

Processing an application for accreditation of a New Academic Programme

Overview

The Council on Higher Education is responsible for the accreditation of public and private higher education institutions' learning programmes leading to qualifications registered on the **National Qualifications Framework (NQF)** and approved by the **Department of Higher Education and Training**.

The **Accreditation Directorate** carries out this work by developing and operating the **HEQC-online system** through which institutions submit programmes for accreditation. As well as new programmes, these include programmes to which significant changes have been made.

Accreditation of a new programme

A new programme is generally defined in the HEQSF as “one which has not existed before or has been significantly changed, such as when its purpose, outcomes, field of study, mode or site of delivery has been changed to a considerable extent.” A significant change is considered to be a 50% or more change to the programme design. New programmes will be accredited against the criteria for programme accreditation.

Screening and Evaluation

Once a completed application is received, it is screened for completeness and a preliminary analysis is undertaken to verify that the information that it contains is sufficiently comprehensive to enable a full programme evaluation. Where an application is incomplete, it is returned to the institution.

An evaluation panel is then constituted, or one or more evaluators are appointed. Panellists and evaluators are academic peers from the field related to the programme for evaluation.

Outcome

The evaluation panel or the evaluator(s) produce a report using the evaluation criteria and make a recommendation regarding the accreditation of the programme.

Three possible recommendations can be made:

- accreditation
- accreditation with conditions
- not accredited

The report, and a recommendation from the Accreditation Directorate, is submitted to the Accreditation Committee which makes a final recommendation. The recommendation and any conditions set by the Committee are sent to the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) that submitted the application. Copies of the report are forwarded to SAQA and the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET).

Institutional Response

Representation

A representation is an opportunity for an institution to provide information in response to the reasons for non-accreditation of a programme submission as provided by the HEQC, prior to a final decision being made.

The HEQC will inform institutions its intention to make a decision of a negative outcome of its applications. An institution then has the opportunity to submit a representation within 21 days of receipt of the HEQC's notification. After a re-evaluation and reconsideration of the decision, the HEQC will make a decision which is considered to be final. No further representations will be permitted.

In cases where an application is not recommended for accreditation / approval, the institution may make ONE (1) representation. This representation:

- should be in writing
- should not repeat the contents of the original application
- should be confined to the information provided by the institution during the evaluation process: that is, information that was part of the institution's application and that was made available to the panel of evaluators
- may include new and additional information that is relevant to the reasons for non-accreditation as set out by the report of the HEQC
- should address the report and recommendations of the Accreditation Committee focusing on any errors and omissions that may have occurred in the evaluation process
- should reach the HEQC within 21 working days of the date of the letter

Should the decision not to accredit / approve be upheld, the institution may not submit the same application for accreditation for a period of one year following the original date of submission of the original application.

Conditions

Should a programme be determined as meeting the majority of Criteria and Minimum Standards by HEQC, it may be determined to set Conditions on a prior to commencement, short-term or long-term basis.

Programmes accredited with conditions will have stipulated conditions that an institution is required to meet in a specific time-frame. More than one type of condition, i.e. prior to commencement, short-term, medium-term or long-term, may apply to the same programme. Institutions are obliged to report to the HEQC on their progress with meeting conditions.

If conditions are not met within the specified period, the HEQC may extend the deadline by which such conditions need to be met or issue a notice of intention to withdraw accreditation, where after it may withdraw accreditation.

Deferrals

A deferral is taken when either the Accreditation Committee or HEQC feel it is unable to make a recommendation or decision in relation to the programme. Generally, this will require the institution to submit additional information for review and resubmission to the Accreditation Committee and HEQC for final approval.