**Memorandum from the Parliamentary Office**

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 2864**

**DATE OF PUBLICATION OF INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER: 15/09/2017**

**(INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER 33 OF 2017)**

**Ms H Bucwa (DA) to ask the Minister of Higher Education and Training:**

1. Whether the Council on Higher Education (CHE) has put measures in place to ensure that all universities are using reputable external examiners for all courses; if not, (a) why not and (b) what steps will the CHE take in order to rectify this significant gap in quality control; if so, what are the relevant details of the measures in respect of each course at each university;
2. Whether the CHE approves of the practice of using bell curves in some instances to determine the distribution of marks in university courses, as an alternative to using external examiners; if not, why not; if so, why?

**NW3171E**

**REPLY:**

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) has provided the following response:

1. (a) The CHE is not involved in the appointment of examiners at an institutional level. The Council expects all Higher Education Institutions (HEIs), whether public or private, to have clear institutional assessment policies in place. These must be in line with their teaching and learning policies, which may be differentiated according to the programme and module outcomes. The use of external moderators for exit level outcomes at the programme level is standard of good practice. HEIs will differ on the number of external examiners and moderators used, and whether international academics are utilised or not.

(b) The CHE does not prescribe to institutions outside of the criteria it applies to review programmes for accreditation. During the CHE Quality Assurance processes, a check is made as to whether the institutions assessment processes are rigorous and appropriate. The CHE considers the evaluation in a holistic way rather than as a tick-box exercise. While the CHE expects all public and private institutions to have robust and rigorous assessment practices in place, it cannot confirm that this is always the practice. In the first cycle of institutional audits that ran from 2004 to 2011, institutions were required to show that they had policies and processes in place to address the 19 criteria specified in the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) Institutional Audits Manual 2007. This includes criterion 12, which states:

*“The institution has effective procedures that facilitate the quality of the internal and external moderation of its assessment procedure and results, in order to ensure their reliability, as well as the integrity of the qualifications it awards.”*

All universities that were in existence prior to 2015 were subjected to institutional audits. Where any of the criteria were not met, universities were required to devise and implement improvement plans, which were monitored by the HEQC. The three new universities have not yet undergone institutional audits as they are still developing their policies and processes.

2. The methods used by HEIs to determine the distribution of marks in a course lies outside the remit of an external quality assurance agency. The CHE cannot comment on the extent that HEIs in the country may be using bell curves to determine the distribution of marks in courses as an alternative to using external examiners. However, the CHE expects that all exit level assessment will have external examiners in place, as this is standard of good practice.

COMPILER/CONTACT PERSONS:

EXT:

DIRECTOR – GENERAL

STATUS:

DATE:

QUESTION 2864 APPROVED/NOT APPROVED/AMENDED

PROF. HB MKHIZE, MP

MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING

STATUS:

DATE: