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| MEMORANDUM FROM THE PARLIAMENTARY OFFICE |

**NATIONAL ASSEMBLY**

**FOR WRITTEN REPLY**

**QUESTION 968**

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**INTERNAL QUESTION PAPER NO 17 OF 2020**

**Prof B Bozzoli (DA) to ask the Minister of Higher Education, Science and Technology:**

(a) By what date will the Council on Higher Education’s institutional audit of the University of South Africa begin, given the delay caused by the Covid-19 pandemic and (b) what measures have been put in place to conduct such an audit using remote and other Covid-19-compatible methods?

**NW1257E**

**REPLY:**

The Draft Framework for Institutional Audits 2020 and Draft Manual for Institutional Audits 2020 were approved for consultation with the higher education sector by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) at its meeting of 7 April 2020. It is envisaged that once the feedback from the sector has been considered by the HEQC, the Framework and Manual would be ready for final approval by the HEQC at its July 2020 meeting. UNISA forms part of a group of 20 higher education institutions, both public and private, that have been identified for the audit in 2020 after the final approval of the Framework and Manual. At this stage it is not envisaged that the COVID19 restrictions will cause undue delay in the UNISA audit, barring totally unforeseen developments on the trajectory of the pandemic.

 The Draft Manual for Institutional Audits 2020 makes provision for three institutional visits prior to the main audit site visit, for the purposes of (i) initiating the audit, (ii) discussing the strategy for the audit with the institution, and (iii) finalizing the site visits programme. All these institutional visits can be done via videoconferencing and will commence in August 2020 as planned. Training for the identified higher education institutions, as well as the audit panel members, for the institutional audits can also be done online in the last part of 2020 as planned. A large and complex institution such as UNISA will require at least 6 months to complete their self-evaluation report and to compile a portfolio of evidence, which means that the due date for this is likely to be towards the end of January 2021. The Manual already makes provision for these documents to be submitted in digital format.

The audit portfolio meeting in which the panel finalises (i) the programme for the audit visit, (ii) the requirements for the additional information and evidence, (iii) the details of supporting documentation to be available on-site during audit visit, (iv) the persons to interview, and (v) the members of the panel and dates to visit satellite campuses, if applicable, can also be done online.

The actual audit site visit for UNISA is likely to be around April 2021, by which time it is anticipated that the COVID-19 restrictions would have been lifted. In the event of a continuation of the restrictions due to unforeseen developments, the Council on Higher Education is currently in the process of developing a new methodology in which the self-evaluation reports and portfolios of evidence of institutions will be subjected to a thorough document analysis by the audit panel members on an online platform, with lines of enquiry, further evidence and interviews being conducted online. Physical site visits will only take place in cases where the audit panel is unconvinced by the digital evidence, which may include visual material in addition to text-based material. This methodology will undergo a trial with the national doctoral review, which is currently underway.