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CHE

# COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION



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09 January 2006

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CC: The Chairperson  
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National Assembly  
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Dear Madam Speaker

**INVITATION TO MAKE SUBMISSION TO THE COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION'S TASK TEAM ON SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT INVOLVEMENT IN, AND REGULATION OF, HIGHER EDUCATION, INSTITUTIONAL AUTONOMY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) has established a Task Team to investigate government involvement in higher education since 1994, in the context of the pursuit of specific policy goals and the principles of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability.

The Task Team is in the process of inviting and receiving submissions from various higher education role players and other stakeholders. The Task Team wishes to invite Parliament, its committees and parliamentarians to make such submission to the investigation as they see fit, and has asked me to convey this invitation. (A similar letter has been sent to the Chairperson of the National Council of Provinces, cc to the Chairperson of the Select Committee on Education and Recreation.)

The submission could, for example, be a written position on the nature of government involvement in higher education in the past decade, and on the themes of institutional autonomy,

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academic freedom and public accountability in the context of South Africa, the continent, and higher education transformation (copies of relevant documents, papers or speeches would also be welcomed). Alternatively, an engagement between representatives of Parliament, or its committees, and of the Task Team, could be arranged. Should your response to this invitation be positive, then a submission or engagement by end-April 2006 would be much appreciated, if possible.

The Task Team's investigation takes place against a backdrop of concerns, and claims, as to government 'interference' in higher education. Its purpose is to stimulate debate and build shared understanding, as well as produce a Research Report, on:

- The appropriate nature and modes of government involvement in higher education transformation;
- Appropriate relationships between government, other bodies with higher education regulatory functions, and higher education institutions; and
- Appropriate conceptions of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability, in general and in the specific context of South Africa and higher education transformation.

Further details on the proposed investigation are contained in the terms of reference of the investigation, as appended to this letter.

Should you have any queries regarding the Task Team and its investigation, please contact me (tel: 012 392-9132; fax: 012 392-9120; email: [singh.m@che.ac.za](mailto:singh.m@che.ac.za)).

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation.

Yours sincerely



DR MALA SINGH  
ACTING CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER





**TASK TEAM**

**INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH ON**

**SOUTH AFRICAN GOVERNMENT**  
**INVOLVEMENT IN AND REGULATION OF**  
**HIGHER EDUCATION, INSTITUTIONAL**  
**AUTONOMY AND ACADEMIC FREEDOM**

**OCTOBER 2005 (FINAL)**

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## 1.1 THE PURPOSE OF THE INVESTIGATION

The purpose of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) investigation and research is to

**Stimulate through scholarly debate and discussion, research and writings, and other mechanisms**

- **The building of shared understanding**
- **Perhaps consensus**
- **A report**

on

- **The appropriate nature and modes of government involvement in higher education transformation**
- **Appropriate relationships between government (and other bodies with higher education regulatory functions) and higher education institutions, and**
- **Appropriate conceptions of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability, in general and in the specific context of South Africa and higher education transformation.**

This in turn helps to give effect to the CHE's responsibilities, as part of its overall mission to contribute to the development of a higher education system characterised by quality and excellence, equity, responsiveness to economic and social development needs and effective and efficient provision, governance and management, to

- **Contribute to developing higher education – provide leadership and stimulate debate around key national and systemic issues; undertake investigations and research to sensitise government and stakeholders to immediate and long-term critical challenges of South African higher education in relation to stated principles, commitments and policy goals; produce publications; and hold seminars and conferences, including an annual Consultative Conference of all higher education stakeholders; and promote good practice;**
- **Provide informed, considered, independent and strategic advice on higher education issues to the Minister of Education;**
- **Undertake effective quality assurance within higher education and training – including programme accreditation, institutional audits, programme evaluation and quality promotion and capacity building.**



## 1.2 THE RATIONALE FOR THE INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH

In any fundamental process of higher education restructuring and transformation within a democracy, such as the kind that is being attempted in South Africa, government, of course, has a vital and key role to play.

Indeed, the South African Ministry of Education has committed itself to a 'state steering' model of state involvement as opposed to, say, a 'state interference' model, which characterises the role of the state in higher education in a number of countries.

The state steering model is predicated on the principles, given expression in numerous higher education policy documents, of

- Institutional autonomy
- Academic freedom
- Public accountability

and the related principles of

- Democratisation
- Development.

In recent years the transformation agenda has shifted from the articulation of general visions and frameworks of higher education principles, values and goals to policy formulation and the need to make difficult choices and take tough decisions in the contexts of competing goals and principles, financial constraints and the lack of professional personpower.

In this new context, there are concerns in some quarters, indeed claims, that the nature of government involvement in higher education is showing signs of moving, or has indeed moved, from 'state steering' to 'state interference'.

It is becoming clear that whether they are expressed as concerns or claims, at play and informing such concerns or claims are particular conceptions of *institutional autonomy*, *academic freedom* and *public accountability* and the relationships and priorities between these.

Moreover, there also appear to be different views on the appropriate balance in specific domains of higher education between government prescription and regulation and institutional self-regulation, either individually or as a sector through the umbrella bodies representing institutions.



The questions of:

1. The conceptions of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability that are held by different key higher education actors (the government, the Council on Higher Education, the academic community, and higher education stakeholders)
2. The conceptions of the relationships between institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability that are held by different key higher education actors (e.g. Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), professional councils)
3. The nature of government involvement in higher education transformation
4. The appropriate character and modes of government regulation of higher education and regulation of higher education through other bodies with regulatory functions, such as the Council on Higher Education in the domain of quality assurance

have the potential to become major issues of conflict and contestation between government, institutions and different higher education constituencies, stakeholders and organisations and also constrain the transformation of South African higher education.

Consequently, a sober and rigorous investigation and conceptual and empirical research are urgently required that can illuminate the issues noted above, especially in the specificity of the South African context of transition from apartheid to democracy.

### **1.3 THE AIMS OF THE INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH**

The specific aims of the investigation and research are to:

1. Describe and critically analyse the nature and modes of government involvement in higher education transformation, as well as the nature and modes of involvement of other regulatory bodies
2. Describe and critically analyse the conceptions of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability that are held by key higher education actors – the government, the Council on Higher Education, higher education institutions, and various stakeholders
3. Identify, describe and critically analyse the claims being made of government interference in higher education
4. Identify, describe and critically analyse whatever responses there may be to the claims of government interference in higher education
5. Advance argument and conclusions on the nature of the involvement of government and other regulatory bodies in higher education
6. Advance argument and conclusions on actors' conceptions of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability and their relationships



7. Advance argument and conclusions on the validity and appropriateness of actors' conceptions of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability, in general and in the specific context of South Africa and higher education transformation.

#### **1.4 OBJECTS OF THE INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH**

The objects of the investigation and research are to:

1. Critically review select literature on regulation by government and other bodies with regulatory functions in higher education
2. Critically review select literature on institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability in higher education and their relationships
3. Critically review the literature, and also invite commentary, on the involvement of government and other regulatory bodies in higher education in South Africa under apartheid
4. Critically review the literature, and also invite commentary, on the involvement of government and other regulatory bodies in higher education in South Africa post-1994
5. Invite and assemble assertions and arguments claiming government interference in higher education
6. Invite and assemble assertions and arguments rejecting claims of government interference in higher education
7. Invite and assemble conceptions of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability and their relationships in higher education
8. Establish engagements through appropriate forums between actors holding different views on the nature of government involvement in higher education
9. Establish engagements through appropriate forums between actors holding different conceptions of institutional autonomy, academic freedom and public accountability and their relationships in higher education
10. Interview representatives or select members of the Department of Education, the Council on Higher Education, higher education institutions, higher education stakeholder organisations and higher education research and development agencies to advance the aims of the project



## 1.5 FRAMEWORK OF THE INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH

The investigation and research and the conclusions and arguments that are advanced must keep in mind the values and principles that inform post-1994 South African higher education, and the purposes and goals that have been defined for higher education in various policy documents.

The higher education system is intended to

- Promote equity of access and fair chances of success to all who are seeking to realise their potential through higher education, while eradicating all forms of unfair discrimination and advancing redress for past inequalities
- Meet, through well-planned and co-ordinated teaching, learning and research programmes, national development needs, including the high-skilled employment needs presented by a growing economy operating in a global environment
- Support a democratic ethos and a culture of human rights by educational programmes and practices conducive to critical discourse and creative thinking, cultural tolerance, and a common commitment to a humane, non-racist and non-sexist social order
- Contribute to the advancement of all forms of knowledge and scholarship, and in particular address the diverse problems and demands of the local, national, Southern African and African contexts, and uphold rigorous standards of academic quality.

The higher education system is also required to contribute to the realization of the primary purposes of the *National Plan for Higher Education* (p.6), which are to ensure that

- The higher education system achieves the transformation objectives set out in the *White Paper* and is responsive to societal interests and needs
- There is coherence with regard to the provision of higher education at the national level
- Limited resources are used efficiently and effectively and there is accountability for the expenditure of public funds
- The quality of academic programmes, including teaching and research, is improved across the system.

The values and principles that are required to inform higher education are:

- Equity and redress
- Democratisation
- Development
- Quality
- Effectiveness and efficiency
- Academic freedom
- Institutional autonomy
- Public accountability.



In addition, it is vitally important that the investigation be conducted with an appreciation of South Africa as a country and higher education as a domain in transition – that is, an understanding of the context of higher education change and transformation in South Africa.

Finally, the transition and attempts at higher education transformation take place in a wider international context of globalisation and transnationalisation of higher education and the predominance of particular ideologies, values and policies. These could condition the nature of the transition and attempts at higher education transformation in South Africa.

In sum, the investigation must aim to develop a reasonably clear conceptual framework that is – as far as possible – a normative framework in respect of 'steady-state' notions of academic freedom, institutional autonomy and public accountability. At the same time, it must provide an analysis which is appropriately periodised and qualified to take account of conceptual evolution in time and in different circumstances (e.g. distinguishing between periods of South African higher education policy development in 1994-1999, and of delivery in the years after 2000), and in the light of mediating factors (e.g. the influence of neo-liberalism internationally, the influence of 'the market' nationally and globally, the influence of regional and continental goals and accords).

## 1.6 IMPLEMENTATION OF THE INVESTIGATION AND RESEARCH

The CHE proposes to implement the investigation and research by establishing a Task Team comprising local and international specialists with the necessary expertise and experience.

Within the confines of the stipulated time frame and budget, the Task Team

1. Will direct, guide and supervise the investigation and research
2. Will produce for publication a Research Report
3. May produce on the basis of the investigation, research or a Research Report, and other publications designed to stimulate intellectual and scholarly debate
4. May, on the request of the CHE, produce a Policy Report for the CHE
5. Will assist the CHE in convening a national seminar involving the Ministry of Education, higher education institutions, stakeholder organisations, higher education research and development agencies and other relevant bodies.

The CHE will appoint the Chairperson of the Task Team.

The proposed members of the Task Team are:

- South African member – **Mr Steven Friedman**, Senior Research Fellow, Centre for Policy Studies
- South African member – **Dr Frene Ginwala**, former Speaker of Parliament
- South African Member – **Dr Khotso Mokhele**, President, National Research Foundation
- South African member – **Prof Njabulo Ndebele**, Vice-Chancellor, University of Cape Town
- International member – **Prof. Ebrima Sall**, Head of Research and Documentation, CODESRIA
- South African member – **Dr Mala Singh**, Executive Director, Higher Education Quality Committee



The Chief Executive Officer of the CHE, **Prof. Saleem Badat**, will serve as the Convenor of the Task Team.

## 1.7 TIME-FRAME

The investigation and research will begin in April 2005 and will conclude in late 2006, followed by a national seminar in November 2006 or early 2007.

## 1.8 SCHEDULE

The following schedule serves as a guide for the investigation, and will be adapted according to need.

Activity	Dates
• CHE approval of Project Proposal	November 2003 February 2004
• Securing of funding through donor support	November 2003– May 2004
• Identification of possible members of CHE Task Team	February – May 2004
• CHE selection of members of Task Team	14 June 2004
• First meeting of Task Team	29 March 2005
• Discussion of investigation and research agenda	
• Progress report to CHE	11 April 2005
• Follow-up meeting of Task Team (with all members)	June/July 2005
• Finalisation of investigation and research agenda	
• Progress report to CHE	11 July 2005
• Investigation and research	July – October 2005
• Task Team Seminars	
• Second meeting of Task Team	August/September 2005 (2 days)
• Task Team Forum	
• Investigation and research	August – December 2005
• Task Team Seminars	
• Production of <u>first draft</u> <i>Research Report</i>	
• Progress report to CHE	17 October 2005
• Third meeting of Task Team	January/February 2006
• Tabling and discussion of <u>first draft</u> <i>Research Report</i>	
• Task Team Forum	
• Progress report to CHE	February 2006
• Tabling of <u>first draft</u> <i>Research Report</i> and revisions at CHE	
• Investigation and research	January – April 2006
• Task Team Seminars	
• Production of <u>final draft</u> <i>Research Report</i>	
• Fourth and final meeting of Task Team	April 2006
• Tabling and discussion of <u>final draft</u> <i>Research Report</i>	
• Meeting of Task Team and CHE	
• Progress report to CHE	May 2006
• Tabling of <u>final draft</u> <i>Research Report</i> and revisions at CHE	



