



**REPORT TO THE HESA BOARD OF DIRECTORS
REPORTING PERIOD: 1 JANUARY 2012 – 31 MAY 2012**

REPORT NO 1 OF 2012

1 BACKGROUND

The 2012 Operational Plan outlines HESA's activities for the year. The report reviews HESA's performance for the period 1 January 2012 to 31 May 2012. The Operational Plan and the organisation's efforts focus on implementing the priorities set out in its Strategic Framework 2010 – 2020. With this overall directive, a number of key priority areas were identified by the Board in finalising the Operational Plan.

2 PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES

The report provides an update on project activities carried out from January to May 2012.

2.1. **Infrastructure and Equipment Studies:** The Board has approved the building and equipment study report in principle, subject to data being verified by the 23 Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Final comments from the universities were incorporated in the report. The final report is available on the HESA website. Click on the link below to access the full report.

[http://www.hesa.org.za/sites/hesa.org.za/files/HESA-INFRASTRUCTURESTUDY-Final report-31 March 2012.pdf](http://www.hesa.org.za/sites/hesa.org.za/files/HESA-INFRASTRUCTURESTUDY-Final%20report-31%20March%202012.pdf)

2.2 **Next Generation of Academics:** The report was finalised and published. The Chairperson of the Funding Strategy Group is interacting with key stakeholders with a view to securing funding for the initiative. The final report is available on the HESA website.

2.3 **Responding to the Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training System:** The Minister of Higher Education and Training released a Green Paper on Post School Education and Training on 12 January 2012 for public comments by 30 April 2012. HESA has finalised its response paper, preceded by a seminar on the Green Paper held on 18 April 2012. The final HESA response paper is available on the HESA website. Click on the link below to access the full report.

[http://www.hesa.org.za/sites/hesa.org.za/files/HESA Final Response to Green Paper for PSET May 2012.pdf](http://www.hesa.org.za/sites/hesa.org.za/files/HESA%20Final%20Response%20to%20Green%20Paper%20for%20PSET%20May%202012.pdf)

2.4 **Development of a response to the Report of the Ministerial Committee on the Review of Science, Technology and Innovation Landscape:** A process, driven by the Research and Innovation Strategy Group, is underway to facilitate a sector response to the Report.

2.5 **Development of a framework for strengthening university-industry partnerships:** In light of the imperative to strengthen university-industry partnerships and collaborations, HESA undertook an investigation and produced a report. The report, amongst others:

- a. Identifies and analyses existing collaboration initiatives between universities and the industry;
- b. Reflects on the strengths and gaps of the current modes/models of collaboration between the universities and the industry and their implications for research and innovation development;
- c. Analyses established and emerging international trends and best practices and new modes of collaborations between the industry and universities (including those driven by specific industrial sectors); and
- d. Recommends modes of collaboration between universities and the industry given the unique context of South Africa.

The recommendations of the report are being taken forward by HESA, through the Research and Innovation Strategy Group. The report is available on the HESA website. Click on the link below to access the full report.

http://www.hesa.org.za/sites/hesa.org.za/files/HESA_Promoting_University_Industry_Partnerships_May_2012.pdf

2.6 **Developing a HESA position paper on an alternative model for promoting joint use of research equipment:** HESA, through the Research and Innovation Strategy Group, has commissioned a study to investigate the joint use of expensive research equipment and infrastructure by the scientific fraternity and especially universities. This involves reflecting on current initiatives underway at national and regional levels to promote joint use of research equipment amongst universities and science councils, including national facilities. The study also covers the analysis of international trends and extracting best practices that could be applied in South Africa or guide the thinking behind development of an alternative model. The ultimate aim of the project is to develop a new alternative approach to be presented to the Department of Science and Technology and NRF to foster shared and joint use of research equipment by universities at national and regional levels. The study report is available on the HESA website. Click on the link below to access the full report.

http://www.hesa.org.za/sites/hesa.org.za/files/TechnoScene_Report_on_Joint_Use_of_Research_Equipment.pdf

2.7 **Implementation of the HEAIDS Phase 3 Business Plan:** Detailed work on the implementation of Phase 3 Business Plan has started in earnest. The programme commenced in 2012, with the launch of First Things First Campaign held on 21 February 2012 in Cape Town. The campaign was launched by the Minister of Health, Dr Aaron Mokoale Oetshele and Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training, Prof Hlengiwe Mkhize at University of the Western Cape. The detailed report is attached as **Appendix 1**. In

addition, an amount of R3 million was finally transferred to HESA by the DHET, and an additional amount of R5 million is expected in the next few months. As part of refocusing the programme's priorities, and (re)positioning it in line with the imperatives of the National Strategic Plan for HIV and AIDS, TB and STIs, 2011 – 2016, the HESA HIV and AIDS Strategy Group has scheduled a strategic planning session that was held on 31 May 2012 and 1 June 2012. The programme was also able to successfully conduct the annual COP HIV Education Colloquium on 15 and 16 April 2012. Detailed programme activities are available on the link (<http://www.hesa.org.za/he aids>)

- 2.8 **National Information Service for Higher Education:** HESA has entered into a formal partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) on a post-school education and training campaign to promote, in addition to university study options, other post-school institutions' study options. The DHET intends to launch a massive public and media campaign to promote the role, value and purposes of various post-school institutions and study fields, including minimum entry requirements for entry into various study fields. Funding for such a national campaign would be provided by the National Skills Fund. HESA intends to mount a multi-media "Apply before you Enrol" Campaign (to the same scale as the annual SARS campaign) aimed at urging learners wishing to further their studies at Higher Education Institutions to apply early in line with stipulations of individual universities. Data will be gathered from universities in due course as part of conceptualizing this campaign.
- 2.9 **Higher Education Leadership and Management:** Building on the successful implementation of the HELM in-country mentorship pilot in 2011, a process to award the 15 Fellowships in 2012 has started in earnest in April 2012. A call for expression of interest by institutions was issued and the deadline for institutions to respond was 11 May 2012. This was followed by a Call for Applications for the Fellowships to be awarded in July 2012. In addition, HESA has secured modest funding of R600 000 from the ETDPSETA to offset part of the Fellowship costs.
- 2.10 **Higher Education Enrolment Services Programme:** The Matriculation Board has issued 13 070 exemption certificates at the time of writing this report, against the annual target of 38 000.
- 2.11 **Rural Campuses Connection Project:** The Minister of Higher Education and Training awarded HESA an amount of R28 million to roll-out the connection of rural campuses to the SANREN backbone. As a condition of the Grant, the Minister instructed HESA to establish a Steering Committee to drive the implementation of the project. The HESA Secretariat established a Steering Committee chaired by Professor Thandwa Mthembu. The Committee has approved a set of projects to be implemented in 2012. A progress report from TENET is attached as **Appendix 2**.
- 2.12 **Finalisation of Integrated Transformation Plans:** In general, satisfactory progress has been made by HEIs to develop an institutional Integrated Transformation Plan (ITP). Out of the 23 HEIs, nine ITPs have been completed and approved by their various Councils.

Ten HEIs are in different phases of development. Out of the ten, nine institutions envisage completion and approval between September and December 2012 and one institution by January 2013.

Some challenges in completing the ITPS were identified such as the extensive stakeholder engagement involved and general time constraints involved in obtaining feedback and approval from the respective institutional structures.

3 RESPONDING TO ISSUES IN THE POLICY AND REGULATORY ENVIRONMENT

During the reporting period, HESA has facilitated processes to respond to emerging issues in the policy and regulatory environment. The following issues were dealt with:

- 3.1 **Protection of State Information Bill:** HESA has presented its position to the NCOP's Ad Hoc Committee on the Protection of State Information Bill as part of the 18 organisations shortlisted for this purpose out of over 230 submissions received by Parliament, and bought media space in leading opinion shaping newspapers to communicate its position in a direct and unmediated way to the public. HESA will monitor the developments in this regard. A final HESA position paper on the matter is available on the HESA website. Click on the link below to access the full report.

[http://www.hesa.org.za/sites/hesa.org.za/files/Protection of State Info Bill_HESA Final Submission_ 17 February 2012.pdf](http://www.hesa.org.za/sites/hesa.org.za/files/Protection%20of%20State%20Info%20Bill%20HESA%20Final%20Submission%2017%20February%202012.pdf)

- 3.2 **Central Application Service:** The DHET has indicated its readiness to set-up a Central Application Service. To this end, HESA received a letter early in January 2012 from the DHET in which HESA was requested to nominate a representative to serve on a Departmental Steering Committee that will be established to oversee the planning process for the establishment of a Central Application Service. Although HESA has taken a position against the introduction of this Service at its earlier Board meetings (particularly the one held in March 2009 at TUT), it intends to arrange an urgent meeting with the Minister to get clarity on a range of questions and concerns. Parallel to this, HESA has nominated a member, Prof Themba Mosia, to serve on the Steering Committee of the DHET established to design and implement such a Service. The HESA Office will facilitate an urgent meeting with the Minister of Higher Education and Training on the matter.

- 3.3 **A CHE Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education:** After collating inputs from HEIs, HESA developed a consolidated sector response, which was submitted to the CHE in March 2012. The response document is attached for ease of reference as **Appendix 3**.

- 3.4 **National Planning Commission's National Development Plan:** The HESA Office submitted a response to the Plan on 11 May 2012. The response was circulated to all Vice-Chancellors on 29 May 2012. The response is available on the HESA website. Click on the link below to access the full report.

http://www.hesa.org.za/sites/hesa.org.za/files/National_Development_Plan-Final_HESA_office_response-11_May_20121.pdf

4 ADVOCACY AND OUTREACH ACTIVITIES

During the reporting period, HESA held a number of important events to advocate its positions to key stakeholders and consolidate its approaches to key issues of relevance to Higher Education in South Africa.

4.1 **Seminar on Green Paper on Post-School Education and Training System:** HESA held a seminar on 18 April 2012, in which a draft HESA response paper, together with institutional perspectives, were presented. The seminar included the attendance of the Minister's Special Advisor, Mr John Pampallis, Acting DDG: Universities Branch, Dr Di Parker, CEO of CHE, Ahmed Essop, Deputy-Vice-Chancellors and Executive Directors from the sector. The seminar assisted HESA to strengthen and finalise its draft position paper.

4.2 **Joint Seminar between HESA and Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training:** The seminar was held on 20 April 2012 at Stellenbosch University, with the following objectives:

- a. creating a platform for HESA and the PPC on HET to discuss and share each other's perspective on emerging Higher Education priorities and challenges;
- b. sensitising the PPC on HET to projects initiated by HESA and the sector to enhance the PPC's appreciation of Higher Education challenges;
- c. enhancing the recognition and the value of Higher Education in contributing towards national development, in order to ensure a comprehensive knowledge of, and respect for, the role and position of Higher Education in society; and
- d. creating a platform for the PPC to engage HESA on priority issues and challenges arising from its members' own constituency work and broader parliamentary activities.

The presentations made at the Seminar were circulated to all Vice-Chancellors on 24 April 2012. The presentations are available from the HESA Office on request. A follow-up session will be explored towards the end of 2012.

4.3 **HESA biennial Research and Innovation Conference:** HESA held a successful biennial Research and Innovation Conference on 3 and 4 April 2012. The RISG resolved that the 2012 HESA Research and Innovation Conference would assess whether the recommendations emanating from the 2010 conference were still valid; whether new frameworks/modalities are required to give effect to the implementation of the recommendations and the extent to which legislative and policy changes in the recent past (e.g. the New Growth Path; new initiatives from the Department of Science of Technology etc.), have been considered. In more specific terms, the Conference aimed to:

- a identify the critical and necessary conditions for the successful implementation of the national research and innovation plans from the perspective of the higher education sector;
- b delineate potential strategies to guide the contribution of higher education and other sectors to achieve the goals of the national research and innovation plans;
- c take stock of the progress made by government in articulating a compelling vision for the research and innovation system for South Africa, with a special focus on achievements, prospects and challenges; and

- d consider and critically discuss the various policy initiatives developed over the last few years and consider their implications for the higher education sector, taking into account the latter's strengths, capabilities and limitations.

The following thematic areas were covered at the Conference, in addition to strategic inputs by both the Minister of Higher Education and Training, Dr Blade Nzimande and Minister of Science and Technology, Ms Naledi Pandor:

- a. Stream 1: Creating an enabling policy environment for the flourishing of research and innovation in the sector;
- b. Stream 2: Strengthening multi-sectoral collaborations;
- c. Stream 3: Internationalisation of South African Higher Education Research and Innovation agenda; and
- d. Stream 4: Innovation for development.

A report is being finalised, and will be circulated to all Vice-Chancellors.

In addition to these events, HESA has been consistently in the news, through the Chairperson presenting sector positions and representing Higher Education on a wide range of issues of relevance to Higher Education.

5 Conferences, workshops and seminars

5.1 Project and activity meetings

Date	Location	Title	Participants	Outcome
29/01/2012 23/02/2012	Gauteng	Executive Committee	Members of the Executive Committee	Minutes/Reports
27/02/2012	Gauteng	Transformation Strategy Group	Strategy Group Members	Engagements with the Ministry of HET and the CHE on the transformation agenda.
28/02/2012	Gauteng	HEAIDS Strategy Group	Strategy Group Members	.Minutes/Reports
1 – 2/03/2012	Gauteng	Registrars' Forum	Members	Dealt with matters as per agenda. Minutes
08/03/2012	Gauteng	Research Strategy Group	Strategy Group Members	Minutes/Report
15/03/2012	Gauteng	Funding Strategy Group	Strategy Group Members,	Engaged with the draft reports on the equipment and building studies for further development. Engaged AGSA and the DHET on reporting regulations for HEIs.

14/03./2012 30/05/2012	Gauteng	Education Deans' Forum	Deans of Education	Engagements with the DHET and DBE on issues relating to Teacher Education.
22/03/2012	Gauteng	Rural Campus Connection Project meeting of Steering Committee on the 22 March 2012.	Brenda Swart Leonardo Cloete. Ronel Blom; George Chetty; Jeffrey Mabelebele; Attie Juyn; Christiaan Kuun; Ingrid Fourie; Duncan Martin Thandwa Mthembu	Dealt with matters as per agenda. Minutes
23-24/03/2012	Cape Town.	Finance Executives' Forum	CFOs	Engagements with AGSA and DHET on reporting for HEIs and NIPMO on research cost recovery.
28/03/2012	Port Elizabeth	Transformation Managers' Forum	Members	Engagements with the DHET on issues relating to the transformation agenda for HE.
29/03/2012	Durban	HESA Board Meeting	Board members	Minutes/Report
19/04/2012	Gauteng	Admissions Committee	Members	Dealt with matters as per agenda. Minutes
23 – 24/04/2012	Gauteng	HR Directors' Forum	Members	Dealt with matters before its agenda
10/05/2012	Gauteng	Central Application Service Steering Committee	Members	Report
15 – 16/05/2012	Port Elizabeth	HEAIDS CoP	Members	Colloquium
24 – 25/05/2012	Gauteng	Skills Development Facilitators Forum	Members	Joint meeting with the ETDP SETA
26/05/2012	Port Elizabeth	HESA Task Team on Differentiation	Members	Development of a conceptual framework on differentiation

5.2 Conference/Workshops organised

Date	Location	Title	Participants	Outcome
3 – 4/04/2012	Gauteng	HESA Research and Innovation Conference	Invited participants	Report
18/04/2012	Gauteng	Post-School Education and Training Seminar	Invited participants	HESA Position Paper on the Green Paper for Post-School Education and Training
20/04/2012	Stellenbosch	Joint Seminar between HESA and Parliament's Portfolio Committee on Higher Education and Training	Members of the PPC on HET and HESA	Presentations

6 CORPORATE ISSUES

The following corporate issues are worth noting:

6.1 Election of the Deputy Chairperson of HESA

Dr Max Price was elected Deputy Chairperson of HESA. His term of office runs from 1 April 2012 to 31 December 2013.

6.2 Appointment of Project Manager: Capacity Development

Dr Marianne Engelbrecht has been appointed as Project Manager: Capacity Development. She assumed duty on 1 May 2012.

6.3 Review of organizational policies

A number of organizational policies are currently under review and so are the Articles of Association, in line with the provisions of the Companies Act, 2008.

6.4 Splitting of the Audit and Finance Committee into two committees

In line with the previous decision of the Board, the process to formally split of the Audit and Finance Committee into Finance and Investment Committee and Audit and Risk Committee is underway. Terms of reference for the two committees were approved by the HESA Board, and nominations for members to serve on the Committees are being received.

6.5 Raising additional funds for HESA activities

HESA secured the following modest grants to supplement its operating expenses for on-going projects:

- Higher Education Leadership and Management programme: A total amount of R600 000 was secured from the ETDP SETA for the implementation of the home-grown HELM programme.
- Post-School Education and Training System and National Skills Development Strategy III related activities: A total amount of R575 000 was secured from the National Skills Fund. The amount is used for activities relating to post-school education and training and other activities of the HR Directors' Forum.

6.6 Appointment of CEO of HESA

The process to appoint the CEO of HESA is underway. Dr Jeffrey Mabelebele will remain the Acting CEO until the CEO position is filled.

7 BROAD ACTIVITIES PLANNED FOR THE NEXT QUARTER

At headline level, the following priorities will be implemented in the next quarter:

- 7.1 The Research and Innovation Strategy Group will finalise the conference report and develop an implementation plan
- 7.2 In addition to other priorities on the agenda, the Transformation Strategy Group intends to finalise a conceptual framework for the development of Integrated Transformation Plans and agree on a mechanism to support institutions to finalise their ITPs.
- 7.3 In addition to other priorities on the agenda, the Funding Strategy Group will finalise the Infrastructure Study Report: Buildings and Equipment. It is envisaged that HESA will prioritise responding to the Student Accommodation Report and the anticipated Ministerial Committee Report on the review of the funding for universities.
- 7.4 HESA Office will initiate a process, in consultation with the Board and Exco, to establish a Teaching and Learning Strategy Group, building on the work of the existing Teaching and Learning Working Group.
- 7.5 The HESA Differentiation Task Team under the leadership of Prof Ihron Rensburg will finalise its critical framework document and simplify the survey instrument for discussion at the next Board meeting.
- 7.6 HESA Rural Campuses Connection Project Team, under the leadership of Prof Thandwa Mthembu will accelerate the implementation of approved priority projects in accordance with the approved criteria.
- 7.7 A HESA approach to, and position on, the Central Application Service will be finalised.

- 7.8 Plans are underway for the full implementation of the HELM Local Fellows Exchange Programme in 2012.
- 7.9 With regard to the HEAIDS Phase 3 Business Plan, a set of strategic directions for the programme has emerged at the planned workshop in May 2012. Working in partnership with the Department of Higher Education and Training and other international donor agencies, plans are underway to intensify the mobilisation of additional financial resources for the programme.

8 CONCLUSION

Overall, the implementation of the 2012 Operational Plan is progressing well. It is pleasing to report that all the HESA strategy groups are now in a position to provide strategic advice to the HESA Board on a range of issues falling within the scope of their Terms of Reference.

The HESA Office will soon be finalising a mid-year strategic reflection document for the Executive Committee's discussion. This will guide the latter's discussion on HESA's overall progress in relation to the implementation of the 2012 operational plan.

Ends

2012 First Things First HCT campaign

The **First Things First** HIV Counselling and Testing campaign was successfully launched at the University of the Western Cape on 21 February 2012. The campaign had been activated at about ten HEIs prior to the formal launch, with successful uptake being reported by all the institutions.

The launch was supported in person by the Minister of Health and the Deputy Minister of Higher Education and Training.

Led by HEAIDS, the 2012 **First Things First** campaign is undertaken in partnership with Innovative Medicines South Africa (IMSA), Foundation for Professional Development (FPD) and the South African National Aids Council (SANAC), with funding support by USAIDS and PEPFAR through FPD.

Regional consultation and planning workshops succeeded in their attendance by every HEI. UNISA has also facilitated a special workshop to facilitate its full participation in the campaign nationally.

The campaign is aimed at involving all campuses at all public Higher Education Institutions, including students, academics and service and administrative staff. The campaign modestly aims to test at least 35,000 people - up from the 22 000 tested in last year's campaign.

While first year students continue to be a focus of the campaign, in account of their fresh exposure to new environments at a life stage of greater personal independence that requires them to be responsible in the face of HIV risk factors, including unprotected sex and alcohol and substance abuse, "First Things First" as a campaign brand speaks to the priority of HIV Counselling and Testing.

The campaign is being rolled out through the course of the year at such calendar times as suits individual institutions. It is supported by a variety of promotional elements including posters and bunting; pledge walls; and a memory stick with a multi-media presentation and HIV information.

The roll out of media collateral has been successfully undertaken save for minor delays experienced in mid February due to a port workers' strike.

Other challenges thus far reported relate to:

- poor management of memory sticks at one institution
- the late arrival of FPD testing staff on testing days at one campus
- capacity deficiencies at some institutions to meet FPD's request for daily data reporting

The campaign has within three months of its launch already exceeded its target to test 35,000 people.

As at 10 May, **36,772 students and staff** had already **tested** for HIV **at 20 universities** that to date had activated the campaign. The campaign had rolled out at **54 university campuses**.

This is a significant achievement with some four months still to go in the run of the campaign in which universities may undertake multiple testing activations and a number are yet to activate their campaigns.

The success of the campaign is further registered in a number of Further Education and Training (FET) colleges that have joined the campaign. As at 10 May, **five FET colleges** had activated the campaign **at 15 campuses** with **2,258 students and staff tested** for HIV.

The success of the campaign goes beyond the numbers reached. Every person who tests HIV positive in the campaign is directly enrolled in or referred to accessible treatment, care and support facilities.

The campaign's success resides too in the added value it offers to existing institutional HCT programmes, to the strengthening and sustainability of HIV programmes across the whole of the public higher education sector, and to making for a unified higher education sector response.

In the long lines of students and staff waiting to be counselled and tested at higher education institutions across the country, there is the socialisation of HIV Counselling and Testing and a powerful challenge to the stigmatisation of HIV and AIDS issues.

In the context of the global drive that promotes treatment of HIV and AIDS as prevention, HCT assumes a far reaching significance that the First Things First campaign helps catapult.

Ends

RURAL CAMPUS CONNECTION PROJECT

TENET Progress Report to RCCP Steering Committee.

Summary of TENET RCCP activities

Items	Narrative	Status	Date
RFI 2011-	RFI to establish a list of preferred wireless suppliers to whom RFPs can be sent.	Completed	16 Feb 2011
RFP 2011-1	Umlazi project to Connect MUT	Completed	15 Apr 2011
RFP 2011-2	QwaQwa project to connect the QwaQwa campus of UFS to the SANReN PoP at Bloemfontein. UFS elected to use Telekom directly	Completed Scrapped	7 June 2011 20 Sept.2011
RFP 2011-3	vdBP project to connect sites in a fibre optical ring topology so that they can be connected back to the SANReN PoP at Wits.	Completed Withdrawn	7 July 2011 7 Mar 2012
RFP 2011-4	Limpopo Phase 2 Project to connect Univen to UL Turfloop.	Completed	29 Aug 2011
HESA TENET MOA Implementation Agency Agreement	This MOA sets out the expectations, reporting relationship and financial arrangements between the parties.	Completed	26 Sept. 2011
RFP 2012-1	RFP for the Polokwane project	Draft for comment	02 Mar 2012
RFP 2012-2	RFP for redesigned network circuit connecting VUT to NWU vdBP campus	Draft for comment	16 Mar 2012
Projects			
Umlazi Project	100 Mbps wireless circuit completed and tested	Completed	13 Mar 2012
Limpopo Project Phase 1	100 Mbps managed wireless circuit between CSIR and UL Turfloop.	In Progress – almost complete.	30 Mar 2012
Limpopo Project Phase 2	150Mbps wireless network from UL Turfloop to Univen to UNISA Makhado.	In Progress, Project mandate and REN Access Network Agreement need to be signed.	31 June 2012

vdBP Project	Redesigned fibre optical ring from NWU vdBP to VUT. RFP written , will be released shortly.	Planning – awaiting approval to proceed	
Polokwane Project	RFP written will be released shortly.	Planning	
Soshanguwe Project	Preliminary design and costing completed RFP's required for wireless and fibre build from Garankuwe to UL Medunsa	Planning – awaiting approval to proceed	

16 March 2012



**A FRAMEWORK FOR QUALIFICATION STANDARDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION
CONSULTATION DOCUMENT: COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

13 March 2012

PREAMBLE

This submission outlines the higher education sector's draft preliminary response to the document entitled: *A Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education*, made available for public comment in November 2011.

Higher Education South Africa (HESA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on the document. However, HESA is aware of the fact that many higher education institutions have, in addition to contributing their comments to this document, submitted their own individual institutional comments. Such comments may not be reflected in this submission, but should be considered as integral to a sector response.

This submission is based on the inputs of the following public higher education institutions: University of Cape Town; the Durban University of Technology; the Central University of Technology; University of Zululand; Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University, University of the Witwatersrand; University of South Africa (Colleges of Education; Human Sciences; and, Law); University of Fort Hare; North-West University; and, University of the Western Cape.

It should be noted that some of the above institutions intend to place their submissions before their Senates and that subsequent to Senate consideration, responses may be enhanced and/or changed.

Likewise, the HESA office has put together this document as a consolidated commentary submission based on institutional responses and the content thereof has not been adopted by the Board. It is hoped that there will be an opportunity to do so before the Council on Higher Education (CHE) finalizes the draft framework. The HESA Board is meeting on 29 March 2012.

1. BACKGROUND AND INTRODUCTION

The *Framework for Qualification Standards in Higher Education*, (CHE, 2011) has been developed against the following legal mandates vested with the CHE:

- 1.1 In terms of the Higher Education Act (Act No. 101 of 1997) and the Higher Education Amendment Act (Act No. 39 of 2008), the CHE is responsible for quality assurance for higher education, and for the implementation of the Higher Education Qualifications Framework (HEQF);
- 1.2 In terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No. 67 of 2008), the CHE is also a Quality Council with the vested responsibility for standard setting and related matters in respect of the higher education qualifications band;
- 1.3 Consistent with these mandates, the Department of Education (DoE) 2007 policy statement requires that qualification standard setting *'must have legitimacy, credibility and a common, well-understood meaning, and they must provide benchmarks to guide the development, implementation and quality assurance of programmes leading to qualifications'*.

With these legislative requirements in mind, this response is cognizant of the two key imperatives spelt out above namely, the need for the CHE to further develop its approach to quality assurance of higher education provision and, its responsibility in respect of standard setting, which in our opinion, should foreground quality improvement of the higher education sector. In this regard, a positive feature of the draft document is that it seeks to strike a balance between the use of qualification standards as a quality assurance mechanism and an academic development strategy.

While the higher education sector supports the CHE *Framework* in general, we also wish to raise a number of areas that need further explication and clarification. The submission will therefore outline those principles supported by the sector, but it will also raise concerns and indicate some caveats. These comments are made in relation to 'Standards in Higher Education', 'Quality Assurance', 'Normative Approaches and Ranking' and 'Qualification Standards and Level Descriptors'. We will conclude with a summary of some other issues, not addressed in any of the other sections.

2. STANDARDS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

- 2.1 The higher education sector supports the CHE's approach in respect of retaining 'existing, internal means of quality control over qualifications', such as the peer review and external examiner systems. In fact, the sector believes that an approach to standards setting through the strengthening of the criteria and general transparency of inter-university moderation would enhance the improvement of the quality of undergraduate education in all institutions. At the same time, it would help to build communities of practice which can be a resource in advising on improvements in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment, which take account of contextual specificities and orientations of institutions.

- 2.2 Further, the sector supports the principle that standard development is ‘an ongoing process’ with the intention to foster collaborative and consultative relationships. A framework for qualification standards should therefore enhance and encourage the development of communities of practice, as it is in this way that trust within and between institutions of learning is built (Blom, 2006).
- 2.3 In this regard, the use of the term standard ‘development’ rather than ‘setting’ or ‘generation’ is supported, as well as the emerging relationship between the development of standards and of self-accreditation approaches for the sector, which in itself suggests an incremental development of trust in the quality of the sector.
- 2.4 There is a general understanding that standards in higher education are intended for guidance and clarity in the design and development of programmes. However, it is also important to highlight the role that standards should play in the appropriate pitching of courses and/or modules, as well as in spelling out levels of cognitive demand and complexity at different levels of programmes/qualifications.
- 2.5 Nevertheless, there needs to be the recognition that in developing standards, we have to manage the conceptual space between the abstract and the concrete and between the general and the particular. It is therefore necessary to be very clear where qualification standards are situated – hence the importance of the nested approach. For qualification standards to be useful, they need to be at the general level. Greater specificity may too easily lead to prescription and straight-jacketing of institutional innovation and initiative. What could be helpful to academics when designing their programmes and to peers when making these quality judgments of programmes, could be some national qualification standards that they could use as minimum benchmarks against which to assess the quality – on the understanding that these standards are always reinterpreted and recontextualised into particular historical and institutional contexts.
- 2.6 Further, while the sector agrees on the need for standards to guide comparative qualifications analyses so that qualifications gained in different disciplinary areas could be seen to be of comparable cognitive demand, we want to issue a strong caveat in respect of the assumptions implied in this ideal namely, that a framework document of this nature could overcome the ‘intrinsic logic’ (Tuck, Hart and Keevy (2004: 8), which could bedevil the principle of the parity of esteem of such qualifications. (‘Intrinsic logic’ is described as the ‘design features, such as flexible pathways and the establishment of equivalences between different qualifications’ which intends to enhance parity of esteem between qualifications (Blom, 2006)).
- 2.7 While the ‘intrinsic logic’ of common qualification standards therefore suggests that seamless articulation between different contexts will be enabled, more than the design of qualification standards is needed for this principle to become a practical solution to the lack of mutual recognition and trust within the system.

- 2.8 Therefore, an important question that the standards development process will need to address is how students may negotiate the boundaries between qualifications and programmes that have a primarily contextual orientation and those with a primarily conceptual orientation. This question is very important for the development of articulation pathways and a credit accumulation and transfer scheme.
- 2.9 Qualification standards should thus focus on the cognitive demand in relation to the purpose(s) of qualifications and should not seek to develop a one-size-fits-all approach which ignores the intrinsic value of learning in a particular context. In standardizing qualifications, the standard setting process should be careful not to compare programmes across disciplines given the differentiated outcomes, context and content. The approach should rather focus on comparing similar qualifications across institutions while equally valuing the different knowledge domains of disciplines as important, relevant and appropriate in its own right.
- 2.10 Particularly important for the work on qualification standards is the recognition that disciplinary contexts impact on the development of the qualification purpose as well as the formulation of graduate attributes in terms of the mix of exit level knowledge, skills and applied competence.
- 2.11 However, while the discussion document distinguishes between contextual and conceptual knowledge, it does not address the more vexing question of the extent to which contextual or procedural knowledge and conceptual or theoretical knowledge can be reconciled with each other. At some point, the document seems to assume that contextual and conceptual knowledge can be mixed in an essentially unproblematic manner.
- 2.12 Further, the sector cautions that the notion of the purpose-orientation of qualification pathways (vocational, professional, general formative) must never become linked to *differentiation* between institutional types. The framework for the development of qualification standards should enshrine the principle of parity of esteem in terms of qualification pathways, and should seek to enhance articulation between qualification pathways.
- 2.13 The use of a 'threshold standard' may therefore generate an unintended perception and divide amongst the various higher education institutions as, historically, the case was to differentiate between Historically Disadvantaged Institutions and Historically Advantaged Institutions.
- 2.14 Further, the implications of the differential resourcing of different universities appear not to have been considered as a factor in relation to uniform standards. The on-going internal development and undertaking of certain institutions to move from 'threshold standards' to 'best practice' will require additional resources.

- 2.15 Thus, the focus of qualification standards should be on locating qualification types in the three pathways on the basis of their purpose and on an understanding of knowledge differentiation – which would then allow for a principled/objective basis for institutional differentiation based on which qualifications are offered rather than the inevitable establishment of a hierarchy based on reputation and snobbery.
- 2.16 Nevertheless, the sector agrees that qualification standards cannot ‘guarantee the recognition of learning credits for students moving from one qualification to another or one educational provider to another’, but in accordance to the NQF Act (Act No. 67 of 2008), the CHE is compelled to facilitate learning achievement mobility by mitigating any unnecessary barriers which may exist.
- 2.17 What is needed is to introduce and make useful the idea of the three qualification pathways – vocational, professional and general and to relate these to institutional differentiation/types (although institutions would have the option to offer qualifications across the qualification pathways). This can be done by specifying what each of the qualification types would look like in each of the three pathways. The location of a qualification in a pathway (and the programmes that realise it) is a function of its purpose. Thus, the key focus of qualification standards should be to specify its purpose, locate it in one of the pathways and identify what kinds of knowledge should be selected to realise its purpose.
- 2.18 Therefore, qualification standards should not only inform programme design, but also the development of access and articulation routes.
- 2.19 The document refers to the possibility of distinguishing between threshold, typical and best practice standards, and links this to the notion of proficiency standards, thereby implying that at least in certain qualification types it is possible to achieve varied levels of proficiency. This is an interesting approach that may be helpful in the work of standards generation, but which requires further clarification. Firstly, it would be useful if more clarification could be provided with respect to the difference between a ‘performance standard’, which the document seems to dismiss as inappropriate to the work of standards generation, and a ‘proficiency standards’. As both performance and proficiency can be judged in terms of specific criteria, it could be argued that when applied to a construct such as student mastery of knowledge, skills and applied competence, the two concepts are interchangeable.

3. QUALITY ASSURANCE

- 3.1 As noted in the introduction to this submission, the sector recognizes that the CHE has a twin legislative mandate – that of quality assurance and that of standard setting. However, while these two aspects are strongly linked, they are not the same. In our view, in this draft framework document, these mandates are conflated to the extent that there is lack of clarity about the problem being addressed.

- 3.2 The document sets out a number of purposes for establishing standards in higher education. The list subsumes a wide range of problems which highlights the conflation of the two mandates. For example, the list of problems include public prejudices about the quality of programmes (*a quality assurance issue*), dissatisfaction with the competencies with which many graduates exit higher education (*a curriculum issue*), a lack of consensus about the characteristics of different kinds of qualification types at the same levels on the NQF (*a parity of esteem issue*), the absence of benchmarks for comparing graduates of different institutions (*a parity of standards issue*) and enabling international comparability (*an educational system issue*). Unless greater clarity is achieved in what the standards framework is intended to address, it is difficult to ascertain whether the draft document would meet its purpose.
- 3.3. Further, given that the specificity of qualification standards would be of 'certain benefit for quality assurance within each knowledge field, it would have arguably, limited value for quality assurance across and between knowledge fields and thus, for qualifications per se', we are not convinced that the development of qualification standards would add substantial value to the quality assurance mandate. However, it could enhance the quality of teaching and learning in terms of the standard setting mandate.
- 3.4 On the one hand, greater specificity for the sake of facilitating quality assurance makes assumptions about the ease with which there could be consensus about curricula and practices (and the extent to which such specificity could stifle creativity and innovation). On the other hand, less specificity reduces the quality assurer's ability to align the broad level descriptors and/or the generic minimum threshold standards in the programme accreditation framework across the system. While both of these options are valuable, trying to make qualification standards serve a dual purpose instead of a complementary purpose in relation to quality assurance is not satisfactory.
- 3.5 The question should therefore be asked whether 'assuring quality' (quality assurance) and 'developing quality' (standards generation) could be meaningfully used in the same sentence.
- 3.6 The conflation of quality assurance and standard setting becomes clear in the statement - 'the discussion seeks to distinguish between qualifications standards (which the CHE aims to develop) and other fundamentally different kinds of standards sometimes employed by higher education, for example content standards and achievement standards'. The danger of such conflation is that the qualification standards, in an attempt to facilitate manageability, are reduced to bureaucratic requirements to meet qualification criteria set out in great detail.
- 3.7 Further, the discussion document seems to jump around between different definitions of performance standard, decoupling them from individual student success in one instant, but in another linking them to the problematic notion of outcomes-based education (which surely is about individual performance?). And if a performance standard can be about teaching standards or standards of infrastructure, why can they not also be about student performance? What makes a performance standard different from a proficiency

standard? At any rate, it may be very difficult to separate different gradations of performance, such as threshold, typical and best practice.

- 3.8 A fairly comprehensive set of HEQC criteria are already in place to guide new programme approval and accreditation and the question could legitimately be posed as to how the standard setting process would be done in such a way as to guard against becoming a demand for rigid compliance.
- 3.9 We believe that standard setting and quality improvement needs to be build both institutionally and sectorally – and that it is in the interplay of these two levels where a great deal of new thinking is required.

4. NORMATIVE APPROACHES AND RANKING

- 4.1 The main purposes of qualification standards as outlined on p. 9 seem to confirm that the aim of the discussion document is to develop normative national standards. It is not clear how the tension between institutional versus national standard setting is to be negotiated.
- 4.2 If we have standards which are normative, the fact of establishing them will show up the differentials and disparities within the system. To some extent this is an inevitable consequence of any standard based system and it could be argued that making standards transparent is desirable because they could provide benchmarks for improvement. We would however then need to develop a strategy for dealing with these differentials in a way that would accommodate positive diversity in the system whilst eliminating diversity associated with a legacy of inequality. If we are not able to do this we will end up merely fuelling notions of a hierarchy within the system and exacerbating existing tensions between institutions; or we would, as a result of political pressure, produce 'low threshold' standards as the explicated norm, but one that many academics will ignore.
- 4.3 Linked to the above, while we support the avoidance of interpretations of terminology that can lead to notions of hierarchies, rankings or classifications, standards should NOT form the basis for any kind of ranking between higher education institutions.
- 4.4 The sector needs to caution against unintended consequences in attempting to define 'best practice' standards which could inadvertently result in the ranking of HEIs.
- 4.5 It is strongly recommended that the intricacies of how the contextual-conceptual continuum plays itself out in different qualification types at different levels should not be regarded as a matter that can be normatively prescribed in a national standards setting framework.

5. QUALIFICATION STANDARDS AND LEVEL DESCRIPTORS

- 5.1 The development of uniform standards in each discipline will be resource and time intensive, as well as disruptive of the academic project. The question is raised whether the current HEQC accreditation framework is not adequate? Academic staff at higher education institutions is already fatigued with standard setting and related activities.
- 5.2 Given that qualification standards would of necessity be pitched at a high level of abstraction to be useful, we do not believe that they would add significant value to the HEQF itself, or that qualification standards would end up looking very different from the level descriptors or the generic minimum threshold standards in the programme accreditation framework. Terms such as 'common capital' and 'graded personal and cohort capital' do not help to elucidate the essence of what is envisaged by qualification standards (p. 17).
- 5.3 To solve this conundrum, it seems that the generation of qualification standards should, at the very least, initially engage with the NQF level descriptors in order to make them more context specific (qualification types, qualification variants, and academic fields and disciplines) – though the resultant development of qualification standards may make the formulation of NQF level descriptors redundant.
- 5.4 It may be advisable to investigate whether either the level descriptors could not be converted into qualification standards, or that the level descriptors are replaced by the qualification standards.

6. OTHER MATTERS AND CONCLUSION

- 6.1 There needs to be close cooperation between the three Quality Councils in quality assurance and standard setting (CHE, Umalusi and the QCTO), not just in standard development but also in assessment requirements among the three. The articulation between these parts of the system is crucial if meaningful pathways are to be developed. The document is silent on how the three councils will align and manage the standard setting processes.
- 6.2 Careful consideration needs to be given to the manner in which standards for higher education qualifications are generated and applied to ensure that a delicate balance is maintained between institutional autonomy and national regulation. The notion of a generative approach to standard setting that allows for innovation, creativity and responsiveness is supported.
- 6.3 The role of professional bodies in setting standards for HE qualifications needs to be clarified in relation to the framework suggested by the CHE. The caution is that the inclusion of professional bodies should not evolve into these bodies prescribing to the HEIs.

The higher education sector recognizes that the draft document is an honest attempt by the CHE to make sense of the relatively new mandate of standard setting in higher education. However, we want to caution against the assumptions that seem to have permeated the education and training system, namely the almost unproblematic acceptance that more

regulation – in this case in the form of qualification standards and their association with quality assurance – will solve the problems of the lack of parity of esteem, equivalence between qualifications on the same level of the NQF, articulation and progression possibilities within the system and credit accumulation and transfer.

We are therefore not convinced that development of an approach to standards development is what the higher education system in South Africa needs right now. Currently, there are huge variances in the quality of programmes across the system. There are significant inequalities in the resourcing of institutions, and major challenges with respect to governance and management, as evidenced by the number of institutions currently being managed by administrators. These factors have a significant impact on the capacity and ability of institutions to offer quality programmes. Serious questions need to be asked whether it is appropriate and desirable to allocate scarce resources to standard setting, which given the scope of the exercise, may take a long time to have a positive effect on the system which should, at the moment, be assisted to enhance quality where it counts – in the classroom.

HESA is keen to participate in the public engagements proposed in the Way Forward, but we also hope, given the complexity of the issues at hand, that a more substantive discussion could be arranged with the CHE to present this preliminary response to the CHE draft framework.

7. NOTES

The institutional responses which formed the basis for this consolidated response are included as part of this submission as separate, stand-alone contributions, as many of these inputs are detailed and specific in respect of the draft CHE document and may thus be useful to the compilers in refining the draft framework document (please refer to the annexures attached).

8. SOURCES

Please refer to the additional sources used in the individual institutional inputs.

Blom, JP, 2006. The ideal of an integrated national qualifications framework. Unpublished PhD. University of Pretoria.

Tuck, R., Hart, J. and Keevy, J. (2004). The Relevance of the National Qualifications Framework Impact Study to Qualification Framework Development in the Southern African Development Community. *SAQA Bulletin*, 6, (2), pp. 5 – 29.

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