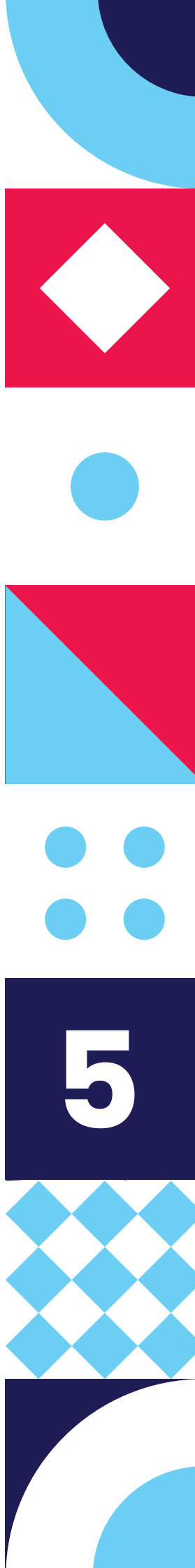




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# Background note on the national review of initial teacher education (ITE) qualifications

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## 1. Purpose

This Background Note:

- Summarises the scope, methodology and outcomes of the ITE National Review.
- Analyses how the Bachelor of Education (B. Ed) and the Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) qualification standards articulate literacy-related expectations for beginner teachers in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases.
- Identifies mechanisms within the review that can potentially improve programme responsiveness to early literacy needs.
- Proposes actionable recommendations.

## 2. Background

The CHE is designated as the quality assurance body for higher education by virtue of the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 as amended and the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008 as amended. The CHE Council and its Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) approved the Quality Assurance Framework (QAF, 2021), the Framework for Institutional Audits (2021), the Manual for Institutional Audits (2021), Implementation Protocols for the External Quality Assurance Functions of the QAF (2024), the National Review Manual: Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Qualifications (2025), Qualification Standards for Initial Teacher Education: Bachelor of Education (2024), and Qualification Standards for Initial Teacher Education: Post Graduate Certificate in Education (2024). These documents provide the basis for the National ITE Qualifications Review that is underway.

## 3. Introduction

The Council on Higher Education (CHE), through the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), is conducting a National Review of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) Qualifications - the Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) - across all teaching phases. All higher education institutions, both public and private, offering ITE qualifications are required to participate in this national review.

The review is a developmental, alignment focussed, process grounded in newly CHE approved ITE national qualification standards (November 2024) and operationalised via the CHE's National Review Manual (June 2025). It requires institutions to self-evaluate, undergo peer site visits, and implement improvement plans where standard alignments are not yet met.

Critically for South Africa's early learning outcomes, the B.Ed. and PGCE qualification standards place strong emphasis on language and literacy pedagogy, multilingual and bilingual approaches, and formative assessment - all of which directly address literacy challenges in the Foundation Phase and Intermediate Phase Teaching. The qualification standards foreground language and literacy pedagogy, multilingual approaches, and formative assessment, ensuring beginner teachers are equipped to improve literacy outcomes. The review will lift programme quality and coherence in these areas through explicit graduate attributes, WIL alignment, and evidence-based monitoring of improvement plans.

The review is strategically linked to addressing South Africa's persistent literacy challenges in the Foundation and Intermediate teaching phases.

Both qualifications - B.Ed. and PGCE - are central to this effort, each with distinct purposes, structures, and graduate attributes that collectively enhance teacher readiness for literacy teaching.

## 4. Policy and regulatory context

Established under the Higher Education Act No. 101 of 1997 and the National Qualifications Framework Act No. 67 of 2008, the CHE is an independent statutory body and sole quality council for higher education. It is mandated to assure and promote quality through qualification and programme accreditation, standards development, and quality reviews, including qualification reviews. Guided by values of innovation, integrity, accountability, equity and respect, its responsibilities include the development of higher education practice standards and qualification standards, capacity development, and management of the within the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework. Quality Reviews such as Institutional Reviews, Themed Reviews and Qualification Reviews are undertaken against the standards that are developed by the CHE, through expert-based Communities of Practice.

In 2024, the HEQC approved qualification standards for the B.Ed. and PGCE, developed via a peer-based Community of Practice and public consultation, to serve as threshold standards for the national review.

The National ITE Review Manual (June 2025) sets out the generative-reflexive methodology, Self-Evaluation Report requirements, site visit protocols, review panel composition, and decision-making processes culminating in a national report on ITE qualification provision.

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) initiated the National Review of Initial Teacher Education Qualifications (ITE) in 2025. The aim is to ensure alignment of ITE qualifications offered by higher education institutions with qualification standards - specifically the B.Ed. and the PGCE - qualifications critical for producing competent teachers for the foundation, intermediate, senior and FET teaching phases. It is compulsory for all higher education institutions, both public and private, offering ITE qualifications, to participate in the national review.

This national review will evaluate the alignment of Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) and Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE) qualifications against nationally developed qualification standards that articulate the knowledge, skills, and values expected of new teacher graduates. It is a developmental intervention rather than a compliance exercise. The national review is designed to improve institutional capacity and programme quality so that teacher education meaningfully advances national development goals and constitutional imperatives.

## 5. Sector concerns and emerging priorities

Persistent concerns have been raised by stakeholders, including the 2030 Reading Panel, about the preparedness of new teacher graduates, particularly in literacy and numeracy teaching. Over the past decade, research and practice have highlighted persistent weaknesses in initial teacher education. The concerns that follow are illustrative of systemic risks.

**Mathematics competence:** Roberts and Prim (2019) found that 71% of Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) students were unable to achieve more than 60% on mathematics tests at the level they are expected to teach. This outcome signals a misalignment between programme design and/or delivery and the Minimum Requirements for Teacher Education Qualifications (MRTEQ, 2015) requirement that graduates demonstrate subject content mastery at the level of their teaching specialisation.

Literacy pedagogy: Taylor's (2014) Initial Teacher Education Research Project (ITERP) study revealed that none of the five institutions included in his study offered a dedicated course in literacy instruction, despite PIRLS findings that three quarters of Grade 4 and 5 learners are functionally illiterate. This omission undermines MRTEQ's emphasis on pedagogical content knowledge and highlights the need for alignment with the CHE's standards for B.Ed. and PGCE qualifications.

In their early grade teaching study, Spaul and Kotzé (2015), draw on Research on Socio-Economic Policy (RESEP) research, and argue that weak initial teacher education entrenches learning deficits in mathematics and reading. These deficits, once established in the early grades, are exceedingly difficult to remediate.

Together, these findings highlight systemic risks in mathematics, literacy, and early grade pedagogy. While not all institutions are implicated, the persistence of these weaknesses suggests insufficient alignment with the constitutional imperative to secure literacy and numeracy outcomes for all learners. Other concerns include uneven content depth across specialisations, credit allocations, responsiveness to priorities such as climate change and inclusive education, digitalisation, and unequal implementation of teaching practice. Emerging emphasis is on the need for ITE qualifications to integrate digital technology and artificial intelligence in pedagogically sound ways, equip teachers for remote and hybrid learning, and address the ethical dimensions of technology in education. Sustainability and climate change education have likewise become essential, ensuring that schooling prepares learners to engage with complex social and environmental challenges. Overall, the findings underscore the urgency of a comprehensive review to strengthen teacher preparation for early literacy development, which is foundational for lifelong learning.

## 6. Purpose scope and methodology of the national review

The National ITE Qualifications Review is founded on the CHE's Quality Assurance Framework (QAF, 2021). A decisive shift away from a compliance-driven quality approach to a developmental and reflexive generative approach to quality assurance characterises the QAF. Guided by nine principles: institutional responsibility, fitness for and of purpose, integration, differentiation, simplification, collaboration, innovation, and continuous improvement, the QAF recognises system diversity, streamlines processes, and seeks to embed continuous improvement within institutional cultures. It provides both the philosophical and operational foundation for the national review of ITE qualifications.

The National ITE Qualifications Review seeks to:

- Assess alignment of ITE qualifications with newly developed national standards for B.Ed. and PGCE (approved by the HEQC in November 2024).
- Identify gaps in programme design, delivery, and outcomes, particularly regarding graduate attributes in professional knowledge, skills, and values.
- Promote improvement through institutional self-evaluation and development plans, ensuring quality and responsiveness to sector needs.
- Generate a national report on the state of ITE provisioning to inform policy and practice, and to potentially underpin advice to the Minister.

The national review scope is comprehensive: All ITE qualifications (B.Ed. and PGCE) offered by public and private HEIs across all phases (Foundation, Intermediate, Senior, FET) are included in the national review to ensure a full national picture of ITE quality.

The national review methodology seeks developmental alignment: Institutions must self-evaluate using a reflexive-generative approach against the qualification standards, identify above-threshold practices and areas for improvement, and based on an institutional review report developed by the CHE's review panel, submit time-bound improvement plans. Non-compliance can result in withdrawal of accreditation of existing qualifications, resulting in no further enrolments and teach-out of pipeline students in these qualifications.

The national review process unfolds as follows:

Self-Evaluation Report (SER) submission → CHE desktop screening → trained appointed peer academic review panels evaluation of SER and the submitted Portfolio of Evidence → site visits by trained review panels → drafting of the review report by the appointed review panel → QRC review of report and decision → HEQC review of report and decisions → publication of national report → institution submission of improvement plans → monitoring of improvement plans → institution submission of progress reports.

Institutions have already begun submitting comprehensive Self-Evaluation Reports (SERs) aimed at demonstrating alignment with the qualification standards, supported by Portfolios of Evidence.

Peer review panels will triangulate evidence through site visits scheduled between March 2026 and March 2027. Their review reports will be reviewed by the CHE's Quality Review Committee (QRC) before submission to the HEQC for final consideration and approval.

Review outcomes may:

- Confirm alignment of the reviewed programme with the qualification standards.
- Identify areas of strength in the form of commendations.
- Identify areas requiring improvement in the form of recommendations with monitored improvement plans to be developed and implemented by the institution and monitored by the CHE to successful conclusion.

Where improvement plans fail to address identified weaknesses, and misalignment persists, withdrawal of accreditation can result.

Throughout, the review remains developmental rather than punitive, providing feedback, capacity-building support, and opportunities for institutions to ensure alignment and enhance their quality and relevance.

## 7. How the qualification standards address literacy

Early literacy is a national priority, which the review directly supports by:

- Evaluating whether Foundation Phase teacher education programmes adequately prepare graduates to teach reading and writing effectively.
- Assessing the integration of reading pedagogy and language development strategies in programmes and curricula and identifying programme and curriculum weaknesses in developing new teacher knowledge of phonics, comprehension strategies, and multilingual approaches.
- Promoting institutional improvement plans that prioritize literacy teaching competence as a key graduate attribute.

The national review's findings will inform targeted interventions to strengthen teacher preparation for early literacy.

The standards to which qualifications must be aligned through the national review embed language and literacy across its domains of graduate attributes, assessment conditions, and Work Integrated learning (WIL) as illustrated below:

### **Graduate Attributes (Knowledge, Skills, Values)**

*Professional Knowledge:* Teachers must understand language's role in learning, bilingual pedagogies, translanguaging, code-switching, and the use of home languages to enable learning - crucial in multilingual Foundation and Intermediate classrooms.

*Professional Skills:* Teachers must be able to plan coherent curricula, select and adapt texts and learning materials, integrate digital resources for literacy, and apply formative/summative assessment to monitor reading, writing, and language development.

*Professional Values:* A commitment to equity and inclusive education ensures literacy support for learners from diverse linguistic and socio-economic contexts, preventing marginalisation due to LoLT barriers.

### **Work Integrated Learning (WIL)**

WIL must be formally arranged, structured, supervised, and credit-bearing, with explicit alignment to graduate attributes - including literacy pedagogy in authentic, diverse classroom contexts. This ensures student teachers practise early literacy strategies and multilingual approaches during their placements.

### **Assessment Conditions and Qualification Infrastructure**

The standards require valid, rigorous and diverse assessment modalities, enabling diagnostic, formative, continuous and summative evaluation of learner progress including language and numeracy skills and - supported by adequate infrastructure, libraries, IT, and staff expertise.

Together, these domains describe teachers who are knowledgeable, skilled, and values-driven; able to teach effectively across phases and subjects; responsive to diverse contexts; and committed to advancing the constitutional right to education.

## **8. Specific implications for foundation and intermediate phase teaching**

### *For Foundation Phase Teaching*

- Emphasis is on early reading and writing development, phonological awareness, vocabulary building, oral language, and text-rich environments mediated through home language and bilingual strategies. The qualification standards foreground teachers' ability to use translanguaging pragmatically to scaffold comprehension and participation.
- WIL placements should ensure exposure to multilingual classrooms, early literacy interventions, and continuous progress monitoring (running records, analysis, and oral reading fluency), all within the assessment frameworks envisaged by the qualification standards.

### *For Intermediate Phase Teaching*

- The focus shifts to reading-to-learn, disciplinary literacy, and subject-specific discourse (science, social sciences, mathematics); requiring teachers to integrate explicit vocabulary, comprehension strategies, and writing-to-learn across subjects.

- Teachers are expected to plan coherent, sequential programmes that build cumulatively on Foundation Phase literacy skills, with assessment records tracking learner progress and informing targeted support.

## 9. Expected outcomes: how the national review is expected to contribute to literacy improvement

- Qualification alignment: Self-Evaluation Reports (SERs) will surface gaps in literacy pedagogy. Improvement plans must specify curriculum redesign, module enhancements (language-in-education policy, bilingual pedagogy, literacy assessment), and resource upgrades.
- Evidence-Based Monitoring: HEQC decisions may impose timelines and require improvement plans with progress reports. CHE will monitor implementation until alignment with standards are met, ensuring sustained focus on literacy.
- WIL Quality Assurance: Panels will interrogate WIL placement quality, school partnerships, mentoring, and assessment of literacy teaching practice - driving improvements where WIL and placements do not yet meet alignment with qualification standards' expectations.
- National Reporting: The final national report will identify sector-wide strengths and weaknesses in literacy-related teacher preparation, informing policy updates, funding priorities, cross-institutional development initiatives and advice to the Minister on what could be done to further strengthen initial teacher education.

## 10. Conclusion

The ITE National Qualifications Review is a strategic lever to elevate early literacy teaching quality by driving alignment to national qualification standards that foreground multilingual, inclusive and assessment-rich literacy pedagogy. With targeted guidance, robust WIL arrangements, and systematic monitoring, the review is expected to strengthen the preparedness of beginner teachers to improve literacy outcomes in the Foundation and Intermediate Phases - laying a more secure foundation for learner success across the schooling trajectory.

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