

SOUTH AFRICAN COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY ASSURANCE



COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION



Higher Education Act



NQF Act



QAF Launch



QAF IS APPROVED

2020

STAKEHOLDER CONSULTATIVE PROCESS CONTINUED

2021

REGIONAL WORKSHOPS BEGAN

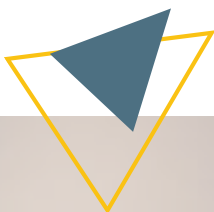
2022

QAF LAUNCHED

2023

QAF TO BE MORE FULLY IMPLEMENTED

2024



SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION FACES INTERRELATED CHALLENGES

The quality assurance framework (QAF) was conceptualised at a juncture in South Africa's history that presented both unprecedented challenges and novel opportunities for innovative change.

The higher education (HE) system in the country faces interrelated challenges related to socio-economic development, the contextual relevance of knowledge production and dissemination, rapid advances in technology, the continuing need for systematic, societal and economic transformation, and the increasing fragility of the planetary ecosystem due to environmental degradation.

THE CHE WILL FULFIL ITS LEGAL MANDATE AS QUALITY COUNCIL FOR HE THROUGH ITS EQA FUNCTIONS

After 25 years of managing external quality assurance (EQA), the Council on Higher Education (CHE) is changing its EQA model in the dynamically changing higher education sector. The QAF aims to simplify processes and provide higher education institutions (HEIs) with greater self-regulation, responsibility and accountability for the quality management (QM) of their provisioning for HE through their internal quality assurance (IQA) systems.

As the Quality Council (QC) for HE, the CHE will fulfil its EQA responsibility through its QA functions of standards development, quality promotion and capacity development (QPCD), quality reviews and accreditation of qualifications. In the QAF, the CHE emphasises a developmental approach to building and supporting internal quality assurance in institutions. This will be balanced by the need for accountability to ensure that HE standards are met.

THE CHE CONDUCTED AN EXTENSIVE ANALYSIS

In conceptualising this QAF, the CHE undertook a historical analysis of the legislative and CHE contexts and higher education and quality assurance (QA) trajectories over the past two decades. It also examined current international and national trends and undertook a needs analysis based on evaluations and consultations.



PURPOSE OF THE QAF



1

The purpose of the QAF is to put in place a QA system that strengthens and enhances the quality of higher education provisioning, thereby contributing to knowledge generation and construction, dissemination and application. This focus entails connecting the quality of the academic project, which includes learning and teaching, research and community engagement, to the broader social purpose of building a sustainable and equitable social order in South Africa while simultaneously ensuring global relevance.

2

The QAF focuses sharply on the learning and teaching, and educational experiences that institutions provide to their students, and on their personal development and the extent to which they prepare them as graduates for national, continental and global citizenship, capable of addressing complex societal, environmental, economic and political issues, and leading change and innovation. It emphasises the integrated and coherent way in which an institution's research agenda and community engagement initiatives support and contribute to the academic project in line with its unique vision, mission and identified goals.

3

Thus, the QAF is intended to be used as a strategic lever to a) strengthen the relevance of HEIs to social, environmental, economic issues and justice in South Africa; b) strengthen HEI accountability for quality; c) support HEIs in the development of robust quality cultures and appropriate structures; and d) focus attention on the academic project and pedagogic practices in the context of technological advancements. Ultimately the QAF should contribute to building confidence in the quality of higher education provisioning and HEI graduates in South Africa.



PURPOSE OF THE QAF

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The QAF is based on the fundamental premise that HEIs are responsible for the quality of their core academic and support functions and that academic leadership, Communities of Practice, peer review and innovation work together to achieve continuous quality improvements and enhancements. Institutions should have the capacity to translate the information generated by both IQA and EQA mechanisms into institutional knowledge for institutional planning, academic leadership, continuous improvement and innovation.

5

In the QAF, the CHE draws attention to curriculum transformation, pedagogic renewal and the flexibility of provision. It does so in a way that engages HEIs to reflect critically on what their IQA findings indicate and how best to address them. Engagement through dialogue is more likely to build understanding of how institutions could be more socially accountable to improve the quality of the educational experience of students. In using a generative and reflexive approach in executing its EQA functions in the QAF, the CHE will contribute positively to the academic project of higher education in South Africa.

OBJECTIVES OF THE QAF



The QAF has developed the following objectives to assure the public regarding the extent and depth of an HEI's commitment to quality delivery:

To develop and implement an agile future-oriented QA system that is responsive to the national planning and policy context, as well as a changing and differentiated HE sector and varying aspects of workplace requirements. Each of the EQA functions seeks to advance this goal by promoting reflexive and flexible practices, building CoPs, nurturing innovation, cultivating institutional investigative capacity, leading and implementing educational change, and building academic leadership relating to flexible curricula and pedagogy and the institutional functions that support these.

To improve the quality of higher education in the sector through engagement with HEIs and Quality Promotion and Capacity Development (QPCD) initiatives.

To harness synergies between the CHE's EQA functions so that they work together to form an integrated view of the QA performance of an institution, which the CHE will use as the basis for its differentiated focus during its engagement with institutions. Such engagement could relate to an institution's capacity development initiatives and lines of enquiry for conducting its functions of institutional reviews, qualification accreditation and national reviews. ICT advancements will be utilised to create an integrated view of an institution's QA systems and the quality of its provisioning. This integrated view, which the CHE refers to as an institutional QA-dashboard, displays different layers and levels of relevant quantitative and qualitative QA data and analyses relating to every institution and will be regularly updated.

To support institutional innovation and responsiveness to national and international trend sin the interest of creating a sustainable and equitable society.

To develop a functioning EQA system to optimise its efficiency in relation to funding capacity and human resources, and form the basis for sector-wide analysis and intelligence.



“THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF THE QAF



1

Institutional Responsibility and Accountability for IQA

The primary responsibility of HEIs is to assure internal quality. They are accountable for the quality of learning and teaching, the educational experiences of their students, the competencies of their graduates and system flexibility, as well as for the quality and impact of their research and innovation outputs and activities, community engagement, academic support, staff development and the range of support services provided for the academic community.

To do this, HEIs should ensure that they have well-established and fully functional IQA systems, appropriate plans, policies, structures, processes and networks, and the resources and flexibility to assure quality across all their functions and operations, including the core academic activities, governance structures and management, administrative and support services.

To ensure that all aspects of educational provision are functioning as planned, the CHE expects institutions to conduct their own self-reviews as part of regular institutional quality review cycles and to collect evidence that would inform continuous quality improvement and enhancement.

The QAF will facilitate and support development and assure the effectiveness of the HEI's IQA mechanisms in meeting the CHE's quality standards.

2

Integration

Integration means that all aspects of the QA activities, regardless of whether they are the EQA activities of the CHE or the IQA activities of the HEIs, are interconnected and cannot exist or be understood independently of each other. The EQA functions are therefore designed and implemented with due regard for the interdependencies and interrelationships that exist in complex systems. The concept of integration can also be expanded to include the need to create intra- and interinstitutional connectedness, e.g. through the establishment of Communities of Practice.

To assure system flexibility and agility, responsive Communities of Practice and collaboration between Communities of Practice are needed.

The QAF was built on the principle of structural and functional integration between the CHE's EQA functions and has identified the synergies between and among the different lenses that it will employ to assure quality at an institutional level in HEIs. An integrated approach to EQA is followed in the QAF. Central to this is the development of integrated track records of HEQC decisions on the findings and outcomes of various types of EQA reviews and qualification accreditation decisions for each institution, that is an institutional QA-dashboard view of QA information management data and analyses. Also central to this approach are communication and transparency between and within institutional units, as well as between institutions.

“THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF THE QAF



3

Fitness for Purpose and Fitness of Purpose

The EQA system of the CHE for higher education has to be ‘fit’ for the South African context and a rapidly changing world. It has to deal with the ongoing challenge of transformation, which includes the need to widen both formal and epistemological access.

To achieve this, it needs to track system flexibility to meet the needs of the students. The EQA system has to deal with challenges presented by a South African higher education system that is growing, is becoming increasingly complex, fluid and at times unstable, and has to be responsive to rapid advances in new technologies as well as the societal challenges that impact on higher education.

In terms of fitness of purpose, the CHE has to fulfil its mandate in terms of both the Higher Education Act of 1997 and the NQF Act of 2008, as amended. In doing so, it needs to streamline its functions and processes to become an effective, efficient, responsive, innovative, and, if necessary, a disruptive external quality assurance agency.

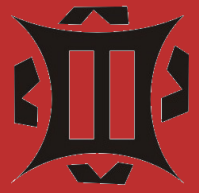
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Differentiation

The adoption of a differentiated approach has various dimensions. The first dimension recognises that in the sector as a whole, institutions are at different levels of functionality in terms of the effectiveness of their IQA systems. This implies that some institutions may initially require more frequent and deeper engagements than others with respect to QA. The second dimension relates to the need to support institutions to achieve their differentiated missions. The CHE values and supports the uniqueness of different institutions and institutional types, which should be harnessed to strengthen the entire system and not perpetuate inequities within the system. This is important as a lack of adequate attention to, and support for mission differentiation could lead to mission drift and inappropriate approaches to QA through standards that do not support mission differentiation. The third dimension relates to the importance of the QAF and its functions to be sensitive and responsive to the contexts of different institutions. In its engagement with institutions, the CHE recognises and respects the unique contexts in which each institution is situated.

In order to implement a differentiated approach, the CHE uses a reflexive and generative approach to the development of quality standards. This approach recognises that standards are quality codes that should be developed for all areas of quality management, but that they should be formulated in a manner that allows for the unique contexts and approaches of different institutions.

“THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF THE QAF



5

Simplification

Simplification of the current system is essential to address the administrative burden currently faced by institutions and the CHE. This means that EQA processes will be streamlined to eliminate and reduce the duplication of actions and information required from HEIs, and reduce the burden of reporting by institutions with well-established IQA systems.

Wherever possible, EQA requirements and processes will be made more understandable and manageable without compromising their focus, robustness and effectiveness. As part of this process, the streamlining of the information requirements for HEIs and statutory professional bodies will be considered. The integrated institutional QA-dashboards will assist in this process of simplification by building up a track record of the HEQC decisions for an institution.

Thus, the CHE intends to establish a streamlined, future-oriented, innovative and technology-supported system - the management information system (MIS) - for the QA of the higher education sector.

6

Collaboration

To ensure the credibility of the EQA system, all components of the system need to be developed in a consultative and collaborative manner. Higher education institutions, professional bodies and other key stakeholders have been extensively consulted to ensure that the processes and procedures in the QAF are fit for purpose, taking into consideration the contextual factors and that there is buy-in from stakeholders.

The QAF promotes collaboration between the CHE and other regulatory bodies such as the DHET, SAQA, the QTCO, Umalusi and statutory professional bodies based on a common understanding of the roles and responsibilities of the partners in the collaboration.

The implementation of the QAF takes due cognisance of changes in their regulatory environments, the roles played by other regulatory bodies and agencies in the quality assurance of qualifications and programmes, including qualifications on the OQSF, and qualifications in professional fields. Enhanced communication within and between entities is needed to streamline the quality assurance processes further.

“THE SEVEN PRINCIPLES OF THE QAF



7

Innovation

The QAF is designed for the future and is innovative, agile and developmental in its differentiated approach to institutions. Innovation in the context of quality management refers, among other things, to the capabilities required to generate and apply new knowledge, ideas or methods to help drive, sustain and nurture quality improvement efforts in higher education to achieve better outcomes and more efficient and effective processes and services.

The CHE has used innovative ways to optimise the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of its QA functions, for example in the way it will use ICT to optimise the manner in which it collects and analyses data obtained from the HEIs into a comprehensive MIS which will allow a view of the historical track record and current trajectory of each institution.



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