together with time frames and budgetary allocations for each step, and the human resources for managing the implementation. This includes implementation of the policies, strategies, conditions, etc. specified in the criteria for the candidacy phase, and provision of the required infrastructure.
- Institutional strategies to ensure that the HEQC's criteria for programme progress, output and impact, and review are met in the accreditation phase of the new programme.

Applications for new programmes will be evaluated by an HEQC panel of specialist peers. A site visit may also be undertaken by the peer panel or by the HEQC secretariat, where necessary. If the requirements for candidacy status are met, the HEQC will award provisional accreditation to the new programme.[15]

Midway through the programme, the institution will be required to submit a progress report for evaluation by the HEQC secretariat. A site visit will be undertaken only when circumstances warrant it. The progress report should provide details on the following:

- Steps taken to address issues identified by the HEQC for urgent attention when the candidacy submission was approved.
- Progress in relation to the implementation plan submitted to the HEQC for the programme. This includes progress with the implementation of the policies, strategies, conditions, etc. specified in the criteria for the candidacy phase, and with the provision of the required infrastructure. This will provide an early warning (to the institution and to the HEQC) about problem areas, as well as an opportunity for appropriate developmental intervention, where necessary.
- Structures, strategies, processes, etc. which are in operation or in development to ensure that the HEQC's criteria for programme process, programme output and impact, and programme review in the accreditation phase of the programme are met.

15 A new programme receives full accreditation only after the requirements for the accreditation phase have been met.

2.6.2.2 Accreditation phase

Within one year of the first cohort of students graduating from the new programme, the institution must demonstrate that it has met the conditions set by the HEQC during the candidacy phase, which include conditions relating to the evaluation of the mid-term report from the institution. Acceptable reasons and relevant evidence have to be provided in instances where the conditions have not been met.

The institution is also required to conduct a self-evaluation of the programme against the HEQC's criteria for the accreditation phase, which include those for programme input,[16] process, output and impact, and review, and submit a programme improvement plan to address areas in need of attention as identified in the self-evaluation. A site visit may be conducted, if necessary.

If the institution's submission is approved by the HEQC, the programme obtains accreditation status.

It should be noted that, in both phases of accreditation, institutions will have the opportunity to further develop the programme where it does not meet the required criteria, on the expectation that they have the ability to remedy the problem areas and attain minimum standards within a stipulated period of time.

2.6.3 Period of accreditation

New programmes will be accredited as follows:

- New one- and two-year programmes may be accredited for a maximum of three years.
- New programmes with a duration of three years and longer may be accredited for a maximum of six years.

2.7 Re-accreditation arrangements for existing programmes[17]

2.7.1 Re-accreditation arrangements for existing programmes where no statutory councils are involved

Re-accreditation of existing programmes where no statutory councils are involved will be linked to institutional self-accreditation status, which the HEQC will grant to institutions for a period of six years. This will allow an institution to re-accredit its existing programmes

16 The institution also has to evaluate whether the policies, strategies, conditions, etc. specified in the criteria for the candidacy phase of the programme have been implemented and whether the required infrastructure is in place.

17 Re-accreditation of existing programmes will generally not be conducted by the HEQC in its schedule of activities: 2004 – 2009, except where:

- An institution performs consistently poorly in the accreditation of new programmes.
- Audits or re-accreditation of existing programmes through national reviews point to serious problem areas.
- The HEQC decides to undertake re-accreditation for other relevant reasons.

where no statutory council is involved. The HEQC's decision on granting self-accreditation status will be based on audit findings for the institution, as well as programme quality information from HEQC sources, and other quality-related information from the DoE and SAQA. In addition, the institution has to present a satisfactory quality management plan for the execution of its re-accreditation responsibilities during the period of self-accreditation.

If an institution has not obtained self-accreditation status, the HEQC reserves the right to conduct an evaluation of existing programmes where no statutory councils are involved.

2.7.2 Re-accreditation arrangements for existing professional programmes

The HEQC recognises the responsibilities and interests of statutory councils with regard to vocational and professional education, particularly with regard to licensure and other professional and work-based requirements. The HEQC is in the process of developing appropriate models of cooperation with such councils and SETA ETQAs. Cooperation agreements will include provision for the HEQC to monitor the MoUs, details of the model of cooperation and an indication of the qualifications and institutions covered by the agreement.

Professional programmes which do not have statutory councils or SETA ETQAs associated with them will be re-accredited by the HEQC, in consultation with interested organisations in the field.

2.8 Judgements and the outcomes of accreditation

The peer review panel will first evaluate the programme(s) against each individual criterion as set out in the HEQC's *Criteria for Programme Accreditation*. The following categories will be used to classify the results in each instance:

(i) *Commend:* All the minimum standards specified in the criterion were fully met and, in addition, good practices and innovation were identified in relation to the criterion.

(ii) *Meets minimum standards:* Minimum standards as specified in the criterion were met.

(iii) *Needs improvement:* Did not comply with all the minimum standards specified in the criterion. Problems/weaknesses could be addressed in a short period of time.

(iv) *Does not comply:* Did not comply with the majority of the minimum standards specified in the criterion.

The outcomes of the accreditation process as a whole will be determined in a holistic manner and not by merely calculating the sum total of the evaluations against individual criteria. The following classification will be used for the accreditation outcomes of the programme as a whole:

Table 1: Criteria, judgements and outcomes

	Evaluation against HEQC criteria	*Classification of accreditation outcomes*
1. New programmes (a) Candidacy phase	**Exceeds minimum standards:** All minimum standards specified in the criteria were met and, in addition, examples of good practice and innovation were identified in relation to several criteria.	Provisionally accredited.[18]
	Complies with minimum standards: All minimum standards specified in the criteria were met.	Provisionally accredited.
	Needs improvement: Not all minimum standards specified in the criteria were met. Problems/ weaknesses could be addressed in a short period of time.	Provisionally accredited (with conditions).
	Does not meet minimum standards: Did not meet the majority of minimum standards specified in the criteria.	Not provisionally accredited.
(b) Accreditation phase	**Exceeds minimum standards:** All minimum standards specified in the criteria were met and, in addition, examples of good practice and innovation were identified in relation to several criteria.	Accredited.
	Complies with minimum standards: All minimum standards specified in the criteria were met.	Accredited.
	Needs improvement: Not all minimum standards specified in the criteria were met. Problems/ weaknesses could be addressed in a short period of time.	Accredited (with conditions).
	Does not meet minimum standards: Did not meet the majority of minimum standards specified in the criteria.	Not accredited.

18 New programmes are only provisionally accredited during the candidacy phase. Full accreditation is granted if the criteria for the accreditation phase are met.

	Evaluation against HEQC criteria	*Classification of accreditation outcomes*
2. Existing programmes	**Exceeds minimum standards:** All minimum standards specified in the criteria were met and, in addition, examples of good practice and innovation were identified in relation to several criteria.	Accredited.
	Complies with minimum standards: All minimum standards specified in the criteria were met.	Accredited.
	Needs improvement: Not all minimum standards specified in the criteria were met. Problems/ weaknesses could be addressed in a short period of time.	Accredited (with conditions).
	Does not meet minimum standards: Did not meet the majority of minimum standards specified in the criteria.	Not accredited.

2.9 Report on the outcomes of accreditation

Evaluator reports will reflect judgements arrived at in relation to each individual HEQC criterion, as well as the evaluation of the programme as a whole, using the classification model set out in Section 2.8 above. Evaluator reports will be forwarded by the HEQC to the institution for comment on factual errors, discrepancies and omissions. The reports, together with the institution's comments, will be submitted to the HEQC Board for approval. The full final report will, thereafter, be presented to the institution. A summary of the report will be published on the HEQC website. The summary will be updated, where necessary, as progress is made with the implementation of the institution's improvement plan.

3. CROSS-BORDER PROVISION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE

3.1 Foreign providers in South Africa

All foreign institutions which offer higher education programmes in South Africa, including those higher education institutions which are subject to the accreditation requirements of other national, regional or international agencies, are subject to the HEQC's programme accreditation policies, requirements and procedures. In addition, these institutions have to satisfy the registration requirements of the DoE and the qualification registration requirements of SAQA.

3.2 South African higher education institutions abroad

South African higher education institutions which operate outside the country are subject to the HEQC's programme accreditation policies, requirements and procedures for all their local as well as cross-border academic activities. In addition to the HEQC's requirements, such institutions have to satisfy the relevant quality assurance policies and procedures of the countries in which they operate. The HEQC will cooperate closely with national quality assurance agencies in countries where South African higher education institutions have an operational presence, in order to share relevant accreditation and audit information.

All higher education providers which are operating across borders need to ensure equivalence in the quality of provision at different sites of delivery in South Africa and abroad.

ELEMENTS OF THE HEQC'S PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION MODEL

PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION MODEL

New programmes

Accreditation requirements and methodology

(i) Requirements:

- HEQC's programme criteria for both phases of the accreditation process.
- *Professional programmes:* In addition to the HEQC's criteria, also licensure and other professional and work-based requirements of statutory councils.

(ii) Methodology:

Self-evaluation using the HEQC's programme accreditation criteria, followed by external peer evaluation. A site visit may be conducted by the HEQC in the accreditation phase, if necessary.

Accreditation process and outcomes

Candidacy phase (provisional accreditation)

↓

Accreditation phase

↓

Outcome:

Programme accredited for stipulated period of time.

Involvement of statutory councils

Involved in accreditation of professional programmes, depending on nature of cooperation agreement with HEQC.

Existing programmes

Programmes where no statutory council is involved

(i) Requirements:

- Where self-accreditation status was obtained, HEQC criteria for existing programmes and institutional benchmarks.
- Where self-accreditation status was not obtained, HEQC criteria for existing programmes.

(ii) Methodology:

- Where self-accreditation status was granted, self-evaluation against HEQC criteria and institutional benchmarks, followed by external evaluation arranged by the institution.
- Where self-accreditation status was not granted, the HEQC reserves the right to conduct an evaluation by a panel of subject specialists using the HEQC's programme criteria.

Professional programmes

(i) Requirements:

- Where a statutory council exists, requirements as specified in the MoU between the HEQC and the statutory council.
- Where no statutory council or SETA ETQA is involved, HEQC criteria for existing programmes in association with interested parties.

(ii) Methodology:

- Where a statutory council exists, methodology as specified in the MoU between the HEQC and the statutory council.
- Where no statutory council or SETA ETQA is involved, evaluation by an HEQC review panel of subject specialists using the HEQC's programme criteria, in consultation with interested organisations in the field.

HEQC ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR NEW PROGRAMMES

Candidacy phase

Submission to HEQC of application for candidacy status for new programme

(i) Self-evaluation of new programme against HEQC's criteria for programme input.
(ii) Plan for implementation of new programme.

↓

Evaluation by HEQC panel of peers (site visit, if necessary)

↓

Decision by HEQC Board

↓

Publication of decision only on HEQC website

Mid-term progress report

(i) Submission of institutional progress report on programme for evaluation by HEQC secretariat.
(ii) Site visit only where circumstances warrant it.
(iii) Communication of outcome of evaluation to institution.

↓

Accreditation phase

Submission to HEQC of application for accreditation status for programme with candidacy status

(i) Demonstration that conditions set during candidacy phase have been met.
(ii) Self-evaluation of programme using HEQC's criteria for programme input, process, output and impact, and review.

↓

Evaluation by HEQC panel of peers (site visit, if necessary)

↓

Evaluation reports to institution for comments on factual errors, discrepancies and omissions

↓

Evaluation reports to HEQC Board, together with institution's comments

↓

Decision by HEQC Board

↓

Final report to institution

↓

Publication of summary of report on HEQC website. The summary will be updated, where necessary, as progress is made with the implementation of the institution's improvement plan.

HEQC ACCREDITATION PROCESS FOR EXISTING PROGRAMMES

Programmes where no statutory council is involved

Institutions with self-accreditation status

Self-evaluation of existing programmes using HEQC criteria and institutional benchmarks

Institutions without self-accreditation status

Self-evaluation of programme by institution using HEQC criteria for existing programmes

↓

Evaluation by HEQC panel of peers (site visit, if necessary)

↓

Evaluation reports to institution for comments on factual errors, discrepancies and omissions

↓

Evaluation reports to HEQC Board, together with institution's comments

↓

Final report to institution

↓

Publication of summary of report on HEQC website. The summary will be updated, where necessary, as progress is made with the implementation of the institution's improvement plan.

Professional programmes

Programmes where statutory council and SETA ETQA have an interest

Process and requirements as specified in MOU between HEQC and statutory council and SETA ETQA

Where no statutory council or SETA ETQA is involved

Self-evaluation of programme by institution, using HEQC criteria for existing programmes, with input from interested parties

↓

Evaluation by HEQC panel of peers in association with interested parties (if necessary, with site visit)

↓

Evaluation reports to institution for comments on factual errors, discrepancies and omissions

↓

Evaluation reports to HEQC Board, together with institution's comments

↓

Final report to institution

↓

Publication of summary of report on HEQC website. The summary will be updated, where necessary, as progress is made with the implementation of the institution's improvement plan.

PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION WITHIN THE HEQC'S SCHEDULE OF ACTIVITIES: 2004 – 2009

The HEQC's quality assurance activities during the period 2004 – 2009 are structured into Phase A (2004 – 2006) and Phase B (2007 – 2009). The details below indicate how programme accreditation fits into the envisaged schedule:

Phase A (2004 – 2006):

(a) Full-scale audits commence at all public and private higher education institutions where no mergers are under way.

(b) In the case of merged institutions, provision is made for a three-year settling-down period. The HEQC will undertake visits to merged institutions in the first year after the merger date, in order to ascertain the nature and level of planning for institutional and programme quality management.

(c) New programmes from all public and private higher education institutions undergo accreditation processes that may include site visits, in order to ensure that only programmes of good quality enter the higher education system. This includes new programmes from merged institutions.

(d) In general, existing programmes are not re-accredited by the HEQC. Where professional councils or other statutory bodies require existing programmes to be re-accredited, the HEQC will undertake such re-accreditation jointly with other relevant ETQAs in a range of cooperation modalities.

(e) National reviews (such as the HEQC's MBA re-accreditation exercise) are undertaken in selected programme, qualification or disciplinary areas.

(f) Self-accreditation status is not granted to higher education institutions. However, institutions intending to apply for self-accreditation status in Phase B (2007 – 2009) can use this opportunity to develop the necessary structures, systems and capacity for self-accreditation.

Phase B (2007 – 2009):

(a) Audits continue at all institutions not affected by mergers.

(b) Audits commence at merged institutions.

(c) Accreditation of new programmes of all institutions continues.

(d) Re-accreditation of existing programmes is generally not conducted by the HEQC, except if an institution performs consistently poorly in the accreditation of new programmes, or if the audits or the re-accreditation of existing programmes through national reviews point to serious problem areas.

(e) Institutions can apply for self-accreditation status. This status will be granted on the basis of satisfactory evidence of the effectiveness of internal quality management systems and programme quality.[19] The HEQC could undertake selective re-evaluations of existing programmes in institutions which apply for self-accreditation status, in cases where this is deemed necessary by the HEQC.

(f) National reviews continue as required.

19 For more information on self-accreditation status, see the Glossary.

Accreditation Recognition status granted to a programme for a stipulated period of time after an HEQC evaluation indicates that it meets minimum standards of quality.

Audit See Institutional audit.

Benchmarking Within a programme context, a process by which a programme is evaluated and compared against internal and external, national and international reference points, for the purposes of accountability and improvement.

Candidacy status Status granted to a provider that demonstrates capacity or potential to meet the minimum standards of provision determined by the HEQC for the intended programme and qualification. The provider can begin to offer the programme to the first cohort of students.

Cooperative education An approach to learning that promotes the concept of enhanced learning based on cooperation between education institutions on the one hand, and industry, commerce and the public sector on the other.

Criteria for programme accreditation Minimum standards necessary to support and enhance the quality of teaching and learning in a programme.

Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) Body responsible for monitoring and auditing the level of achievement of national standards or qualifications offered by providers and to which specific functions have been assigned by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA).

Evaluators See Programme evaluators.

Existing programme A programme that is registered on the NQF and has been accredited by the AUT or SAQA or the HEQC.

Experiential learning A term traditionally used within the former technikon sector for 'work-based learning'. (See Work-based learning.)

Institutional accreditation Status attained after an HEQC evaluation has found that a new private higher education institution has the potential or capability to meet minimum quality thresholds of educational provision for higher education.

Institutional audit An improvement-oriented evaluation of the effectiveness of institutional arrangements for quality and quality assurance in teaching and learning, research and community engagement, based on a self-evaluation conducted by the institution. The external evaluation is conducted by a panel of peers and experts using the HEQC's criteria and other quality requirements set by the institution itself. The audit panel's findings form the basis of the HEQC's report to the audited institution, with commendations on good practice and recommendations for improvement.

Institutionally managed evaluation Evaluation activities which are initiated, managed and financed by the institution itself.

Minimum standards Requirements for a specific level of provision that a programme has to meet in order to be accredited by the HEQC.

New programme A programme which has not been offered before, or a programme whose purpose, outcomes, field of study, mode or site of delivery has been considerably changed.

Professional programme A programme that has to meet the licensure and other professional and work-based requirements of statutory councils.

Programme A purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification.

Programme evaluation The external quality assurance processes which are undertaken in order to make an independent assessment of a programme's development, management and outcomes through the validation of the findings of an internal programme self-evaluation.

Programme evaluator Subject specialist with the expertise and training to undertake external evaluations of programmes.

Provisional accreditation Status granted by the HEQC to a new programme when it complies with the criteria set for the candidacy phase.

Qualification Formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by an accredited institution.

Quality assurance Processes of ensuring that institutional arrangements for meeting specified quality standards or requirements of education provision are effective.

Re-accreditation Accreditation of an existing programme after its previous accreditation by the AUT or SAQA or the HEQC.

Self-accreditation status Status granted by the HEQC to an institution for a period of six years which enables the institution to re-accredit existing programmes, where no statutory council has jurisdiction. Information which will be considered by the HEQC in order to grant self-accreditation status will include the audit findings for the institution, as well as programme quality information from HEQC sources, and other relevant information from the DoE and SAQA. The institution also has to present a quality management plan for the execution of its re-accreditation responsibilities during the period of self-accreditation.

Self-evaluation Within a programme accreditation context, self-evaluation refers to the process by which an institution critically reviews and evaluates its programmes using the benchmarks of the HEQC's programme accreditation criteria and any other quality criteria that it deems relevant. The process leads to the development of the self-evaluation report.

Service learning Applied learning which is directed at specific community needs and is integrated into an academic programme and curriculum. It could be credit-bearing and assessed, and may take place in a work environment.

Universities and Technikons Advisory Council (AUT) This was the Minister of Education's advisory body before 1994.

Work-based learning A component of a learning programme that focuses on the application of theory in an authentic, work-based context. It addresses specific competences identified for the acquisition of a qualification, which relate to the development of skills that will make the learner employable and will assist in developing his/her personal skills. Employer and professional bodies are involved in the assessment of experiential learning, together with academic staff.