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ENSURING CONSISTENCY AND RELIABILITY IN EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE PROCEDURES

The NCHE Experience in Namibia

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The quality assurance nexus

Shared institutional responsibility and complementary external oversight



Higher Education Institutions
Primary responsibility for internal quality assurance

NCHE

Higher Education Act, 2003
Programme accreditation, institutional audits and quality assurance monitoring

NQA

NQA Act, 1996
National Qualifications Framework and statutory accreditation responsibilities

Professional Bodies

Relevant professional legislation
Profession-specific standards and regulatory responsibilities

» ***Integrated accreditation arrangements with NQA and cooperation with professional bodies (e.g. chartered accountancy, health, veterinary and engineering) support the consistent application of quality assurance standards.***

EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (EQA)

What Makes EQA Consistent and Reliable?

Two complementary principles, applied through practical safeguards

Consistency

The fair and uniform application of the same standards, criteria and procedures across institutions, programmes and review panels.

Reliability

Findings and recommendations that are credible, evidence-based and transparently justified.

Practical safeguards at NCHE

- Clear standards and procedures
- Trained and independent review panels
- Evidence-based assessment and triangulation
- Internal checks and quality oversight
- Review and continuous improvement

Together, these safeguards promote fair, transparent and defensible EQA outcomes.

From Regulatory Gaps to Clearer Expectations

A strengthened and coordinated framework for consistent and transparent EQA

Established Foundations

- QA System (2009)
- Programme Accreditation Manual
- Institutional Audit Manual

Further Clarification

- **Minimum Standards for HEIs (2026)**
- Clearer requirements and measurable criteria
- Enhances fairness, transparency and consistency

Coordinated Application

- NCHE–NQA Integrated Accreditation Manual
- Integrated arrangements with professional bodies, including:
  - ✓ **Chartered accountancy**
  - ✓ **Health professions**
  - ✓ **Veterinary professions**
  - ✓ **Engineering**

2009 QA System established

2014 Implementation began

2026 HAQAA3 external review and Minimum Standards

2027 QA System review planned

A clearer, more coordinated framework that reduces ambiguity and supports consistent EQA outcomes.

Two EQA Processes, Common Safeguards

Programme accreditation and institutional audits – distinct purposes, aligned procedures and shared safeguards

Programme Accreditation

- **Purpose:** To determine the quality and fitness for purpose of higher education programmes.
- **Scope:** Accreditation of new higher education programmes and re-accreditation of existing programmes (NQF Level 5 and above).
- **Process:** Self-evaluation, external review (review panel), site visit (if necessary), reporting and NCHE Council consideration.
- **Outcome:** Accreditation decision (e.g. full cycle or conditional).

Common Safeguards

- Common standards and criteria
- Qualified and independent review panels
- Reviewer induction and calibration
- Evidence-based assessment and validation
- Structured reporting and follow-up monitoring

Institutional Audit

- **Purpose:** To evaluate the institution's overall capacity and quality assurance arrangements.
- **Scope:** All institutional functions, assessed against the institutional standards (4 themes).
- **Process:** Institutional Portfolio, site visit, review panel assessment, report and Council feedback.
- **Outcome:** Audit report with commendations and recommendations, followed by an Improvement Plan and progress reporting (no accreditation decision).

Aligned processes and shared safeguards support consistent, credible and transparent EQA outcomes.

Preparing Reviewers for Consistent Judgements

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A structured and coordinated approach to the selection, preparation and work of review panels



Panel Selection

- Based on clear criteria: relevant expertise, experience and an appropriate institutional mix (academic, QA, industry and, where applicable, a student).

Independence and Integrity

- Declaration of independence and any potential conflict of interest.
- Commitment to confidentiality (through a signed confidentiality Agreement).
- Professional and ethical conduct in line with the TOR.

Induction and Preparation

- Structured induction on the QA framework, procedures and expected outputs.
- Common understanding of the applicable criteria and evidence requirements.

Common Criteria

- Application of NCHE criteria:
  - ✓ **Programme Accreditation:** 7 themes and 28 criteria.
  - ✓ **Institutional Audit:** 4 themes and 16 criteria.

Collective Assessment

- Joint analysis and discussion of evidence.
- Agreed findings, commendations and recommendations.
- A single, consensus-based panel report.

A consistent review outcome is enabled by competent, independent and well-prepared reviewers who apply common criteria through a collective and evidence-based assessment.

From Evidence to Defensible Findings

A systematic and transparent approach to assess, confirm and agree on findings



Evidence Verification

- Review of documented evidence (e.g. policies, records, data and reports).
- Confirm that evidence is relevant, current and sufficient against the criteria.

Triangulation

- Cross-checking of evidence from multiple sources (e.g. self-evaluation, site visit, interviews and observations).
- Builds a complete and reliable picture of the situation.

Panel Deliberations

- Structured discussion of the evidence against each criterion.
- Consideration of different perspectives and professional judgement.
- Agreement on findings, commendations and recommendations.

Factual Verification

- Draft report shared with the institution to check the accuracy and factual correctness of the findings.
- Confirmed factual inputs are incorporated before finalisation and submission to the NCHE Council.

These steps ensure that findings are evidence-based, fair, accurate and defensible.

From Panel Recommendations to Decisions

A structured decision-making process that ensures quality, consistency and regulatory compliance



Internal Checks (NCHE)

- Review of the panel report for completeness, consistency and alignment with NCHE standards and procedures.
- Verification that evidence supports the findings, commendations and recommendations.
- Preparation of a submission with a clear recommendation for the NCHE Council.

Council Consideration

- The NCHE Council considers the review report, the internal assessment and the recommendation.
- The Council makes the decision (e.g. accreditation for a specified period, accreditation with conditions or, where applicable, non-accreditation).
- The decision is communicated to the institution in writing.

NQA Concurrence (where applicable)

- For programme accreditation decisions, the outcome is submitted to the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA) for concurrence, as required by the NQA Act (Act 29 of 1996).
- NQA confirms alignment with the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) before the decision is finalised and communicated.

A transparent and accountable process that ensures decisions are evidence-based, legally compliant and aligned across the national quality assurance system.

Independence, Feedback and Appeals

Existing safeguards to ensure impartiality and institutional feedback, and the identified appeals gap



Independence

- Reviewers **declare** conflicts of interest and sign confidentiality undertakings.
- **Selection** based on relevant expertise, with balanced panels (academic, industry and QA).
- NCHE provides **induction** and clear terms of reference.

Feedback

- Draft reports are shared with institutions for **factual verification.**
- Institutions can provide **written comments** and clarifications.
- The **final report** reflects verified and substantiated findings, commendations and recommendations.

Appeals

- Current framework **does not provide a formal appeals mechanism** for institutions or programmes.
- This gap was identified during the **HAQAA3 review** as an area for further development.
- NCHE is considering **options** to introduce a clear and transparent appeals process in the revised QA system.

NCHE upholds independence and provides opportunities for institutional feedback, with the development of a formal appeals process identified as a key area for system enhancement.

Quality Assurance Does Not End with a Decision

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A continuous cycle that supports institutional improvement and the sustained quality of provision



Improvement Plans

- Institutions are required to develop an Improvement Plan based on the review findings and recommendations.
- The plan outlines **specific actions, responsibilities, required resources, estimated cost, timeframes and expected outputs.**

Progress Reports

- Institutions submit periodic Progress Reports to provide updates on the implementation of the Improvement Plan.
- Reports are assessed by NCHE to determine progress, address challenges and identify any further support needed.

Follow-up Monitoring

- NCHE monitors the implementation of agreed actions through the review of Progress Reports and, where necessary, targeted follow-up engagements.
- The outcomes inform ongoing support and future review cycles (e.g. re-accreditation or the next institutional audit).

Follow-up and monitoring ensure that review outcomes lead to measurable improvement and the sustained quality of higher education provision.

NCHE EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE (EQA)

What the HAQAA3 External Review Revealed

Independent findings on NCHE's quality assurance arrangements



Independent Findings

- An external review of NCHE's EQA arrangements was conducted under HAQAA3.
- The review provided an independent and evidence-based assessment of NCHE's alignment with the African Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ASG-QA).
- The findings confirm a generally compliant and functional QA system, with areas for strengthening.

Strengths

- A clear legal and regulatory mandate, supported by established policies, standards and procedures.
- Structured and transparent EQA processes (accreditation and institutional audit).
- Qualified and experienced external reviewers, with induction and guidance.
- A commitment to improvement and alignment with continental QA principles.

Areas Requiring Improvement

- Development of a formal appeals mechanism for institutions and programmes.
- Further strengthening of NCHE's independence, considering operational constraints (e.g. Council appointment by the Minister).
- A more systematic review of the effectiveness of NCHE's own standards.
- Enhanced evidence of post-accreditation monitoring outcomes and impact.
- Addressing resource constraints to support implementation.

Review Date: 3–5 March 2026

Judgement Summary: 16 standards: 11 Compliant | 5 Partially Compliant

The HAQAA3 review affirmed NCHE's progress and credibility, while identifying specific areas to further strengthen and refine its QA arrangements.

Turning Lessons into Improvement Priorities

Key actions, planned reviews and continuing challenges following the HAQAA3 review



Key Actions

- Develop a formal **complaints** and **appeals** process.
- Strengthen NCHE's **independence** and address operational constraints.
- Enhance post-accreditation monitoring and evidence of impact.
- Address resource constraints to support effective implementation.

Planned Reviews

- Review and update the NCHE Quality Assurance System for Higher Education in Namibia.
- Assess the effectiveness of NCHE's standards to ensure relevance and fit for purpose.
- Align these reviews with the planned QA system review in the 2027/28 financial year (starting April 2027).

Continuing Challenges

- Limited human, financial and technical resources relative to the scope of EQA activities.
- Maintaining operational independence within the current governance arrangements (e.g. Council appointment by the Minister).
- Keeping standards and processes aligned with evolving sector needs (e.g. online learning and micro-credentials).

The HAQAA3 findings are being translated into concrete actions and planned reviews to strengthen the effectiveness, credibility and sustainability of NCHE's quality assurance arrangements.

Closing: Three Lessons from Namibia

Key takeaways and an invitation to continued peer learning



1. Independence Builds Trust

- Clear procedures for expert selection, conflict of interest and transparency help ensure impartial and credible reviews.

2. Quality Assurance is a Continuous Process

- The value of EQA lies not only in the decision, but in follow-up actions — improvement plans, progress reporting and ongoing monitoring.

3. External Review Drives Improvement

- Independent feedback, such as the **HAQAA3** review, helps to validate what is working, identify gaps and prioritise practical enhancements.

We look forward to continued peer learning and the exchange of practical experiences on strengthening external quality assurance in our respective contexts.



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Thank You

I welcome your questions, reflections and experiences.