



## Media Release

# Lesotho Qualifications Framework, an Important Base for Accreditation of Programmes

### 1.0 Background

According to the Higher Education Act of 2004 the Council on Higher Education (CHE) has a mandate to regulate higher education. Regulation of Higher Education involves such things as accreditation of programmes offered by higher education institutions, and auditing of quality assurance mechanisms of these institutions, among other things. It is important for accreditation to be anchored on a functional national qualification's framework. Such a framework should be linked to other similar frameworks in the SADC region and internationally to enable student and graduate mobility. The following points present the road travelled by Lesotho in development and implementation of policies pertaining to higher education:

- 2004 – Higher Education Act was enacted;
- 2005 – Draft Qualifications Framework for Lesotho was developed but not approved and could not be implemented;
- 2008 – CHE Board was appointed;
- 2010 – CHE Secretariat was established, and therefore, CHE became fully operational;
- 2013 – CHE started accreditation of programmes offered by Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) using Minimum Accreditation Standards, but it could not use the Draft Qualifications Framework for Lesotho because it was not approved.
- 2016 – 2018 – The Draft Qualifications Framework for Lesotho was reviewed, and the process was led by CHE. Thus, the revised framework titled Lesotho Qualifications Framework (LQF) was developed.
- 2019 – LQF was approved by Cabinet as a national policy document. LQF has ten levels with each level defining learner achievement through level descriptors and learning outcomes among others. LQF also allocates credits for each level which indicate depth and breadth of qualifications.
- In the same year CHE was given mandate by the Ministry of Education and Training to manage implementation of LQF within the higher education subsector. The following year the same mandate was expanded to cover the whole education sector. However, practical circumstances within the Ministry do not provide an enabling environment for this to happen effectively. So, to date CHE manages implementation of LQF in higher education only. Management of LQF involves verification and evaluation of both local and foreign qualifications, among other things. CHE has verified many qualifications and has found a few suspicious cases of fraud which are still being investigated.

- 2021 – CHE aligned its Minimum Accreditation Standards to the newly approved LQF;
- CHE issued a notification that all HEIs should align their programmes to the LQF. Alignment would take place over time and involve redesign of some old programmes either upwards or downwards;
- 2021 was the first year in which CHE was able to ascertain a level of a resultant qualification(s) for a programme upon accreditation. Prior to the operationalisation of the LQF, CHE could not pronounce on the level of a qualification because there was no policy basis to support that.

## **2.0 Alignment to LQF on Course**

- For a period of 8 years from 2013 to 2021 there was a gap in which programmes were accredited without a clear pronouncement by CHE on the level of resultant qualifications.
- It was only when the LQF was implemented that CHE was able to effectively determine levels of qualifications.
- All HEIs have therefore, been requested to align their programmes and their resultant qualifications to the LQF, in their submissions for accreditation.
- A number of programmes offered by different HEIs have been affected by this policy gap. The following cases are examples of various challenges that have been encountered as a result of the gap:
  - Botho University programmes were accredited with the assumption that they would yield Honours qualifications from 2015 and in subsequent years. Honours qualifications are placed on LQF Level 8. However, when two of the same programmes were submitted to CHE for re-accreditation with the LQF in operation it emerged that they were slightly below the assumed LQF Level 8. The discrepancy was caused by non-existence of the LQF policy document. CHE is currently working with the institution to fully align its programmes and resultant qualifications to LQF requirements.
  - CHE is working with the Lesotho Nursing Council (LNC) and related institutions towards alignment of nursing programmes offered in different institutions in the country. Currently the programmes are mostly at diploma level, and entry level to various diploma programmes is a diploma. This is an anomaly, that needs to be corrected so that there is progression in accordance with the prescripts of the LQF.
  - CHE has recently conducted an institutional audit of the Lesotho Agricultural College (LAC) in which significant short-comings were found. Alignment of their programmes to the LQF is in doubt, so the plan is for the college to submit its programmes to CHE for review towards accreditation so that the identified shortcomings during institutional audit, and those related to programmes can be addressed comprehensively.

- Various institutions have bridging programmes through which they prepare students for entry into their mainstream programmes. Traditionally, these bridging programmes were not accredited. However, CHE has now resolved to accredit them so that their quality can be ascertained and be placed on the LQF accordingly. This will not only assure quality, but it will enable students to move from one institution to another and be able to carry units accumulated through a bridging programme.

The journey towards full alignment of all old programmes offered by Higher Education Institutions will take a few years. Currently all programmes, new and old submitted to CHE for accreditation are required to be fully aligned to the LQF. CHE will always ensure that quality of higher education in Lesotho is maintained during this time of transition and beyond.