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ITL Resource No. 2
Programme and Course Review

Each of the seven Improving Teaching & Learning Resources can be read and used individually, although there are cross-references as some are closely related. However, it is important to read the *Introduction*, as it deals with the purpose of the Resources and how they relate to the Higher Education Quality Committee's quality assurance mandate and its quality promotion and capacity development activities.

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FOREWORD

The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) prioritised quality issues in teaching and learning very early on in the development of its quality assurance systems. Mandated by legislation to conduct institutional audits and programme accreditation and to promote quality and quality assurance, the HEQC initiated a project in 2002 aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

The project on teaching and learning was intended to refocus attention on one of the core functions of higher education in an environment where the restructuring of higher education had given much attention to issues such as governance, financing and the 'size and shape' of the system. The project also reflected the importance of quality-related capacity development in the work of the HEQC, especially in a context where historical disadvantage impacts on the capacities of academic staff to plan and deliver good quality programmes and on the capacities of students to benefit from them. These issues needed to be addressed and to be brought to the centre of the debate about the purposes of a new quality assurance system for South Africa. Moreover, the project fitted in with international debates and developments in higher education, which were prioritising the learning experiences of students as well as giving increased attention to the professionalisation of higher education teaching and to staff development and support.

The HEQC set up the project in a way that would involve a number of role-players. It was important to draw on teaching and learning expertise in higher education as well as maximise the impact of those involved within higher education institutions. The Resources for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning should be seen therefore as the fruit of an extensive collaboration between the HEQC, a large number of experts and practitioners and a range of public and private higher education institutions.

It is hoped that the Resources will be adapted creatively for a number of purposes and used by higher education practitioners individually and in teams in the process of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to give effect to the transformation objectives in the restructuring of higher education, especially in relation to redress and equity and to the responsiveness of higher education to national goals and challenges.

The HEQC looks forward to further cooperation with key partners in higher education in effectively developing and using the Resources. We would like to acknowledge that funding for the project and this publication was made available by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation.

Dr Mala Singh
Executive Director
November 2004

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

FOCUS AREA

This ITL Resource on *Programme & Course Review* refers to the programme and course[1] levels of an institution's educational activities. However, the review of any programme or course should be conducted within its context – the institution-wide quality management system in which the effectiveness of an institution's academic provision is monitored and improved across the system.

All three aspects of review – quality management of academic review, programme review, and course review – are wrapped up together (like the layers of an onion), and cannot be easily unwrapped. For analytical purposes, however, we have dealt with them separately, moving from the macro to the meso to the micro levels of review:

a) the quality management of academic review;

b) programme review; and

c) course review.

In this Resource the HEQC provides guidance to HEIs and to programme evaluators for the internal and external evaluation of programmes, for course review and for establishing a quality management system for academic review (i.e. to manage at institutional level the review of both courses and programmes). In Resource No. 6 on *Staff Development*, the HEQC provides guidelines for the evaluation of teaching. The intention in providing these resources for internal review and self-evaluation procedures is to assist HEIs to develop quality management systems that are likely to improve teaching and learning. The intention is neither to prescribe a quality management blueprint to HEIs, nor to suggest that the HEQC intends scrutinising all self-evaluative activities. While recognising that the evaluation of teaching and the internal review of courses are fundamental to the achievement and enhancement of curriculum quality, the HEQC intends to leave this level of activity largely to the HEIs themselves.

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[1] In all cases the use of the term 'course' in these Resources can be replaced with the term 'module'. The term 'subject' in its narrow sense sometimes refers to a course or module within a programme.

This Resource complements the HEQC's framework and criteria for programme accreditation, although the criteria are focused on achieving minimum standards and the Resources are aimed at supporting development that goes beyond the minimum.

This Resource relates closely to, and should be used in conjunction with, ITL Resource No. 1 on *Programme Planning, Design & Management*.

RATIONALE

Since teaching and learning are to be a primary focus of the HEQC's quality assurance (QA) activities in the first phase of its work, systems for the review and evaluation of the inputs, process, outcomes and impact of educational provision (courses and programmes) become a key concern. As the external QA agency for the country, the HEQC is mandated by government to accredit all programmes and, from time to time, to undertake national reviews or evaluations of targeted programme types. Both of these functions involve external evaluations of programmes but these will always be based on prior internal self-evaluations.

This Resource aims to assist institutions in setting up their quality management systems for internal review. Needless to say, perhaps, the system and criteria set up by the HEQC for summative external evaluation will have a 'wash back' effect on the systems and criteria that institutions establish for themselves internally. However, given that the purpose of the HEQC's QA system is the improvement of teaching and learning, it is crucial that those who are to be involved in any self-evaluation exercise are convinced of the potential value of such exercises for improving quality. It is also crucial that any particular self-evaluation exercise undertaken be owned by those involved. Furthermore, it is vital that the evaluations and their findings are meaningful to academics, as the agents of improvement in teaching and learning. And finally, because curriculum development (see Glossary of Terms for an explanation of this Resource's use of 'curriculum' in its widest sense) is an ongoing, recursive and highly contextualised activity, judgments and advice from external agencies and outsiders can serve only as a *stimulus* to what need to be continuous cycles of self-improvement, supported by cycles of evaluation and review.

It is important to note that the HEQC does not intend scrutinising teaching and learning activities below the level of the programme, unless there is good reason for it to do so. Rather, in its audit activities, the HEQC will scrutinise an institution's management of programmes, and its procedures for programme design, approval and review. The HEQC will also ascertain the extent to which review findings are used for staff development and curriculum improvement, including the improvement of student access and success. In so doing, the HEQC will be in a position to evaluate the overall effectiveness of an institution's quality management system.

With respect to the *accreditation* of particular programmes, the HEQC assumes that institutional programme reviews include evidence of how the courses comprising the programme are being quality assured by the provider's internal quality management system.

The HEQC's accreditation system is complex. It is based on three categories of programme, each with its own accreditation or re-accreditation arrangements:[2]

1. **New Programmes**: those professional and non-professional programmes that have not existed before or have been significantly changed (more than 50% of content, change of mode or site of delivery, or major revisions to purpose) and have not yet completed their first accreditation cycle. From 2004 onwards all new programmes are required to meet the HEQC's minimum threshold standards for accreditation. New professional programmes are, in addition, required to meet the statutory licensing requirements of their relevant Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA). The meeting of these standards will be ascertained via two accreditation phases: a candidacy evaluation, which focuses on input criteria and a quality management plan for the programme; and a full outcomes evaluation, which requires evidence such as throughput rates, and an assessment of inputs, processes, outputs and impact.

2. **Existing Professional Programmes**: those programmes that have interim registration status on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and/or those that have completed their first accreditation cycle, and fall under the statutory and licensing requirements of an ETQA other than the HEQC. From 2010 these will need to be re-accredited by their relevant ETQA, as recognised by the HEQC. The exact nature of the re-accreditation process will depend on the type of cooperation agreement entered into between the HEQC and the ETQA concerned. These processes are likely to follow the model of an initial internal review with a subsequent external evaluation under the auspices of the ETQA concerned.

3. **Existing Non-professional Programmes**: those programmes that have interim registration status on the NQF and/or those that have completed their first accreditation cycle, and still fall under the jurisdiction of the HEQC. From 2010 these programmes will need to be re-accredited by the HEQC, based on a process of institutionally managed internal programme and course review validated by external evaluation.

From 2007 HEIs may apply to the HEQC for self-accreditation status that will allow them to re-accredit their own existing non-professional programmes. The HEQC will base its decision on evidence gathered from all three components of its national QA system – in institutional audit, national programme reviews and programme accreditation – plus an academic review plan submitted by the applying institution. This Resource therefore may be of particular relevance to those institutions wishing to demonstrate to the HEQC that they have developed quality management systems for academic review that are sufficiently robust to maintain and improve the quality of their education provision above the HEQC's minimum standards.

The Evaluative Questions and Suggested Good Practice Descriptors in this Resource are intended to be generally applicable to all these possible variations for the conducting of programme review and evaluation. Users will need to interpret the questions and descriptions flexibly, depending on purpose and context.

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[2]   See the HEQC's *Framework for Programme Accreditation* (2004c) and *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (2004b) for further details.

DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. **Kathy Luckett,** the coordinator of the working group, was asked to write this section so as to reflect on issues that were discussed by the working group in the course of developing the first draft of the Resources.

Note that the views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

A programme (and its constituent courses) is a carefully structured educational intervention, designed to bring about learning in its students. The extent to which students do, in fact, achieve the intended learning outcomes is therefore a measure of the effectiveness of a programme or course. In order for students to achieve the intended learning outcomes, it is necessary for there to be 'curriculum alignment' in the design of the programme/ course. This means that the educational intervention (content selection and teaching-learning activities) is carefully designed so as to take students from their current levels of development to levels where they can demonstrate, through appropriate assessment tasks, the attainment of the targeted learning outcomes. Therefore, in a programme review, it is essential that the voices of those who designed and taught the programme and its courses – and particularly their rationale for teaching as they did – be heard.

For the goal of continuous quality improvement to be met, programme review needs to be seen as a learning opportunity for academic staff – an opportunity to understand and reflect on their teaching practice and its consequences for learning. Teaching staff should be afforded a space to articulate the educational rationale and theory of learning that underpins their practice, to observe the impact of their teaching on learning, and to reflect on what the findings may mean for the improvement of their own practice.[3] Ideally this self-evaluative and improvement process should be based on sound educational principles and learning theory. It should also be conducted in a non-threatening community of educational practice in which peers (other staff on the programme and educational experts) share the findings and jointly pursue collective solutions to the problems identified.

Judgments about student achievement, the attainment of learning outcomes and curriculum alignment are difficult to make, and require professional expertise. Such judgments are usually best conducted by suitably qualified and experienced expert peers, familiar with the discipline(s) or profession, context and educational practices involved. Thus, course and programme review should be based on self-evaluation but validated by external peer review. Traditionally this has been done through a system of internal moderation and external examination. The HEQC supports this tradition of peer review, but believes that if it is to avoid operating as a reproductive and conservative influence and to serve as a means of QA and quality enhancement, it needs to become more rigorous, explicit, systematic and professional.

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[3]   This process can be understood as contributing to the development of 'reflective practitioners' (see Resource No. 6 on *Staff Development*).

Student learning is arguably the core business of the higher education (HE) endeavour, and students are key participants in the learning process. Therefore student opinion on courses and student or graduate opinion on programmes – gathered through student evaluations – is one of the most direct measures of teaching and learning quality. Concerns are often raised about the validity and reliability of student feedback data, hence our concern for triangulation of data. However, research would suggest that student evaluations correlate moderately well with levels of student learning and also with staff self-evaluations of their own teaching. Harvey and Knight (1996) suggest that student evaluation data should not be used as performance indicators or to make comparisons across courses, programmes and institutions but that, when limited to direct concerns around teaching quality and student services, student evaluations are an effective instrument for measuring quality.

Harvey and Knight (1996) suggest that the kinds of questions that should be addressed to students include the following:

- **The academic** – enthusiasm for the discipline/ field, rapport with students, clarity of explanation, availability to help with study problems;

- **The course** – clarity of goals, effective organisation, appropriate workload, appropriate level of difficulty, effectiveness of teaching methods, opportunities for group interaction, fairness of assessment; and

- **Student services and support** – provision of learning resources and facilities and equipment, quality of the learning environment, helpfulness of support staff, availability and quality of support services, quality of accommodation, cafeterias, etc.

Formulaic designs of student questionnaires are seldom effective as students soon lose confidence in them, thus failing to take them seriously. This problem can be dealt with in a number of ways. Firstly, students should receive feedback on what is being done to address the problems that they raise (see more on this below). Secondly, a variety of methods for collecting student feedback data, apart from questionnaires, should be used; such methods might include focus group interviews, student participation in the identification of the evaluation questions and e-mail prompts. And finally, academic staff ought to be involved in the design of the student evaluation so that it is tailored to their particular course, interests and concerns and related to a particular group of students. Many institutions deal with this by providing a bank of typical questions for students from which staff can select and adapt for their particular purposes.

Since programme and course reviews are key components of an institutional quality management system, procedures need to be in place to ensure that insights and learnings from such reviews are acted upon and that plans for improvement are implemented (i.e. that the 'quality loop' is closed). Closing the quality loop will include ensuring support and resources for the implementation of improvement plans. An institution should also provide a framework for academic staff regarding the method and frequency of reviews and offer support for ensuring the quality of the review method. As mentioned above, if stakeholders, particularly students, are to be encouraged to take the collection of data seriously, then it is desirable to provide feedback to them on what has been learned and on how problem areas/ issues will be addressed. With regard to academic review, this needs to be handled transparently and sensitively since it has the potential to impact negatively on the academic staff members concerned. When an institutional quality unit

(or equivalent) responsible for managing internal reviews gathers data from students and other stakeholders, those responsible for offering the programme or course need to have access to these data and be provided with the opportunity to respond to them. Only when student opinion data are triangulated with reports from those responsible for designing and offering the course, and ideally also with peer review reports, can a review or evaluation be considered reliable and valid.

While programme evaluation usually has a summative purpose, the review of courses or modules should ideally be conducted while the course or module is being taught. This allows the HEI to address problems or gaps identified, while students still have the opportunity to derive maximum benefit from the improvement. In such cases, course reviews would be formative in purpose and not hold any punitive consequences for the teaching staff concerned. As stressed above, if the goal of QA is improvement of teaching practice, then it is important that institutional managers establish quality management systems that 'ring-fence' formative or improvement-oriented review at the level of the course. This is not to say that the findings of formative course review cannot be used for summative purposes – for example, to demonstrate improvements during summative programme evaluation. It is simply to emphasise that those involved in formative review must have given their consent for the data to be used for summative purposes. The key findings of course reviews can be collated, sanitised and aggregated in order to inform a comprehensive review of the programme of which the course or module forms a part. Comprehensive programme evaluations are usually used for summative purposes, allowing decisions to be made about the future of the programme, its accreditation status and, in the case of a public HEI, its funding by the Department of Education (DoE).

A market-based conceptualisation of quality would suggest that the effectiveness and impact of a programme can be judged by measuring the satisfaction of its key stakeholders – i.e. students and graduates, the wider institution and employers. The results of opinion surveys, interviews, focus groups and so on, can also be included in a programme review; however, it should be noted that, apart from the opinions of students, who are participants in the teaching–learning process, such surveys should count as indirect rather than direct measures of the quality of teaching and learning.

A programme's overall graduation and retention rates[4] provide a quantitative picture of its efficiency. Base-line statistics such as this provide a useful means of routine programme monitoring, i.e. they serve a summative as opposed to diagnostic or improvement-oriented purpose and can alert evaluators to areas for further scrutiny. In an evaluation report, quantitative data should ideally be accompanied by a brief interpretation and explanation. Where discrepancies and irregularities are uncovered, action should be planned and remedial strategies developed and implemented, and the impact of interventions monitored and eventually reviewed.

Many HEIs already have systems of departmental or school review. The HEQC wishes to promote the programme as the unit of analysis for its focus on the QA of teaching and learning. However, the HEQC also wishes to build on institutions' existing practices,

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[4]   Throughput data are best analysed using cohort rather than head-count analyses. This is because head-count analysis only works where intake numbers are stable. Given the DoE's emphasis on the need to widen access and attain greater representivity in student composition, student intakes are unlikely to remain stable.

provided they are sufficiently rigorous and systematic to assure and enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Owing to the vast number of programmes that a multi-purpose institution will have to review within the six year (re-)accreditation cycle mandated by the HEQC, and given the human and financial resource constraints within which many institutions have to work, it is likely that many institutions will continue to conduct their programme reviews via a clustered process, such as a faculty, school or departmental review, wherein a cluster of cognate programmes are reviewed and evaluated in a single process. This layered method of organising a review/ evaluation need not detract from programmes being used as the primary unit of review.

EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC REVIEW

The following evaluative questions may be adapted for use in self-evaluating an institution's quality management system for programme and course review:

1. Does the institution have a comprehensive and clearly laid out policy for the QA of its academic offerings? How does the policy allocate responsibility for QA to academic line managers? How does the policy ensure that programmes and courses are reviewed according to a regular, but not onerous, cycle? How does the policy ensure that data gathered at course level are aggregated to feed into programme and/or school reviews? Does the policy provide guidelines on who has access to data and on how data may be used? What provision is in place for the regular review and refinement of the academic review system itself?

2. What guidelines, procedures and support does the institution offer academic managers and teaching staff to ensure the quality and rigour of the academic review process?

3. How does the evaluation method for programme review ensure that data are triangulated to provide a valid review?

4. How is feedback from course and programme reviews used to effect curriculum improvement?

5. How are the findings of review or evaluation made available to stakeholders, particularly students?

6. On the basis of review results, how does the institution provide support to develop further the educational expertise of its academic staff?

7. How does the institution use expert peer review to judge the quality of student learning, to moderate and validate the assessment of students and to evaluate the effectiveness of its curriculum?

PROGRAMME REVIEW

The following questions may be adapted for use for both internal programme review and the external evaluation of programmes:

1. To what extent are students achieving the intended exit-level learning outcomes or graduate attributes, and demonstrating satisfactory levels of conceptual understanding and knowledge of the discipline or field? Are expert academic or professional peers (as appropriate) satisfied with the relevance and quality of learning achieved by students on the programme?

2. To what extent is the programme aligned[5] with the institution's curriculum development requirements?

3. To what extent are students and recent graduates generally satisfied with the programme as a whole, and with its relevance, delivery and assessment practices in particular?

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[5]   See also the discussion of curriculum alignment in the Discussion section of ITL Resource No. 1.

4. To what extent are employers/ the professions/ the community (as appropriate) satisfied with the quality of graduates from the programme?

5. To what extent are members of the programme's teaching team satisfied with the institutional leadership and management of the programme? To what extent are they satisfied with the resources and facilities allocated to them to run the programme?

6. To what extent do the programme's student graduation and retention rates meet the DoE's benchmarks as stipulated in the *National Plan for Higher Education* (Ministry of Education, 2001: 2.3)?[6]

7. To what extent is the programme achieving 'equity of outcomes' or representivity in graduate output (NPHE, 2001: 3.2)?

8. How does the programme review/ evaluation contribute to a well-managed, comprehensive and effective institutional system of internal review and external evaluation?

9. How are feedback and the results of the programme review/ evaluation used to effect improvements to the programme's design and delivery and to develop further the educational expertise of academic staff?

COURSE REVIEW

Below is a list of the kinds of questions that could be adapted for use for the internal review of academic courses or modules using self-review and peer review or student evaluation. Ideally, the academic staff involved in teaching the course should formulate or select their own evaluative questions and should not feel obliged to 'cover' all aspects of a course review each time they teach it. The evaluative questions listed below could also be adapted for student evaluations (suggestions follow in brackets where applicable). Course reviews should not be onerous to academic staff and should not aim to be comprehensive. They should rather be focused to capture data that can inform the specific, context-related concerns of the teaching staff, with a view to effecting manageable improvements that are owned by the staff concerned.

1. To what extent is the design of the course in alignment with the purpose of the programme and with other programme design elements? [To what extent did each course contribute to the overall purpose and coherence of the programme and to your attainment of the exit-level requirements?]

2. To what extent is the course design in keeping with the institution's curriculum structure requirements? [Was the course well organised and structured?]

3. Have specific learning outcomes and appropriate content selection for the course been defined and communicated to students? To what extent do the learning outcomes contain an appropriate mix of disciplinary and professional knowledge and skills? [Were the goals, learning outcomes and content of the course made clear to you? Do you think they are appropriate to your future career?]

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[6]   Hereafter: NPHE, 2001.

4. To what extent are the design of the course teaching methods, delivery methods and course materials based on a detailed knowledge of the profile of students enrolled for the course? [How effective were the teaching methods (specify) employed on the course?] [Were the course materials well organised and pitched at the right level for you?]

5. On what basis are teaching and learning methods determined? To what extent do they foster active learning by students?[What opportunities did the course provide for active learning, group interaction, etc.?]

6. To what extent is the course content current, relevant, academically justifiable and sufficiently demanding? [To what extent did you find the course content relevant, stimulating and pitched at the right level?]

7. To what extent is the assessment of students valid and fair? How is provision made for feedback from assessment to inform learning? [Did you find the assessment on the course fair? Did you receive adequate feedback so that you could understand where you had gone wrong? What opportunities were there for you to learn from your mistakes?]

8. To what extent is there curriculum alignment between the learning outcomes, the course content and the teaching–learning methods and assessment tasks? [To what extent do you believe that the teaching methods, course materials, assessment methodology and tasks and student support provided you with a fair chance to succeed on this course?]

EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS

QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC REVIEW

Evaluative Question 1: Policy for the quality management of academic review

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Responsibility for quality management

The institution has appointed a senior manager, usually supported by a quality committee or equivalent, to be responsible for the development and review of policy on quality management and QA and to oversee its implementation. Implementation of the quality management policy is built into the job descriptions of all line managers. The policy has been widely disseminated throughout the institution and is owned by those responsible for its implementation.

Programme Directors (or equivalent) are responsible for planning and conducting the review at programme level and for ensuring that reviews of courses comprising the programme are conducted and that the results are aggregated to inform the review of the programme as a whole. Quality promotion staff are available to advise and assist academic staff in the review process. Responsibility for course review is delegated to course convenors/ designers/ facilitators with the assistance of quality promotion staff. The policy requires Programme Directors or Heads of Departments/ Schools to take responsibility for ensuring that insights from reviews at both programme and course level are recorded, reported and reflected upon and that strengths are built upon and weaknesses addressed.

Review cycles

The policy provides guidelines regarding the frequency with which review should take place. (This frequency will vary for programme and course review, with courses being reviewed more frequently than programmes.) The review cycle takes account of the HEQC's six-yearly accreditation cycle. At programme level, there is at least one formative review process within a six-year cycle. Formative review of courses and modules takes place more frequently, on an ongoing basis.

The triangulation of data

The policy makes a distinction between raw data (for example, the results of student opinion/ perception surveys) and a review report wherein processed data from different sources are triangulated, analysed and reflected upon and fed into plans for improvement. The perspectives of those who teach and design the course are included in the triangulation process.

The use of review data

The policy protects individuals against the untriangulated use of data, not only by making a distinction between raw data and a review report, but also by identifying clear paths of responsibility for quality management and by providing guidelines on who has access to review data. The review process is fully documented and open to scrutiny. The policy stipulates that stakeholders, especially students, are informed about the way review findings have been used to inform development at both programme and course level. Where suggested changes cannot be made, stakeholders are informed of the reasons for this.

Review findings are regularly and systematically used to refine and improve the academic review system itself.

Evaluative Question 2: Guidelines & support for academic review

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Quality promotion staff with expertise and theoretical understanding of HE and evaluation are available to advise and assist academics and academic managers in the review process. Training in evaluation is also available as part of a staff development programme.

Hardware/ software is available to assist academic staff in the design, processing and analysis of survey instruments.

Review is understood as part of an ongoing cycle involving the examination and interrogation of practice, and is not associated with sanctions or threats, provided that insights derived from evaluation are acted upon.

The ongoing professional development of academic staff and those who support them (e.g. quality promotion staff) is a priority for the institution.

Evaluative Question 3: Review method

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

In any review, whether at programme or course level, data from a number of perspectives are triangulated in order to gain a holistic understanding. At programme level, the perspectives of students, those teaching on the programme, external examiners and, as appropriate, other stakeholders (e.g. professional bodies, employers), are sought. At course level, the perspectives of students, course/ module convenors and, ideally, peers are sought.

A variety of review instruments is used to collect data, depending on the size of the group whose perspective is sought and the nature of the questions being asked. These review instruments could include questionnaires comprising both closed- and open-ended questions, focus group interviews and individual interviews, as well as other, more informal, data collection tools, which allow data to be collected on an ongoing basis.

Analysis of data from varying sources is undertaken both quantitatively and qualitatively and is appropriate to the nature of the questions asked and the amount of data collected. The validity of conclusions drawn from review data is interrogated in the same way as conclusions drawn from research would be validated.

Evaluative Question 4: Use of feedback for curriculum improvement

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The review process requires that areas of weakness are identified and addressed through the development of detailed plans for improvement. These plans are documented as part of the review report. The implementation of these plans is resourced and monitored by Programme Directors and/or Heads of Departments/ Schools. Further review/ evaluation takes place to check on the efficacy of improvements.

The review process also requires that strengths are examined in order to build on them. Plans to further develop areas of strength are monitored by programme managers.

Evaluative Question 5: Dissemination of review findings

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The programme review report is made available to stakeholders in draft form for comment. In the case of students, the report is made available in a mediated form and is communicated

directly to the students on the programme or through their representatives. Stakeholders are invited to comment on the draft report and these comments are considered before the report is finalised and plans for improvement implemented.

At course level, course convenors provide feedback to class representatives and, where time permits, to entire classes. The course review report is available for perusal by students. Comments from students are considered in the finalising of the report.

Evaluative Question 6: Staff development and support

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors
Educational expertise is available to support academic staff in interpreting review findings and in making plans for improvement. Ideally such plans should be based on sound learning theory. Such support for academic staff is available in the form of individual consultations if necessary. Once plans for improvement have been developed, support is provided to ensure that those working on the curriculum have the necessary skills and understandings to carry through the improvement. The support provided is ongoing and usually informal, but may link to a formal staff development programme. The provision of support is planned as part of the review process.

Evaluative Question 7: Peer review

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The assessment of students at course level

Internal examiners (or 'assessors' in SAQA terminology)

The academic staff who teach a course/ module are responsible for designing, running and marking both formative and summative student assessments, for recording the results and for giving feedback to students.

Traditionally, academic staff have been considered competent to assess students by virtue of their academic qualifications, but in future professional training in assessment should become a requirement e.g. the confirmation of a permanent post for new staff could be conditional on acquiring assessment expertise.

The institution makes provision for staff development in assessment, especially for new staff members.

Internal examiners (or 'internal moderators' in SAQA terminology)

For summative assessment on a course, and especially where more than one marker is involved, it is recommended that at least 50% of the final marks are moderated via a system of internal moderation (i.e. the checking of the reliability of the marking). Traditionally this has been done after the marking is completed, by another academic, who did not teach on the course, and usually from the same department. But for large classes it is acceptable and more efficient for the marking team, led by the course convenor, to work together and compare and moderate one another's marking as the marking proceeds.

The assessment of students at exit qualifications

External examiners (or 'external moderators' in SAQA terminology)

It is recommended that for summative assessment for exit qualifications external examiners are appointed to examine at least 60% of the credits at the exit level at which a qualification is awarded (e.g. for summative assessment of a Bachelor's degree at level 7 of the NQF, 72 credits are externally examined).

The institution has clear criteria for the appointment of external examiners. For example: external examiners are independent experts in their fields with qualifications at least one level above the qualification being examined (except of course for Doctoral level), and should be changed every three years to ensure the integrity of the examiner-moderator relationship. External examiners are approved by Senate and responsible to Senate.

The institution provides documentation on the curriculum and all relevant assessments and guidelines or a format to assist external examiners in the completion of their reports. Completed external examiner reports are returned to the academic concerned and also copied to the Programme Director or Head of Department/ School. Where problems are highlighted, these are discussed with the academic concerned and the academic manager ensures that agreed improvements are effected.

External examiners have the right to adjust marks and are required to approve the final marks list for the qualification concerned. Ideally they also comment on:

- The validity of the assessment instruments in relation to the specified learning outcomes (ideally prior to their implementation) and assessment criteria;

- The quality of student learning and the standard of student attainment across the spectrum of results;

- The reliability of the marking process;

- The quality of feedback given to students; and

- Any concerns or irregularities with respect to the observation of institutional/ professional regulations.

Remuneration for external examiners is commensurate with the extent of their duties.

The validation of a programme's assessment strategies

Programme evaluators

Programme evaluators are the discipline/ professional experts who form part of an external programme evaluation team. They may be appointed by either the institution, the HEQC or another ETQA such as a professional body.

The institution or evaluating agency provides guidelines or a format outlining evaluators' functions and clear criteria for their appointment. For example: evaluators are independent, recognised experts in their fields and have qualifications or expertise and experience in curriculum and assessment.

The functions of programme evaluators include:

- Evaluating the curriculum design, knowledge base and assessment strategy for the programme as a whole, in relation to its purpose, exit-level outcomes and relevant generic qualification standard;

- Judging the appropriateness and validity of integrated assessments and the standard of samples of student performance on these;

- Reviewing external examiners' reports on courses within the programme for the period under review and ensuring that their recommendations have been considered and acted upon;

- Commenting on the overall progression and graduation rates for the programme in relation to its purpose and student intake;

- Checking that institutional and professional regulations and procedures for assessment have been adhered to;

- Making recommendations for the improvement of the programme to the relevant academic and academic managers; and

- If appointed by the HEQC: making recommendations on accreditation status to the HEQC's Accreditation Committee.

Remuneration for programme evaluators is commensurate with the extent of their duties.

The functions of programme evaluators include:

- Evaluating the curriculum design, knowledge base and assessment strategy for the programme as a whole, in relation to its purpose, exit-level outcomes and relevant generic qualification standard;

- Judging the appropriateness and validity of integrated assessments and the standard of samples of student performance on these;

- Reviewing external examiners' reports on courses within the programme for the period under review and ensuring that their recommendations have been considered and acted upon;

- Commenting on the overall progression and graduation rates for the programme in relation to its purpose and student intake;

- Checking that institutional and professional regulations and procedures for assessment have been adhered to;

- Making recommendations for the improvement of the programme to the relevant academic and academic managers; and

- If appointed by the HEQC: making recommendations on accreditation status to the HEQC's Accreditation Committee.

Remuneration for programme evaluators is commensurate with the extent of their duties.

PROGRAMME REVIEW

Evaluative Question 1: Effectiveness: quality of student learning

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

External examiners' reports provide a range of evidence:

- That assessed student work is properly sampled (particularly on integrated assessments at qualification exit points from the programme);

- That qualifying students are attaining the full range of specified exit-level learning outcomes; and

- That students are demonstrating appropriate levels of conceptual understanding and disciplinary or professional knowledge.

Samples of student performances are judged by expert peers (external examiners or programme evaluators), to meet disciplinary/ professional standards. Such judgments take account of the proposed level descriptor in the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (2004)[7] for the level of the qualification awarded and, where applicable, also take account of the relevant generic qualification standard registered on the NQF.

For key assessments the distribution of scores across the cohort is appropriate.

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[7] *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework: Draft for Discussion* (Ministry of Education: 2004) – hereafter, HEQF, 2004 – which replaced the *New Academic Policy*, or NAP (2002). Note that at the time of publishing these Resources the HEQF had not yet been finalised.

Evaluative Question 2: Effectiveness: curriculum alignment

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Scrutiny of curriculum and assessment documentation (by expert peers, e.g. external examiners) confirms that there is alignment between programme content, teaching and learning methods, entry requirements, levels of student preparedness, exit-level outcomes and assessment methods and criteria. These linkages are clearly communicated in a timely fashion to students on the programme.

Evaluative Question 3: Student feedback

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Student/ graduate opinion surveys conducted on the programme's core modules or on the programme as a whole indicate that the majority of students are satisfied with the programme in general and with its delivery and assessment practices in particular. Where student dissatisfaction has been expressed, there is evidence to show that the teaching staff concerned have interpreted this, resulting in efforts to address or improve the situation.

Evaluative Question 4: External stakeholder feedback

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Opinion surveys of external stakeholders of the programme are conducted where appropriate and feasible. These indicate that stakeholders are satisfied with the programme's curriculum and with the competence of its graduates. Where stakeholder dissatisfaction has been expressed, there is evidence to show that efforts have been made to address/ improve the problems identified.

(For universities of technology: independent advisory boards/ committees could play a central role in providing external stakeholder feedback.)

Evaluative Question 5: Programme team feedback

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

There is evidence to show that staff who teach on the programme are satisfied with the leadership and management of the programme provided by their department/ school/ faculty.

The programme team members are also satisfied with the teaching resources, facilities and support and development provided for them by the institution/ faculty/ school/ department.

Evaluative Question 6: Efficiency: graduation & retention rates

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Programme managers report on their graduation (and retention) rates for the programme overall. Taking the nature of their student intake into account, programme managers have developed plans and strategies for enabling the programme to meet the DoE's graduation and retention benchmarks in the medium-term (e.g. graduation rates for three-year programmes should be 25% of the programme's total enrolment, according to the NPHE, 2001: 2.3).

Evaluative Question 7: Equity: representivity in graduate output

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The programme can justify its race and gender profile in relation to the historical profile of its field and in relation to institutional equity targets. There is evidence to show increasing representivity on the programme and that the composition of the qualifying class increasingly resembles that of the entering class (i.e. increased representivity in intake leads to increased representivity in graduate output).

Evaluative Question 8: System of programme review

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution has established a quality management system for all its programmes, which is based on the triangulation of data gathered from a range of sources, such as: programme evaluators' reports; external examiners' reports on the assessment of students; student opinion data; external stakeholder opinion (as appropriate); and, most importantly, self-reflection by programme teams and by teaching staff on their teaching practice. The HEI has demonstrated the capacity to evaluate and strengthen its own QA procedures.

Evaluative Question 9: Implementation of improvement plans

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution's quality management system for programme review involves clear reporting lines and accountability, which ensures that review results are reported up the management system and followed up with monitored improvement plans. These plans are based on sound education theory and supported by resource provision and staff development. Review and evaluation results are explicitly fed into the next planning cycle.

There are effective and transparent procedures for closing down a course or programme, where accreditation has been withdrawn by the HEQC or the HEI closes down the course on some other grounds.

COURSE REVIEW

Evaluative Question 1: Alignment with the programme

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

It is evident that the specific learning outcomes and content of the course contribute to students' attainment of the programme's exit-level qualification(s).

The contribution of the course to the programme in terms of the development of a knowledge base and academic or professional skills and their sequencing is evident.

The relationships and rules of combination between this course and other courses on the programme are clear.

Evaluative Question 2: Conformity to institutional curriculum development requirements

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The course/ module meets the institution's curriculum planning and design requirements such as module size, credit ratings, rules of combination, entry requirements, assessment regulations, etc.

Evaluative Question 3: Specific learning outcomes

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Learning outcomes and content for the course are specified and communicated in public documents such as programme handbooks, course outlines and academic calendars.

The learning outcomes are appropriate for the level of the course, for its content and for its function in the programme as a whole.

The learning outcomes include the development of disciplinary and professional skills as well as the development of an appropriate knowledge and conceptual base.

Evaluative Question 4: Appropriateness for student profile

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Course designers have a good understanding of the profile of the target group of students (e.g. in terms of students' prior learning experiences, levels of language proficiency, content knowledge, academic skills and current learning environment).

The choice of teaching–learning methods, course materials, media, technology, delivery methods, estimated number of notional study hours, pacing and sequencing are made primarily on the basis of the student profile and student learning needs, and are varied and flexible to accommodate a diversity of students.

Evaluative Question 5: Teaching–learning methods

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Teaching–learning methods are carefully considered and theoretically justified. They are appropriate to the subject matter, student profile and delivery method. There is evidence of innovation in teaching–learning methods and deliberate attempts to encourage and develop deep (as opposed to surface) approaches to learning in students.

Evaluative Question 6: Course content

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The content selected for the course provides sufficient depth and breadth to contribute to the purpose of the course and programme.

The course content is academically acceptable and up to date and provides students with an adequate conceptual framework and knowledge base.

The quantity and complexity of the content is appropriate to the level of the course and does not unnecessarily burden students or duplicate content in other (required) courses.

Evaluative Question 7: Assessment of students

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Assessment tasks and criteria are aligned with the course learning outcomes and content.

The course provides opportunities for formative assessment with detailed feedback to students.

Evaluative Question 8: Curriculum alignment

Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The course design and its implementation ensure that the course content, teaching and learning content and methods and materials, and student support provide students with a fair chance of attaining the learning outcomes specified for the course and of demonstrating this through assessment.

SUGGESTED SOURCES OF DATA FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND REVIEW

These suggestions are not intended to be used as a checklist. They are offered rather to assist and guide institutions on what may be appropriate sources of data that constitute legitimate forms of evidence. This list will obviously need to be adjusted depending on the nature and context of the programme or course review under consideration.

PROGRAMME REVIEW

1. Institutional quality management policy and teaching and learning plan;

2. Documentation on the registration and accreditation status of the programme and its qualifications;

3. Organogram showing the programme structure, the courses/ modules comprising the programme, their titles, levels and credit rating and the exit qualifications from the programme;

4. Programme handbook, course outlines and other information made available to students;

5. Curriculum and assessment documentation to demonstrate extent of curriculum alignment; these should include all exit-level learning outcomes, integrated assessment tasks and criteria and a sample of assessed student work;

6. Reports from programme evaluators and external examiners on summative assessment practices (particularly for exit qualifications), which comment on the quality of student achievement and also on the extent of curriculum alignment;

7. Graduation rates for the programme as a whole, preferably using cohort analyses;

8. Retention rates for years 1 and 2;

9. Performance profiles (i.e. distribution of scores across cohort) for key modules or assessment events;

10. Graduation and retention rates by race and gender groupings;

11. Analysed results of student opinion surveys;

12. Analysed results of external stakeholder opinion surveys (as appropriate);

13. Analysed results of programme team opinion surveys and self-evaluations;

14. Evidence of educational research and development (including publications);

15. Description of the internal quality management system for programme and course review and evaluation, including examples of data-gathering instruments and completed course review reports;

16. Improvement plans and, where relevant, evidence of their implementation;

17. Internal programme review reports; and

18. External programme evaluation reports.

COURSE REVIEW

1. Organogram showing the programme structure, the courses/ modules comprising the programme, their titles, levels and credit-rating, and the programme's exit qualifications;

2. Programme handbook, course outlines and other information made available to students;

3. Curriculum and assessment documentation to demonstrate the extent of curriculum alignment;

4. Student profile providing race and gender breakdown;

5. Relevant reports from internal and external examiners;

6. Course throughput rates;

7. Analysed results of student opinion data; and

8. Self-evaluation report (including an improvement plan) by the course convenor.

ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

CHE	Council on Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
ITL	Improving Teaching & Learning
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality Assurance

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

course/ module review refers to the internal self-evaluation procedures that an HEI undertakes to monitor and reflect on the outcomes of the education it provides through its courses/ modules. The findings of course reviews should feed into the reviews of the programmes of which they form a part.

curriculum alignment refers to the principle of ensuring that the purpose of a programme (or module) is supported by the content selection, learning outcomes, teaching–learning methods and assessment practices used to deliver it.

formative evaluative activities are those undertaken to inform improvement, in this case of teaching and learning and the curriculum.

programme A programme is defined as follows in the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (HEQF, Ministry of Education, 2004: 7):

> A programme is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification. Programmes may be discipline-based, professional, career-focused, or trans-, inter-or multidisciplinary in nature. A programme has recognized entry and exit points. All taught higher education programmes should have core and elective elements. This requirement is optional for research-based programmes. The internal organization of programme is otherwise not prescribed by this document.[8]

It should be noted that the DoE is here proposing a 1:1 correspondence between a programme and a qualification. That is to say, a particular programme should lead to one and only one qualification, while a particular qualification should be attained through a single route only, namely a specific programme.

Terms for constituent parts of programmes

In all cases in these Resources, the use of the term 'course' can be replaced with the term 'module'. While most HEIs in South Africa have adopted a modular curriculum structure, it was decided, in compiling these Resources, to retain the term 'course' as it is more inclusive and remains in common use among academics. The term 'subject' is sometimes used, particularly with reference to parts of vocationally oriented programmes.

programme evaluation refers to the external QA procedures undertaken by an external agency (e.g. expert peers, the HEQC or delegated partner ETQA) to make an independent assessment of a programme's outcomes and impact and/or to validate the findings of an internal programme review.

programme review refers to the internal self-evaluation procedures that an HEI undertakes to monitor and reflect on the outcomes and impact of its academic programmes. The findings of programme reviews should feed into the institutional quality management system, where decisions are taken and action for improvement planned and resourced. For example, the findings from a targeted sample of programme review processes could provide critical planning information, especially in the contexts of fundamental restructuring or mergers.

quality management of academic review refers to the internal quality management system that an HEI establishes to monitor, review and improve its programmes and courses.

summative evaluative activities are those undertaken to inform a judgment or summary decision, in this case on the effectiveness of a programme.

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[8]   That is, the HEQF.

CHE ☒ HEQC

| ITL Resource No. 2 | **Programme and Course Review** |

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