



COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Towards a new future for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in South Africa

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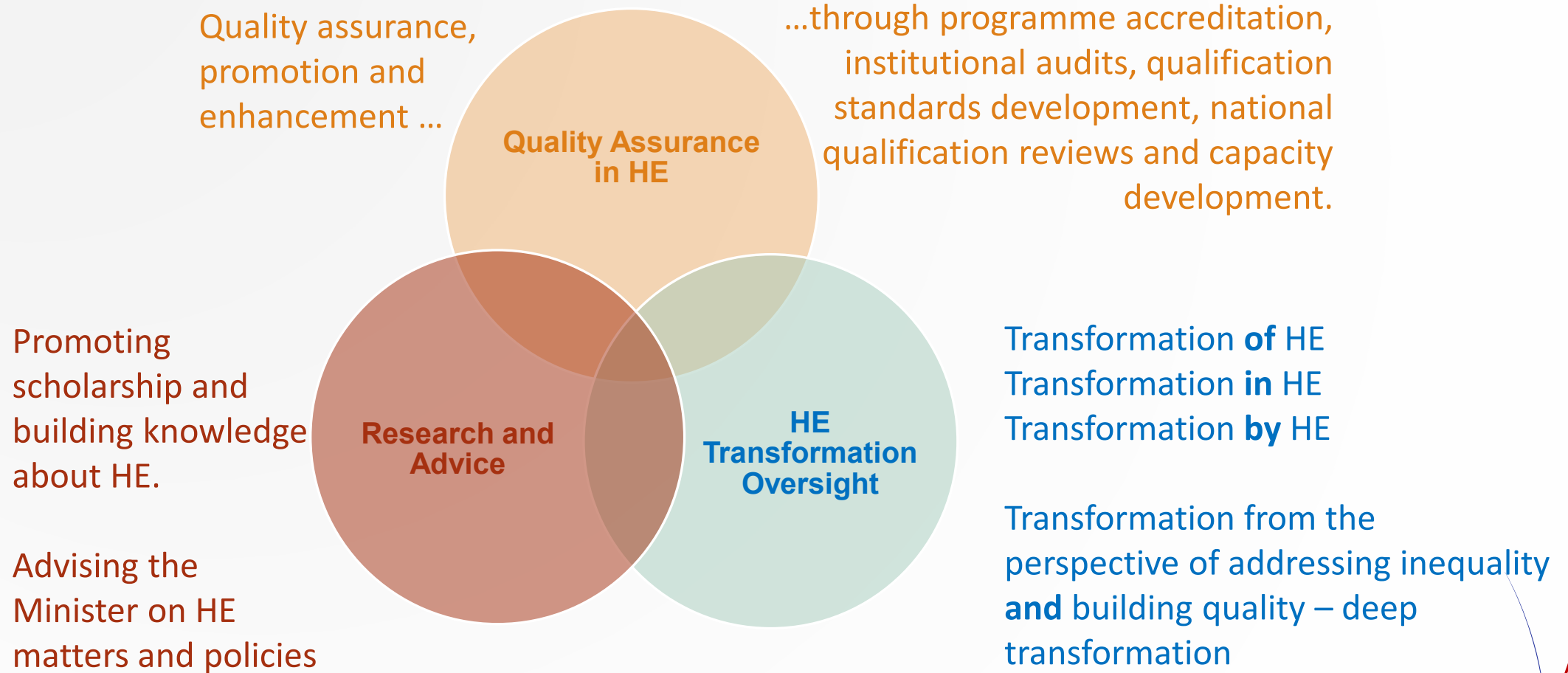
COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION

Outline of Presentation

- Historical trajectories
- New Directions
- Drawing on digital affordances
- Some critical questions

The CHE and its work

An independent statutory body and quality council responsible for:



The CHE's 25-years' Quality Assurance Trajectory

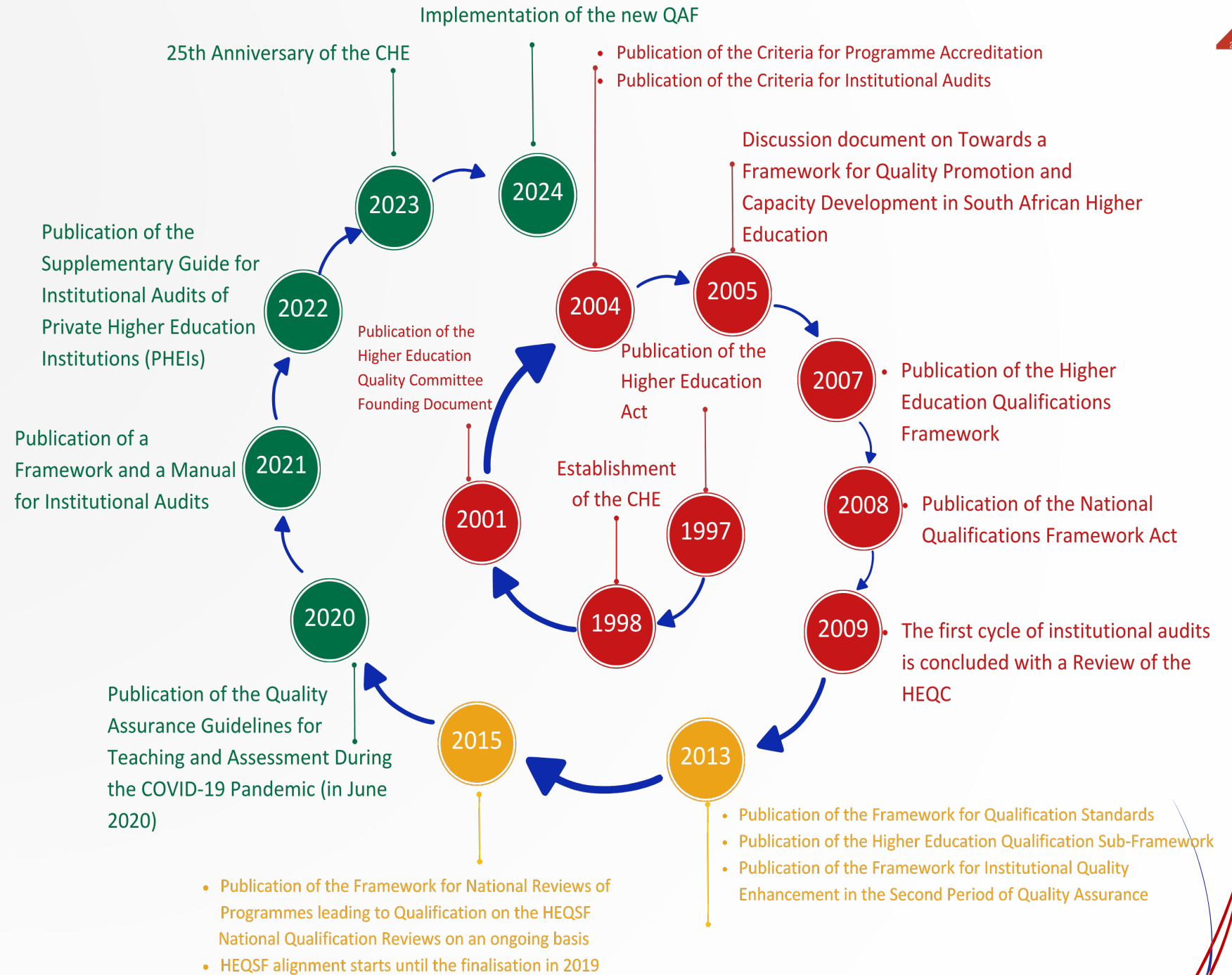
Accountability



Enhancement



Stewardship



A pervasive Audit Culture underpinning QA

- Audit culture as a “condition....shaped by the use of modern techniques and principles of financial audit, but in contexts far removed from the world of financial accountancy...the techniques and values of accountancy have become a central organizing principles in the governance and management of human conduct – and the new kinds of relationships, habits and practices that this is creating.” (Shore, 2008:278)
- Concerns about quality, risk and a **crisis of trust** in the higher education prevalent
- Audit culture conflates *accountability* with *accountancy* and may be viewed as an elaborate policing mechanism based on minimum **compliance**.
- Such an audit culture, however, can lead to ‘**concealing behaviour**’, where instead of accountability, data is deliberately concealed to make institutions look as if there is ‘good quality’ and compliance (Bamber & Anderson, 2012).
- Audit culture also runs the risk of alienating everyday **academics** because they **feel** that it **devalues their everyday practices**.
- If quality assurance is seen as a **top-down practice** where **mindless conformity** is expected, there will be conflict between quality assurance efforts and academics.

(Bamber & Anderson, 2012).

Quality and Quality Assurance as contested concepts

- Who makes the decision what quality is?
- Based on what criteria or standards?
- In what context?
- For what purpose?
- What is contextually relevant and transformative quality?

(Aluko, Letseka, & Pitsoe, 2016; Fresen & Boyd, 2005; Hauptman Komotar, 2020; Zawada, 2019)

New directions underpinned by a philosophy of Ubuntu...

- **The African value of Ubuntu** is often presented in short statements (Samkange and Samkange 1980):

Umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu (isiZulu) = A person is a person through other people.
- *A collection of values and practices that people of Africa or of African origin view as making people authentic human beings. While the nuances of these values and practices vary across different ethnic groups, they all point to one thing – **an authentic individual human being is part of a larger and more significant relational, communal, societal, environmental and spiritual world** (Mugumabata 2020)*
- *More critical...is the understanding of a person as located in a community where being a person is to be in a dialogical relationship in this community. **A person's humanity is dependent on the appreciation, preservation and affirmation of other person's humanity.** To be a person is to recognize therefore that my subjectivity is in part constituted by other persons with whom I share the social world. (<https://iep.utm.edu/hunhu/> accessed on 10 March 2023)*
- 10 Features of Ubuntu (Prozesky 2003- <https://iep.utm.edu/hunhu/> accessed on 10 March 2023)

Humaneness; Gentleness; Hospitality; Empathy or taking trouble for others; Deep Kindness; Friendliness; Generosity; Vulnerability; Toughness; Compassion

Quality Assurance: A Stewardship Approach

Can we reimagine quality assurance as stewardship, rather than as policing, and will this approach result in a greater and more lasting positive impact on quality in higher education?

With acknowledgment to Dr. Chera Reid and Shaady Salehi (<https://www.evaluationinnovation.org/publication/toward-a-trust-based-framework-for-learning-and-evaluation/>) who ask a similar question in the context of evaluation in trust-based philanthropy.

BORDER CROSSING

Accountability	↔	Development and Support
Prescriptive	↔	Generative, Reflexive
Independence & Objectivity	↔	Partnership and Collaboration
CHE Responsibility	↔	Institutional Responsibility
External Quality Assurance	↔	Internal Quality Assurance
Uniform approach	↔	Differentiated approach

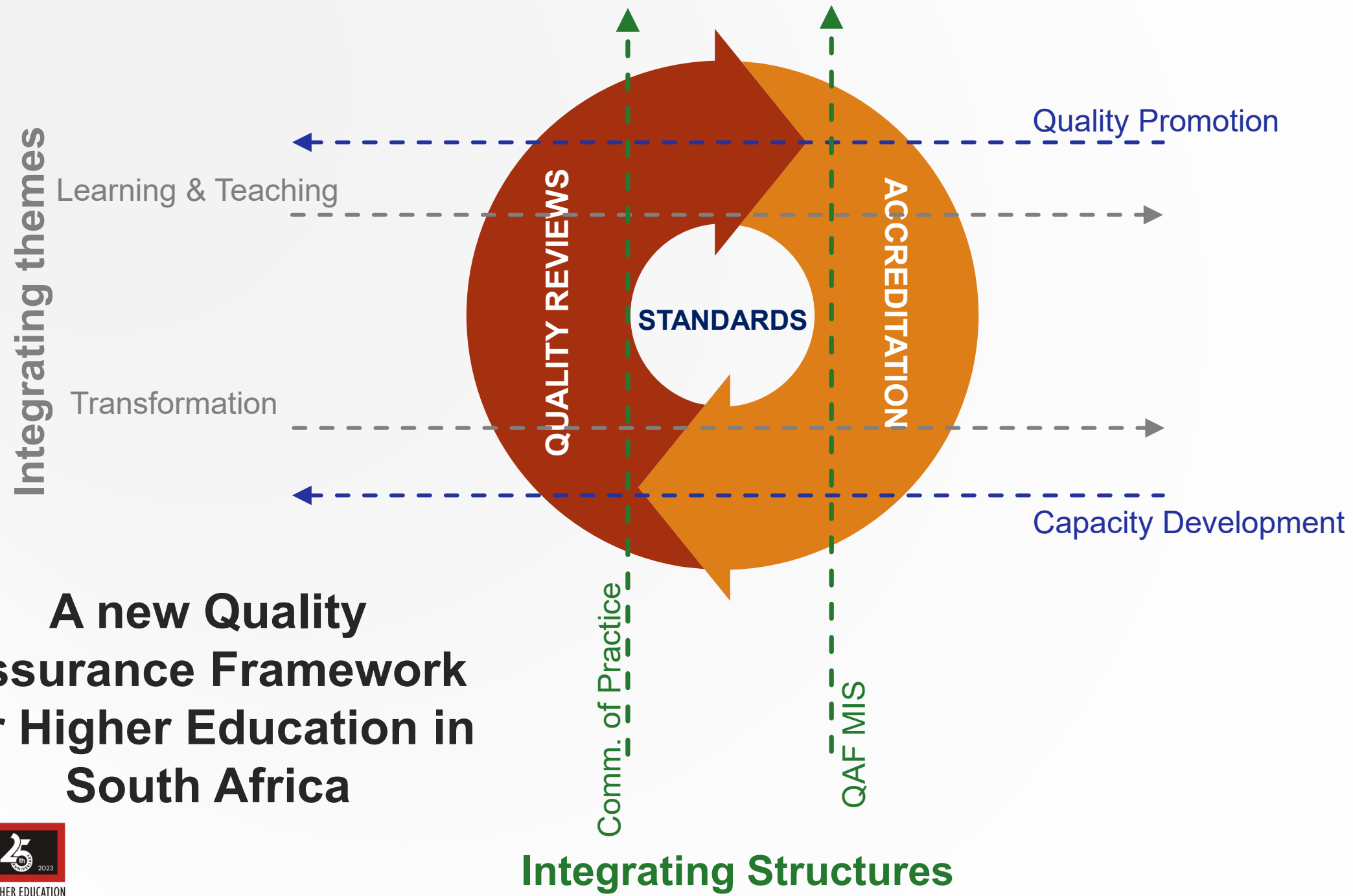
WORKING IN 3rd SPACES

A new language of description...

Generative
Reflexive
Developmental
Collaborative
Consultative
Partnership
Consensus
Peer-validation
Responsibility
Community
Self-Reflection
Context
Difference
Trust
Responsiveness

A different way of working...

A new Quality Assurance Framework for Higher Education in South Africa

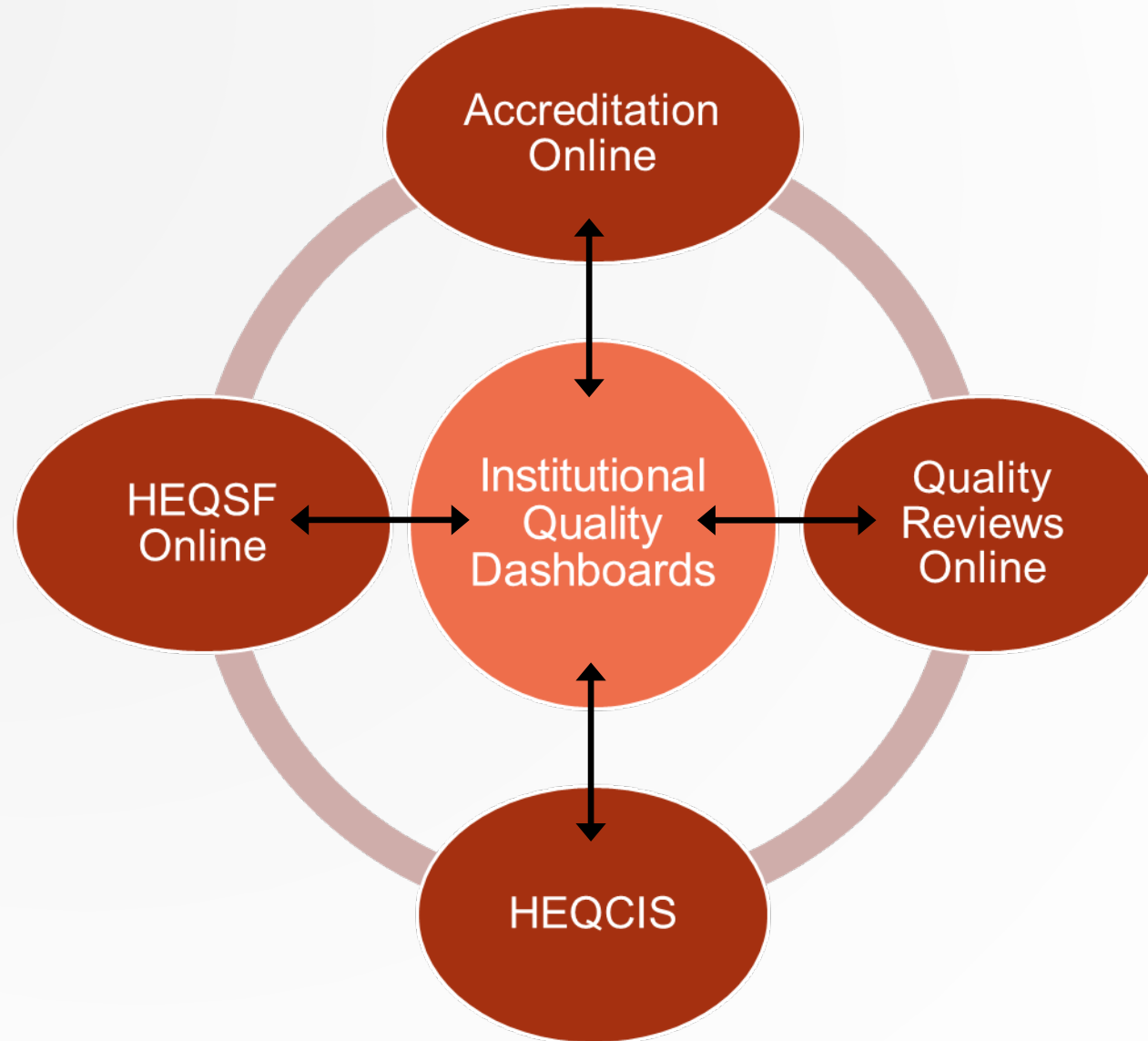


Integrating functions

The QAF Management Information System (MIS)

- The QAF-MIS is a meta system, comprising of a number of individual operating systems that feed into a core system of institutional quality dashboards.
- The individual operating systems are the digital platforms that support and enable the range of QAF EQA functions to be carried out. They are end-to end solutions for each of the EQA functions and enable optimal digital management of the function. Selected data from the individual operating systems feed into the institutional quality dashboards.
- Dashboards are digital track records for each of the higher education institutions in which the decisions of previous EQA activities undertaken against agreed-upon standards, are inputted, collated, displayed, analysed and interpreted per institution.
 - ✓ **The Dashboards provide a view on quality at institutional level and at sectoral level at any given time.**

Overview of the QAF MIS



The nature of higher education practice standards

- Standards are **codes of practice** typically worded as statements that **enable reflection** on the content addressed by the standard. Guidelines accompany each standard and these describe why the standard is important and describe how the **standard might be interpreted and implemented in different contexts.**
- A **standards development rather than standards setting** approach is used, which **enables contextual responsiveness** and **enables a shift from a compliance approach to a developmental approach.**
- **Reflexive and generative methods** are used to develop the standards and to engage with them on an ongoing basis.
- Standards are **developed by communities of practice** drawn from the sector, and are thus developed by the sector, for the sector.

...Standards **not** standardization.

Dashboards based on HEP Standards and Qualification Standards



1. Institutional agency and identity

2. Transforming Knowledges

3. Learning, teaching and assessment, programme management and provisioning

4. Programme and module design, review and improvement

5. Academic staff development

6. Experiential learning

7. Physical environments and experiences

8. Digital environments and experiences

9. Student Administration

10. Student academic and psycho-social support

11. Transitions into higher education

12. Transitions through higher education

13. Transitions from formal higher education

14. The Data Value Chain

15. Research and Innovation

16. Qualification Standards

QAF-MIS – A minimum viable product to be in place in 2024



INPUTS

Accreditation Online

Quality Reviews online

**STORE, ANALYSE
AND REPRESENT**

1. Institutional agency and identity

2. Transforming Knowledges

3. Learning, teaching and assessment, programme management and provisioning

4. Programme and module design, review and improvement

5. Academic staff development

6. Experiential learning

7. Physical environments and experiences

8. Digital environments and experiences

9. Student Administration

10. Student academic and psycho-social support

11. Transitions into higher education

12. Transitions through higher education

13. Transitions out of formal higher education

14. Institutional information and knowledge generation and use

15. Research and Innovation

16. Qualification Standards

OUTPUTS

Changing QA status over time per standard, and overall

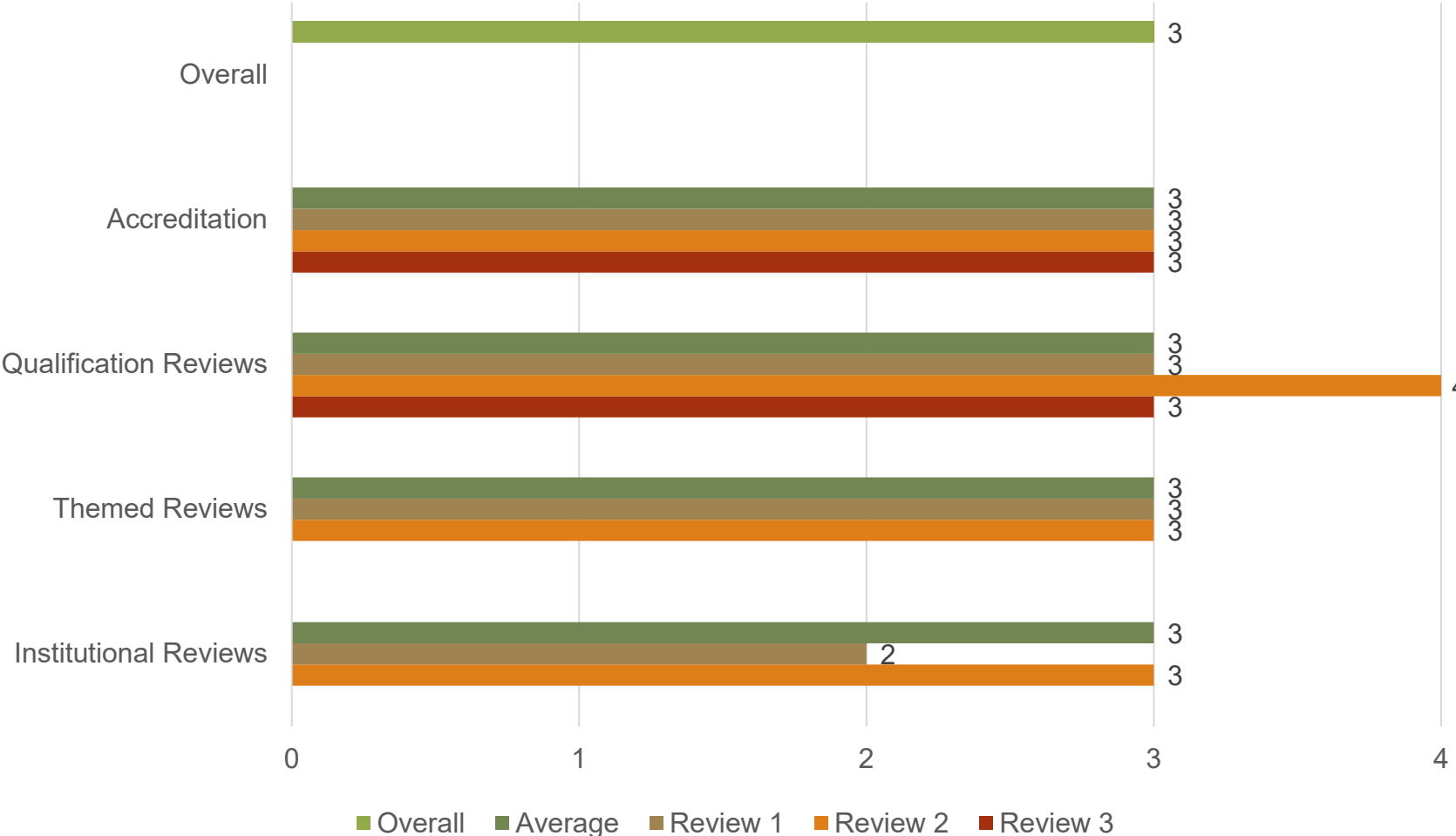
Levels of functionality against the standard

Level 1 (Not Functional)	<p>Did not comply with the majority of the specified criteria for the HEPS.</p>
Level 2 (Needs substantial improvement)	<p>Not all minimum standards specified in the criteria for the HEPS were met. Problems/weaknesses could be addressed in a short period of time.</p>
Level 3 (Functional)	<p>All minimum standards specified in the HEPS criteria were met.</p>
Level 4 (Highly Functional)	<p>All minimum standards specified in the HEPS criteria were met and, in addition, examples of good practice and innovation were identified in relation to several criteria.</p>

A Dashboard Example



HEPS 3: Learning, teaching and assessment, programme management and provisioning



Some critical questions to consider

- The new approach is based on trust and responsibility. Are there any risks inherent in that?
- How do we build the understanding that an approach based on standards is not antithetical to a humanising approach to quality assurance?
- Is performance against a selection of standards in specific areas of higher education practices sufficient to reach an understanding on the state of internal quality at institutions? And is this sufficient to allow institutions which are regarded as functional to take greater responsibility for some elements of QA typically undertaken by the CHE?
- What are the challenges in reducing evidence-based qualitative decisions on quality made by peers based on standards to quantitative representations in visual digital dashboard displays?
- Is there a danger of the IQD system being viewed as a ranking system by the sector, rather than as a system that enables a differentiated approach, thus further entrenching elitism and competition?

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THANK YOU