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The Zimbabwean story of quality assurance in higher and tertiary education

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Massive Expansion of University Education

- The government adopted an education policy which resulted in remarkable and phenomenal expansion of university education from 1981.
- With the introduction of new programmes, Departments and Faculties at the University of Zimbabwe, the student enrolment rose from 2,240 in 1980 to 9,017 in 1990.
- Owing to increasing demand for university education in Zimbabwe, a second University, the National University of Science and Technology (NUST) was established in 1990.
- NUST opened its doors to 270 pioneer students in April 1991.

The Establishment and Mandate of ZIMCHE

- Rapid expansion of universities in Zimbabwe led to serious concerns about possible decline in standards of university education being offered.
- The concern was worsened by dwindling resources for teaching, student learning, and research.
- As a strategy to address the impending challenge, a more conventional quality assurance agency was established.
- This witnessed the genesis of the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education (ZIMCHE) in 2006.

The Establishment and Mandate of ZIMCHE. Cont'd

- As an external quality assurance agency, ZIMCHE's mandate can be summarized as follows:
 - Registration and accreditation of institutions of higher education;
 - Co-ordination and regulation of education provided by institutions of higher education in the determination and maintenance of standards of teaching, examinations, academic qualifications and research in institutions of higher education.
 - Development and implementation of quality assurance systems and procedures;
 - Quality promotion; and
 - Provision advisory services to the Minister

The Structure of the Zimbabwe Council for Higher Education

- ZIMCHE is made up of a 21-member Council and a Secretariat headed by the Chief Executive Officer (CEO)
- The Council is the policy making body whose members are appointed by the Ministry.
- Council members represent different sectors of the economy and are appointed on the basis of expertise in higher education and research.
- The Council operates through the Committee system and currently has five committees, namely:
- The Executive Committee (EXCO).
- Higher Education Quality Assurance Committee (HEQAC)
 - Finance Committee
 - Human Resources Committee
 - Academic and Student Affairs Committee

ZIMCHE's Conception of Quality of Higher Education

- While there is a multiplicity of definitions of quality of higher education, ZIMCHE is generally guided by the following dimensions of quality:
 - **Fitness for Purpose:**
 - Producing graduates who meet the objectives of the institution, of society and of similar institutions
 - **Value for Money:**
 - Satisfying the expectations of Government and other stakeholders
 - **Transformative Development:**
 - Developing and transforming students by empowering them with the requisite skills, attitudes and qualities.
 - In this regard, ZIMCHE expects universities to produce 21st century graduates.
 - **Fitness of Purpose:**
 - Successful execution of institutional mandate. For example, state universities are expected to fulfil their assigned mandates.

The Role of ZIMCHE

Institutional Accreditation and Programme Accreditation

One of ZIMCHE's main role as an external quality assurance agency is to carry out two types of accreditation - institutional accreditation and programme accreditation:

- All universities in Zimbabwe, whether state or private, must be accredited by ZIMCHE.
- Every institution must meet acceptable standards in terms of physical, human, financial and material resources; management and operational procedures, standard of teaching, research, etc.
- Every new programme that any institution wants to introduce must meet ZIMCHE's requirements in terms of staffing, facilities, financial resources, library resources etc.
- To ensure transparency, accountability and good practice.
- ZIMCHE has predefined quality assurance standards for both institutional accreditation and programme accreditation.

Role of ZIMCHE, cont'd

Academic and Institutional Audits

- Academic and Institutional Audits are an important core function of ZIMCHE.
- These audits are aimed at continuous assessment of the quality of educational provision in universities.
- They are also aimed at continuous education improvement or enhancement.
- In carrying out audits ZIMCHE is assisted by qualified and well-trained peer reviewers who are accompanied by ZIMCHE Secretariat.
- In conducting these audits, special attention is paid to:
 - Staff levels;
 - Qualifications of staff teaching at various levels;
 - Enrolment statistics per programme;
 - Facilities available for use by students, including lecture rooms, library, hostels, recreational facilities; and
 - Special facilities and equipment that promote academic excellence.

Added Dimension of Quality of Higher Education in Zimbabwe – Education 5.0

- The Ministry has added a new dimension to quality education which is transformative.
- This dimension is referred to as a Heritage Based Education 5.0.
- Education 5.0 includes 5 expected functions of higher education institutions (HEIs) for them to be truly transformative and developmental.
- Hence, in addition to the traditional functions of HEIs are teaching, research, community service, HEIs are now expected to innovate, and industrialize so that they can produce goods and services.
- The innovation and industrialization functions are largely expected to take place on campuses through Innovation Hubs.
- The new heritage-based philosophy of higher education buttresses Education 5.0 .

Role of ZIMCHE, cont'd

Enforcing Conformance to Standards and Guidelines set by ZIMCHE

To ensure that high standards are maintained, ZIMCHE takes the following measures:

- If the situation demands, ZIMCHE can de-register a registered institution.
- Programmes that do not meet ZIMCHE's requirements are suspended until the shortcomings have been rectified.
- ZIMCHE carries out compliance visits and institutions that operate illegally are asked to close immediately.
- ZIMCHE publishes lists of institutions that it does not recognise.

Further Steps Taken by ZIMCHE to Promote Quality

- In consultation with higher education institutions, ZIMCHE has set minimum requirements for the appointment and promotion of academic staff.
- ZIMCHE has led the development of minimum bodies of knowledge for all programmes. Experts or thought leaders and practitioners are actively involved.
- ZIMCHE is encouraging every institution to establish an institutional quality assurance unit (IQAU).
 - The IQAUs help coordinate QA internally and externally.
- ZIMCHE staff are involved in continuous staff development.
 - e.g. ZIMCHE senior staff recently completed an external quality assurance training course offered by UNESCO in collaboration with DAAD and SARUA.
- As part of good external quality assurance practice, ZIMCHE's work, QA standards and expectations are well-documented and publicized on its website.

Further Steps to Promote Quality, cont'd

- ZIMCHE introduced Zimbabwe Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (ZIMCATS) in 2016 and Minimum Bodies of Knowledge (MBKS) with a view to harmonise curriculum in all universities.
- With ZIMCATS, all universities migrated to the notional hour credit system in the design and management of curricula.
- As a rule, 10 notional hours (both contact and independent study hours combined) are equivalent to one credit.

Use of ZIMCATS and MBKS

- **The use of ZIMCATS and MBKs allows for horizontal and vertical articulation as well as intra- and inter-learner mobility within the national qualification's framework.**
- **Credits for each course represent the minimum volume of learning required to achieve the specified learning outcomes for that course.**
- **It is hoped that ZIMCATS and MBKs will not only bring about harmonization of the curricula, but also parity in programme offerings.**

Zimbabwe National Qualifications Framework (ZNQF)

- The ZNQF integrates education and training into a unified structure of qualifications recognized locally and internationally.
- The ZNQF provides a mechanism to relate basic, tertiary and higher education frameworks to each other in a manner that recognizes prior learning and mobility of learners and graduates.
- The ZNQF transforms the education system to ensure the recognition of prior learning to enable vertical progression from tertiary institutions to higher education institutions.
- It also provides for the horizontal movement of learners through the standardization of similar courses in institutions of higher and tertiary education.

How ZNQF Integrates the Whole Education System In Zimbabwe

- The ZNQF integrates the whole education system in the country through following three major mechanisms.
 - The establishment of pathways for vertical progression of education and training qualifications.
 - The establishment of pathways for horizontal comparability of these qualifications.
 - The development of standardized qualifications for increased coherence between education output and the needs of the labour market.
- Minimum Bodies of Knowledge (MBKs) makes qualifications comparable across the higher education sector.
Universities have a lee way of 80% to introduce distinctive features to their programmes.

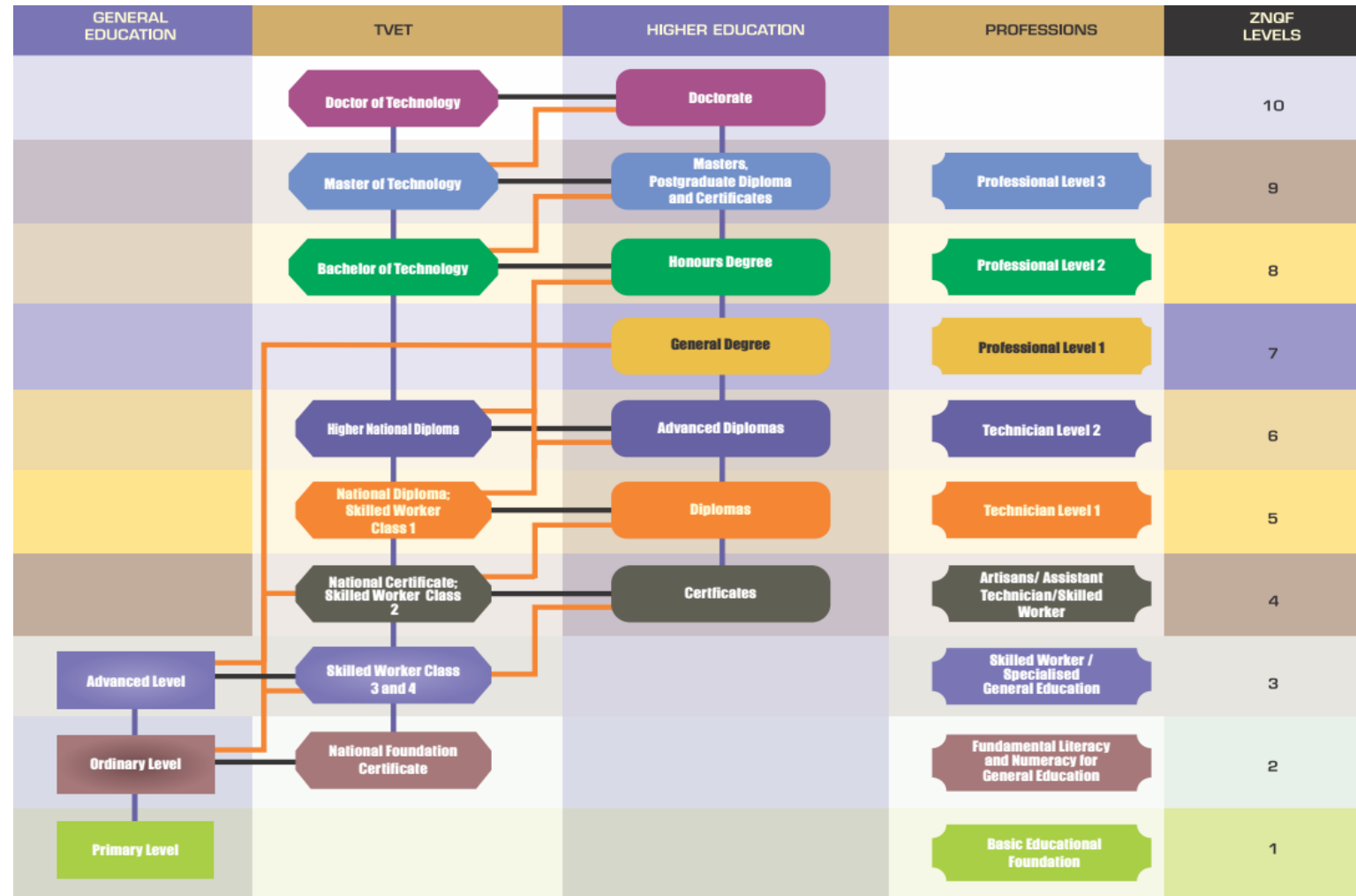
How ZNQF Achieves the Broad Objective of An Integrated and Harmonized Education System

- ZNQF synergizes the vertical progression linkages between ZIMSEC, HEXCO and ZIMCHE which are the primary regulatory agencies for basic education, TVET and higher education respectively.
- It establishes the mechanism for putting in place the MBKs, qualification standards and skills proficiency schedules through subject/programme/trade panels. This enables a harmonised Credit Accumulation and Transfer System (CATS).

Other Aspects of ZNQF

- The Framework provides for the harmonisation and standardisation of both new and existing Zimbabwean qualifications.
- The Framework gives the 10 levels of qualifications from basic, tertiary and higher education.
- Provides the relevant level descriptors (knowledge, skills, competencies and attitudes) for each respective ZNQF level.
- The governance of the ZNQF is through the Ministries of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development and Primary and Secondary Education.
- The coordinating mechanism is through the National Alignment Committee (NAC), which brings together all stakeholders.

Summary of the ZNQF



Source: Zimbabwe National Qualification Framework (ZNQF) (2018, p.iv)

ZIMCHE's Main Achievements

- Most Universities in Zimbabwe have now established Institutional quality assurance units (Institutionalisation of QA).
- Public awareness of QA in higher education is now being appreciated in the country.
- Comparable QA standards and guidelines are now in place.
- Some regional EQA agencies now consult ZIMCHE on QA issues which is indicative of ZIMCHE's positive impact.
- ZIMCATS, MBKS and ZINQF are now operational. This has helped to integrate and harmonise the once fragmented education system in the country.

QA Issues and Challenges

- QA practitioners in the country have limited capacity to implement international best practices
- Limited resources to build capacity for QA personnel in HEIs and ZIMCHE
- Limited expertise to harmonize current ZIMCHE QA standards and guidelines with emerging international QA best practices.
- Latent resistance by HEIs academics to innovations such as MBKS yet these are critical to enhancing the quality of higher education.

Plans To Enhance Quality Assurance in Higher Education

- Like any modern organization which is responsive to its environment, ZIMCHE will soon embark on harmonization of its EQA processes, standards, guidelines and procedures.
- ZIMCHE seeks to review its QA standards and guidelines with a view to harmonise them with international QA best practices especially the African Standards and Guidelines for Higher Education.
- It is hoped that the harmonized standards and guidelines would further enhance ZIMCHE's performance as a modern external quality assurance agency characterized by increased:
 - stakeholder confidence and trust in ZIMCHE.
 - stakeholder satisfaction with ZIMCHE's QA service provision
 - accountability and transparency which is the sine qua non for any successful external quality assurance agency.

Conclusion

- **The COVID 19 Pandemic has forced universities and the ZIMCHE to the re-think the way with think about QA, EQA and the role of the ZIMCHE in ensuring quality in our higher education system.**