Assuring and Developing Quality in the South African Higher Education Sector through Institutional Audits

**CHE 1st Institutional Audit Meeting
with Institutions**

April and May 2021

COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Issues to be covered

- Locating Institutional Audits within the broader mandates and frameworks of the Council on Higher Education.
  (Agenda items 4, 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3)

- Unpacking the approach to this round of Institutional Audits
  (Agenda items 6.1, 6.2 and 6.3)

- Agreeing on the way forward
  (Agenda items 6.4)

Mandate conferred by the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997

- Advising the Minister on HE matters, at the request of the Minister, and proactively.

- Arrange and coordinate conferences.

- Through the HEQC, to promote QA in HE, **audit the QA mechanisms of HEI**s, and accredit programmes of HE.

- Publish information on HE including reports on the state of HE.

- Promote access of students to higher education institutions

- Perform any other functions designated to it by the HE Act, the NQF Act or by the Minister through notice in the *Gazette*.

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Mandate conferred by the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008

Sets up the CHE as the Quality Council for higher education as provided for in HE Act, with responsibility for the HEQSF.

- Developing and managing the HEQSF.

- Developing and implementing policies and criteria for advancement of the HEQSF.

- Recommending higher education qualifications to SAQA for registration on the NQF.

- Maintaining a database of learners 'achievements and submitting the data for recording on the NLRD.

- Take responsibility for quality assurance in relation to the HEQSF.

- Conducting or commissioning and publishing research of importance for the further development of the HEQSF.

- Advising the Minister on matters relating to the HEQSF.
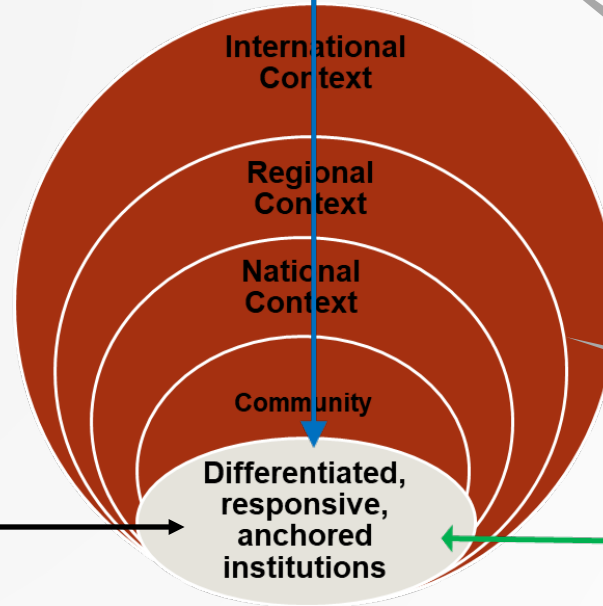
- Informing the public about the HEQSF.

The External Quality Assurance Landscape: The last 10 years

PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION

NATIONAL STANDARDS AND REVIEWS

QUALITY PROMOTION AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT

INSTITUTIONAL AUDITS

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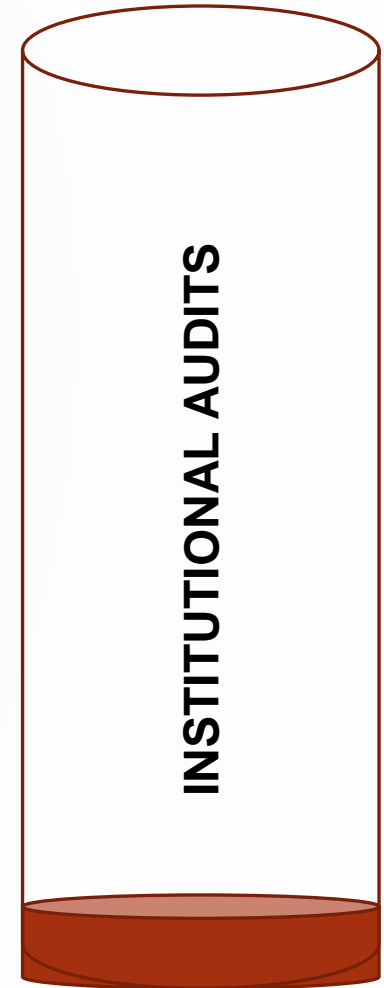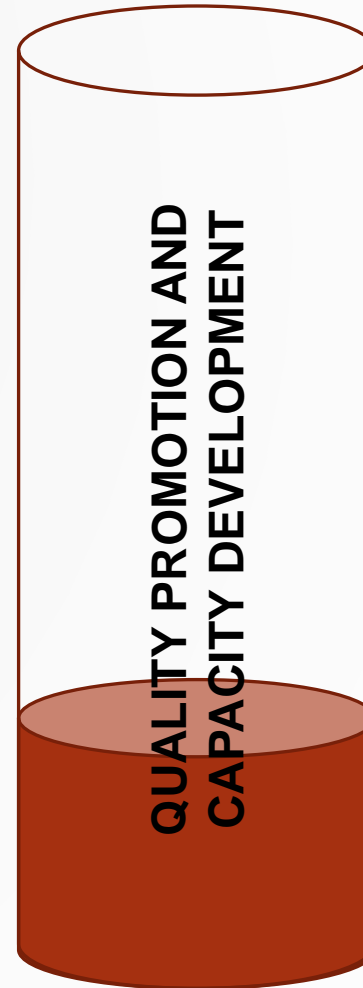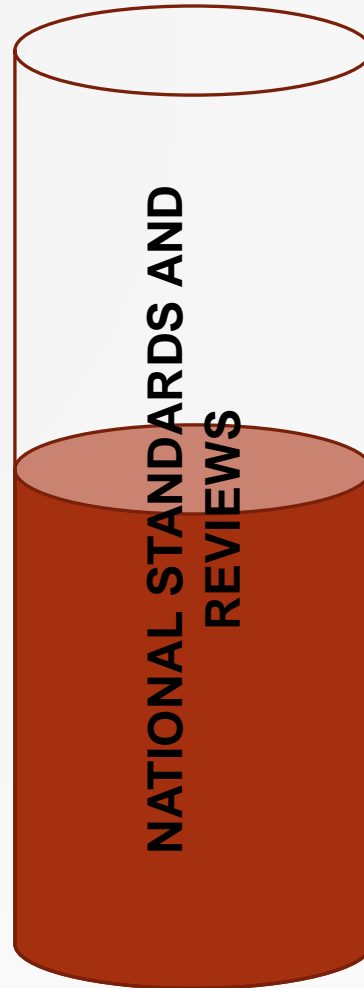
A strong focus on transformation to be built into all the CHE functions- will enable an integrated and holistic approach to advancing and monitoring transformation.

Transformation Promotion and Oversight

HEQSF Management

Quality Promotion & Capacity Development

External Reviews

Qualification Accreditation

Strengthened and enhanced quality in higher education

Standards & Guidelines

Responsive & Proactive Advice
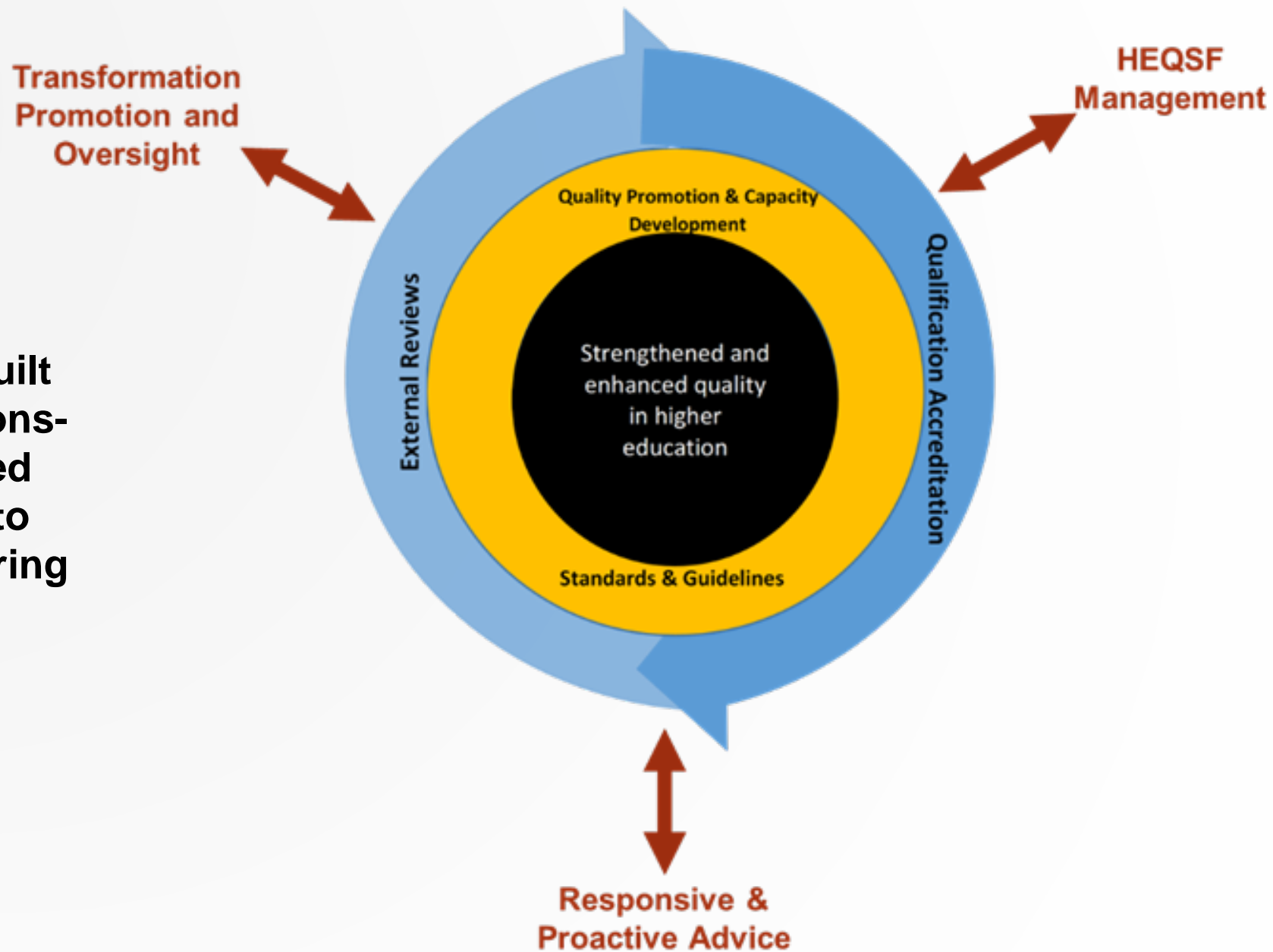
QAF Timelines and Transitions

2020/21 → QAF Implementation Preparation Plan → **2024 AY**
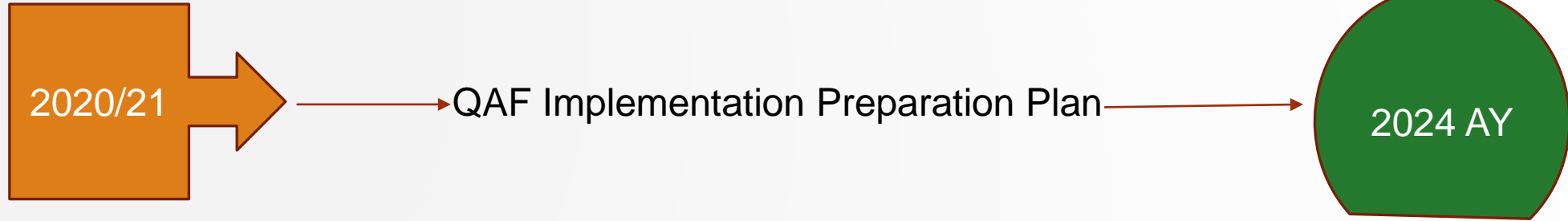
QAF implementation preparation

Full implementation of the QAF

Programme (Re-) Accreditation → **Qualification Accreditation**

National Reviews → **Quality Reviews**

External Quality Assurance → **Internal Quality Assurance + External Quality Assurance**

INSTITUTIONAL AUDITS → **INSTITUTIONAL REVIEWS**

Roadmap to QAF 2024:
From Institutional Audits to Institutional Reviews

Framework for Institutional Audits

Manual for Institutional Audits

Public universities:

March 2021 –

October 2023

Outcomes for public universities:

- Most Improvement Plans completed by October 2023; 5 in 2024
- **Input into the institutional track records for the QAF**

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Process for the development and approval of the *Framework* and *Manual for Institutional Audits (2021)*

- Post the QEP process the HEQC resolved to re-introduce institutional audits, taking into consideration the lessons learnt from the first cycle of audits

- First consultation with the sector in October 2017 to produce a draft *Framework* and *Manual*

- Draft *Framework* and *Manual* piloted in 2019

- Lessons drawn from the pilots included in draft *Framework* and *Manual*

- Consultation with the sector in May / June 2020

- Initially approved by the HEQC in July 2020, but held back for alignment with the QAF

- Aligned and built into the preparation for the implementation of the QAF

- Approved by the HEQC in February 2021 and Council on Higher Education in March 2021

- Final *Framework* and *Manual* published and made available to the sector in March 2021

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CHE / HEQC Reflection and External Evaluation of the first cycle of institutional audits

Conclusions drawn from the external evaluation of the first cycle of institutional audits are:

(i) They were successful and added much value to institutional quality assurance.

(ii) The process had, however, been onerous on institutions and time-consuming and audits would benefit from a more streamlined approach in future.

(iii) The one-size-fits-all approach in the audit criteria neglected to take institutional differentiation into consideration; and the criteria were consequently applied with insufficient focus on differentiation for each institution; the audits thus failed to take sufficient account of institutional diversity in respect of the size, shape, location, context and unique features of an institution.

Similarities to first cycle of institutional audits

- The institution is the unit of analysis, but institutions will not be ranked
- A review methodology, consisting of self-reflection and peer review, is retained, in line with the QAF and with international good practice
- Similar operational processes but designed to be streamlined and shortened, and adjusted to take into account the new way of working online
- Capacity development and training opportunities for the sector
- Induction of audit panel members in terms of ethics, integrity and confidentiality, etc.
- Public accountability: publishing the executive summary of the final audit report on the CHE website (draft audit reports sent to institutions before)
- Institutions to submit improvement plans based on the recommendations

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Differences to first cycle of institutional audits

- Differentiation: a much stronger focus on the individual institution, it's vision, mission and strategic goals, its context and how this plays out in its core academic functions and its internal quality assurance mechanisms

- There will no longer be a sector-wide audit cycle, but each institution will enter into its own audit cycle based on its QA maturity to prepare for the new QAF

- Private higher education institutions will have compulsory institutional audits conducted which will replace the re-accreditation function.

- The use of technology in conducting the institutional audits themselves is also included with digital submissions and online site visits, supplemented with *in situ* site visits only if required by the audit panel

- Four focus areas each with 4 Standards each, i.e. 16 **new** Standards in total

- Each institutional audit to be completed in approximately 18 months

- Draft audit report sent to institutions for factual corrections and also for possible representation on the outcomes

- Clearer focus on the improvement plan phase in the year following the institution's audit

Focus Areas, Standards and Guidelines

- The institution responds to the 16 Standards; the Guidelines are there to assist and guide, not necessarily to be responded to individually

- The new set of standards and guidelines are not just based on the existence of an IQA system in an institution and input quality, but also focus on coherence, efficiency and effectiveness, and impact in terms of outcome quality

- A focus on learning, teaching and assessment

- The use and role of technology, and 4IR, has been included throughout, for example, in how institutions make decisions based on data, how technology is incorporated into the curriculum, how technology is used in learning and teaching, and 4IR in society

- A strong focus on data-, information- and research-based and evidence-based decision-making by institutions has been introduced

- Each Standard will have an outcome in the following categories: *not functional, needs substantial improvement, functional, mature*

Audits with a Review Methodology

Self reflection

Evidence-based

Peer validation

Draft Audit Report:
Factual corrections
Representation on outcomes

Final Audit Outcomes (will be placed on the CHE website):

16 Standards: not functional, needs substantial improvement, functional, mature

Recommendations & Commendations

Improvement Plans

Institutional Audit Processes: Overview

- Scope of the audit: based on differentiation of institutions, esp. in the private provider space; not including postgraduate education for research-based Masters and Doctoral programmes, but including taught Hons, Pg Dips and Coursework Masters

- Timelines and processes (18 months per institution):

- *Two anchor dates (a) and (b):*

a) *Submission of the SER* and Portfolio of Evidence (approx. **6 months; around November 2021**

b) *Date and mode of the site visit* (**April – June 2022**)

c) Submission of proposed audit panel to the institution (second half of 2021)

d) Capacity Development (**June - July 2021, but also ongoing if required**)

e) Submission of Draft Audit Report to the Institution (within 3 months of site visit; based on institutional responses to provide further documents to the audit panel)

f) Institutional audit outcomes (approximately October / November 2022)

g) Improvement Plans (one year following the 18 months)

Institutional commitment @ level of VC / Head

➡ Outcome of this meeting: agreement on scope and timelines for the institution

➡ This agreement signed off by the VC or Head of the institution as a commitment (Manual, section 4.1):

> *The Vice-Chancellor/Head of the institution commits formally to the audit, to the self-evaluation it entails and to the consequences of the audit, and this commitment is also communicated clearly to staff within the institution. For private HEIs, this commitment includes an agreement that the outcomes of the institutional audit may contribute to a recommendation to the DHET on the re-registration of the institution, its programmes, sites and/or modes of provision.*

Next steps:

➡ Appointment of an institutional liaison officer

➡ Setting up of institutional steering committee

➡ Capacity development

➡ Preparation of SER

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Questions and Answer Session

Operational discussions and agreements:

To form the basis of the signed commitment by the VC / Head

THANK YOU