CHE

Council on Higher Education

Framework for Institutional Quality Enhancement in the Second Period of Quality Assurance

Quality Enhancement Project

Institutional Audits Directorate
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Foreword

Higher education has a vital role to play in contributing to the reconstruction and development of all aspects of South African society. In the context of the journey begun in 1994 to fashion a common citizenship and a nation based on the principles enshrined in the Constitution of non-racialism, non-sexism and democracy, the role of higher education cannot be reduced narrowly to producing the knowledge and skills required for economic development and growth. While these are important, fashioning a common citizenry requires that higher education contributes to addressing all the elements that are constitutive of a society—social, cultural, economic and political. As a recent report on undergraduate curriculum reform published by the Council on Higher Education (CHE, August 2013, 32) states:

> *Graduates are required for their disciplinary and professional expertise and for creating jobs, and there are key elements of development that cannot be achieved without them. However, the need for more people with advanced knowledge and competencies, as well as an informed understanding of the contemporary world, goes beyond the demands of economic development and technical skills shortages into all key areas of the country's well-being, including social cohesion, cultural growth and the maturation of South Africa's democracy through responsible citizenship.*

However, higher education is failing in its basic mission to produce the graduates required for the reconstruction and development of South African society. It is failing because of the 18% of 20 to 24 year-olds who are enrolled in higher education, which is low in comparison with other middle income countries, roughly half drop-out without obtaining a qualification. The National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) indicated that increasing the participation rate in higher education is dependent on "improving the efficiency of the higher education system through increasing graduate outputs". This has not been achieved. In the 13 years since the release of the NPHE and despite a range of interventions, including support through the fiscus for expanding extended degree programmes and teaching development grants, the challenge of poor throughputs from higher education remains. It is a challenge that we need to face head-on if higher education is to contribute to giving effect to the vision of expanding access, improving quality and increasing diversity that is contained in the recently released *White Paper on Post-School Education and Training* and in the *National Development Plan*.

The Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), which will replace institutional audits in the second cycle of quality assurance, is the CHE's response to addressing the challenge of low throughput in higher educa-

tion. The aim of the QEP is to enhance all aspects of teaching and learning in order to improve student success, which is defined as:

> *Enhanced student learning with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable.*

Furthermore, a key aspect of the QEP is the recognition that the poor throughput rate is a national challenge and requires the higher education system as a whole to come together to collectively reflect on the challenge, the lessons learned and the solutions required. This is not to suggest a one-size-fits-all solution but to recognise that addressing the challenge is beyond the reach of individual institutions.

The QEP is the culmination of an extended period of research and consultation following the end of the first cycle of quality assurance in 2011. The substance, focus and form of the QEP were presented, discussed and debated in a wide range of forums, including focus groups from a variety of higher education institutions—rural and urban, small and large, historically advantaged and disadvantaged, traditional, comprehensive and universities of technology—as well in quality assurance forums with representatives from public and private higher education institutions and professional bodies, meetings with the Deputy Vice-Chancellors: Academic and Teaching and Learning and in three regional symposia attended by over 800 stakeholders, which were led by Professor Vincent Tinto, Distinguished Professor of Education at Syracuse University in the USA and world-renowned expert on student success at tertiary level, entitled "Conceptualising a coherent approach to student success".

The enthusiastic response of a wide range and large number of participants in the various events and meetings of 2013 to the focus on student success within a quality enhancement framework is evidence that the QEP is timely and much-needed.

The QEP provides an enabling framework within which individual higher education institutions and the higher education system as a whole can make significant progress in addressing the critical challenge of increased student success.

Ahmed Essop
CEO
January 2014

Acronyms

CHE	**Council on Higher Education**
DHET	**Department of Higher Education and Training**
DVC	**Deputy Vice-Chancellor**
HEI	**Higher Education Institution**
HELTASA	**Higher Education Teaching and Learning Association of Southern Africa**
HEQC	**Higher Education Quality Committee**
HESA	**Higher Education South Africa**
NPHE	**National Plan for Higher Education**
NQF	**National Qualifications Framework**
QA	**Quality Assurance**
QAA	**Quality Assurance Agency**
QE	**Quality Enhancement**
QEP	**Quality Enhancement Project**
SHEEC	**Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee**

1. Quality assurance and the higher education system

The HEQC is committed to a quality driven higher education system that contributes to socio-economic development, social justice and innovative scholarship in South Africa. To achieve this end, the HEQC will support the development, maintenance and enhancement of the quality of public and private higher education provision in order to enable a range of stakeholders to benefit from effective higher education and training. The central objective of the HEQC is to ensure that providers effectively and efficiently deliver education, training, research and community service which are of high quality and which produce socially useful and enriching knowledge as well as a relevant range of graduate skills and competencies necessary for social and economic progress. The policies and programmes of the HEQC will be guided by the above commitments and objectives. (CHE 2000, 5)

1.1 National policy and legislative context

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is an independent statutory body established in May 1998 in terms of the Higher Education Act (Act No 101 of 1997), as amended. It also plays the role of Quality Council for Higher Education in terms of the National Qualifications Framework Act (Act No 67 0f 2008). Through its permanent committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC), it is responsible for quality assurance and promotion in higher education. In line with international best practice, the HEQC has conceptualised its role in terms of four inter-related components:

1. *Programme accreditation,* which ensures that minimum standards are met in the programme offerings of higher education institutions (HEIs), thereby safeguarding students against poor quality programmes.

2. *National reviews,* in which specific programmes offered at a number of HEIs are evaluated by academic peers in the light of national and international good practice, and, where appropriate, the requirements of professional bodies and national regulations.

3. *Institutional audits,* which assess higher education institutions' internal quality assurance mechanisms and identify areas for improvement.

4. *Quality promotion and capacity development,* in which training, information sharing and other development opportunities are provided to institutions in order to improve quality management.

All processes, policies and procedures related to the quality assurance of higher education must be approved by the HEQC.

1.2 The first period of quality assurance (2004–2011)

Prior to the establishment of the CHE, responsibility for quality assurance was not centrally coordinated. During the first period of quality assurance, from 2004 to 2011, policies and procedures were developed to strengthen the quality of educational offerings and practices in South African HEIs, as well as the quality of institutions themselves. A rigorous system for accrediting every higher education programme offered at every HEI was developed and implemented, as well as a national review process for benchmarking key qualifications nationally and internationally. In addition, a comprehensive framework and process were developed and implemented for auditing the quality of individual institutions' policies and practices in relation to the three core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, as well as management, governance and administration.

Between 2004 and 2011 all public HEIs and 11 private HEIs underwent institutional audits. The detailed audit reports, produced by panels of experts in consultation with hundreds of role players from individual institutions, identified institutions' strengths and weaknesses and made recommendations for improvement. The engagement of institutions with the recommendations through the development and implementation of improvement plans made a valuable contribution to institutional capacity development. The last institutional audit reports were completed in 2011, marking the end of the first period of quality assurance.

There is no doubt that the institutional audits contributed to strengthening the quality assurance systems and processes of individual institutions and the accountability of the system as a whole. However, given the time and resources needed to audit all HEIs sequentially, it is pertinent to ask what benefit relative to cost would be derived by embarking immediately on another cycle of comprehensive institutional audits, and whether doing so would address the most pressing needs in higher education in South Africa.

1.3 From quality assurance to quality enhancement

In 2009 an external evaluation of the HEQC was carried out. While it was recognised that in the first cycle there had been a need to engage with individual institutions in depth to ensure accountability for the quality of their activities, the evaluation report (4 February 2009) stated that, "...the panel believes that the HEQC should find ways to focus on quality promotion for the second cycle". The HEQC is of the view that of the three core functions of higher education, namely, teaching and learning, research and community engagement, the one that is in greatest need of immediate attention and improvement if the national need for more highly skilled graduates is to be addressed is teaching and learning. South Africa cannot advance socially or economically if the current low participation and high attrition rates in higher education persist (see Section 2.2). Concerted, coordinated and well-conceived efforts are needed to increase the number of quality graduates.

The HEQC has therefore decided to not conduct another round of institutional audits immediately, but rather to focus on enhancing teaching and learning in order to improve student success. The new focus, which will be operationalized by means of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), falls within the quality promotion and capacity development mandate of the HEQC, defined in the HEQC Founding Document (CHE 2000, 10) as follows:

> *The development and implementation of initiatives to build and/or strengthen the capacity for high quality provision at institutional, learning programme and individual levels. Capacity development will be undertaken where appropriate in partnership with relevant national agencies and organizations.*

Given that over 80% of students enrolled in South African HEIs are undergraduates, the focus of the QEP will be on undergraduate teaching and learning.

The shift from quality assurance to quality enhancement does not lessen institutional accountability for quality. Expected outcomes of the QEP include benchmarks and codes of good practice for quality undergraduate educational provision that will raise the bar of what can be expected of institutions in future. Furthermore, although comprehensive audits of all HEIs are not being planned for the next few years, there may be a need to audit certain aspects of HEIs, or certain HEIs as a whole, while the QEP is running. Should this be necessary, the audit processes will be carried out in parallel with the QEP.

The rationale for the QEP, the process that will be followed and the anticipated outcomes are outlined in the sections that follow. An innovative feature of the QEP is that the process will be inductive and iterative. In this document only the broad steps are described. More details of what will take place at various stages of the process will emerge during the QEP through on-going engagement with stake-holders, shared knowledge creation, in-depth analysis and reflection.

2. Context

2.1 The global context of higher education

The world in the 21st century differs in significant ways from the world in the 20th century. A century of rapid industrial and technological development, with little thought for the long-term environmental consequences, is changing the climate of our planet and its on-going ability to support a wide diversity of life forms in large numbers, humans included. Increasing pressure on limited resources because of a rapidly growing population and unsustainable methods of food and energy production is threatening the entire global ecosystem. Globalisation of the production, purchase and sale of commodities means that the fates of communities and nations are interconnected as never before. Ubiquitous, powerful information and communication technologies not only enable the spread of news in real-time, but also serve as tools for social and political ends, be they benevolent, benign or nefarious.

Economic realities are different in the 21st century, especially since 2008, when the world saw the largest economic downturn since the Great Depression, almost 80 years earlier. One of the lasting effects of the economic recession is unprecedented unemployment, particularly among the youth. There is a new global phenomenon—millions of never-employed young people with no career prospects, at least not in the short term. In some countries this had led to political uprisings. In others, it has led to a return to old-fashioned social arrangements, such as adult children living with their parents well into their 20s and 30s. Patterns in the distribution of wealth are also changing, with a larger share of the world's wealth being held by a smaller percentage of people.

In the midst of these turbulent times, higher education is seen by many as holding out hope for the future, for a future. Higher education is also changing in the 21st century. Up until the 1980s, it was considered the preserve of the talented few, the academically able and socio-culturally compatible students who were expected to be able to reap the benefits of exposure to experts in their fields to become educated. For those who successfully navigated the academic hurdles, a university education guaranteed a good job for life and high social status.

Then came massification of higher education. With the dawn of the information age came the din of thousands of fists on the doors of learning. The clamour is escalating. Between 2000 and 2007 there was an increase of 53% in the number of tertiary students globally (Altbach et al. 2009). Jobs for factory workers decreased; jobs for knowledge workers increased. More people wanted more education. The response from thousands of higher education institutions across the world was mass produced higher education. Universities built larger and larger lecture theatres to provide ever-increasing numbers of students with access to the expert on the stage, the source of precious information. Assessments became more standardised and amenable to machine marking, allowing for little in the way of development of individual student learning and thinking over time. Uniformity and conformity were unavoidable. Massification meant depersonalisation of higher education. And those who could not fit within the narrowly defined parameters of the education system dropped out.

Higher education is changing again. In 1997 Alan Greenspan drew attention to a shift in the demands of the workplace away from technical to conceptual knowledge, with a need for workers, "with the ability to create, analyze, and transform information and to interact effectively with others" (http://advance.uconn.edu/1997/971020/grnspch.htm). Nearly a decade later, Daniel Pink (2006) suggests that the information age is being supplanted by the conceptual age.

> *The last few decades have belonged to a certain kind of person with a certain kind of mind—computer programmers who could crank code, lawyers who could craft contracts, MBAs who could crunch numbers. But the keys to the kingdom are changing hands. The future belongs to a very different kind of person with a different kind of mind—creators and empathizers, pattern recognizers and meaning makers. These people—artists, inventors, designers, storytellers, caregivers, consolers, big picture thinkers—will now reap society's richest rewards and share its greatest joys.*

> *...We are moving from an economy and society built on the logical, linear, computer-like capabilities of the Information Age to an economy and a society built on the inventive, empathic, big-picture capabilities of what's rising in its place, the Conceptual Age.*

One-size-fits-all solutions are no longer appropriate (if they ever were) or even viable. The world is too complex, too dynamic, and much too turbulent. The future of the planet and its human inhabitants is dependent upon people who are flexible, adaptable and creative, people who can see the big picture, people who appreciate the complexity of living and working in an interconnected world. The nature of work is changing, and jobs, or even single careers, for life are rapidly disappearing. Information is not only growing at an astronomical rate, access to it is increasingly unfettered. The explosion of Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs) in the past two years has enabled any person with an internet connection anywhere in the world to take a course offered for free by academics from some of the most elite universities in the world.

Web browsers that trawl through millions of sites in seconds and online video sites make information available on any topic at any time. The challenge for higher education in the 21st century is therefore not how to present information to large numbers of students but how to help students navigate the galactic array of accessible information encoded in silicon stores across the world. How do universities teach students meaningful information processing skills so that they can discern the quality of information, select information appropriate for their purposes, and then act on it in intellectually rigorous ways to create knowledge? Even more challenging, how do universities cultivate critical and creative intellectual skills, ethical and moral values and socially responsible dispositions in their students? And how do universities re-personalise higher education for an ever-increasing diversity of students while still allowing mass access? As discussed in the document prepared for UNESCO, *Trends in Global Higher Education: Tracking an Academic Revolution* (Altbach et al. 2009), we are witnessing an academic revolution:

> *...higher education has undergone deep changes that will shape the academic enterprise for decades to come. Perhaps the key engines of change consist of the massification of higher education in almost every country, the impact of information and communications technology and its impact on higher education, the "public good/ private good" debate, and the rise of the global knowledge economy and other manifestations of globalization... The 21st century revolution will continue to shape higher education in the coming decades. This continuing revolution is intensifying...Making higher education more inclusive requires not only moving historically underrepresented groups into higher education but also meeting their unique needs.*

Higher education worldwide is having to reconceptualise its very purpose in the 21st century.

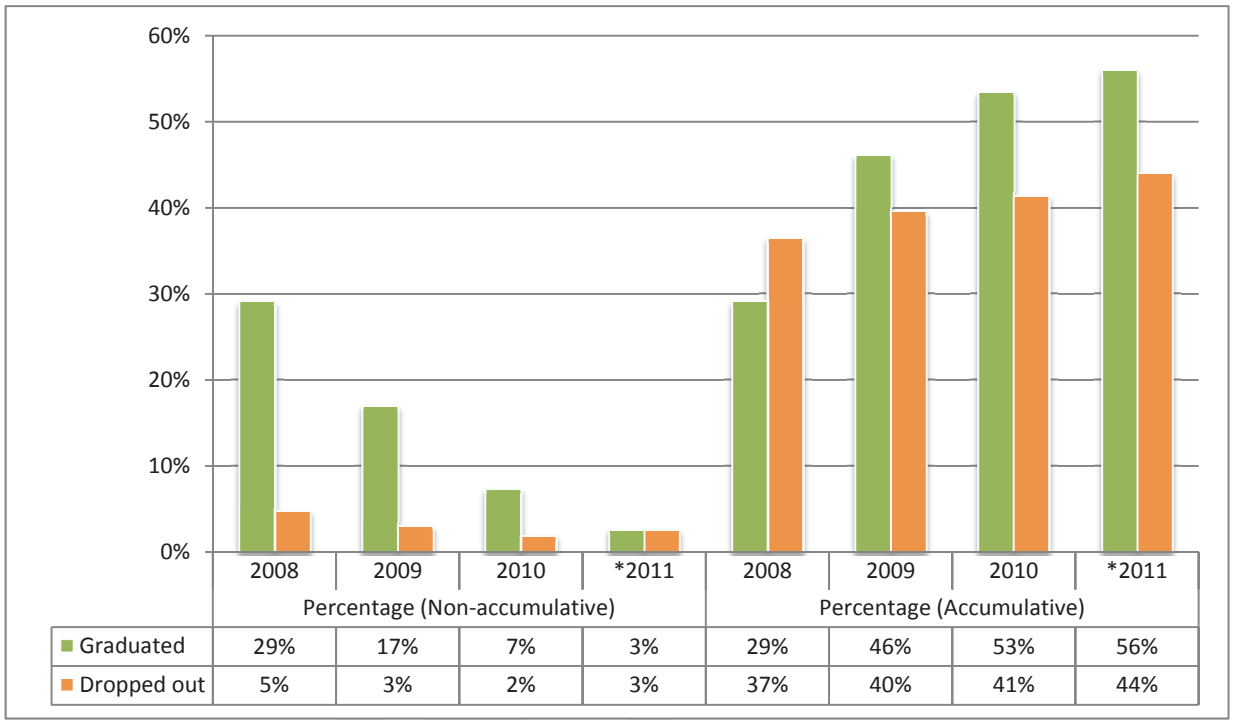
2.2 Higher education in South Africa—the need

An educated and skilled workforce is essential for a country's social, cultural and economic health. And while a range of skills at a variety of levels are needed, highly educated professionals with critical and

creative thinking skills are vital for social and economic growth and development. The report of the National Planning Commission (2012) states,

> *Higher education is the major driver of the information/knowledge system, linking it with economic development. However, higher education is much more than a simple instrument of economic development. Education is important for good citizenship and enriching and diversifying life.*

Yet the number of students in higher education in South Africa is small, only 938,200 in 2011, out of a population of nearly 52 million. Of the 5.4 million people aged 20 to 24, only 17% were enrolled in higher education. Furthermore, the participation rates are racially skewed, with a participation rate of 14% for African students and 57% for white students. By way of comparison with other middle income countries, the 2011 enrolment percentages for 20 to 24 year-olds were 25% for Indonesia, 29% for Mexico, 32% for Mauritius and 48% for Thailand[1]. Given that such a small proportion of South Africa's population is enrolled in higher education, it would be reasonable to assume that the throughput rates would be high. However, this is not the case. Figure 1 shows that for the cohort of students that entered public HEIs, excluding UNISA, in 2006 and enrolled for 3-year degree programmes, only 29% completed their degrees in the minimum expected, or regulation, time.

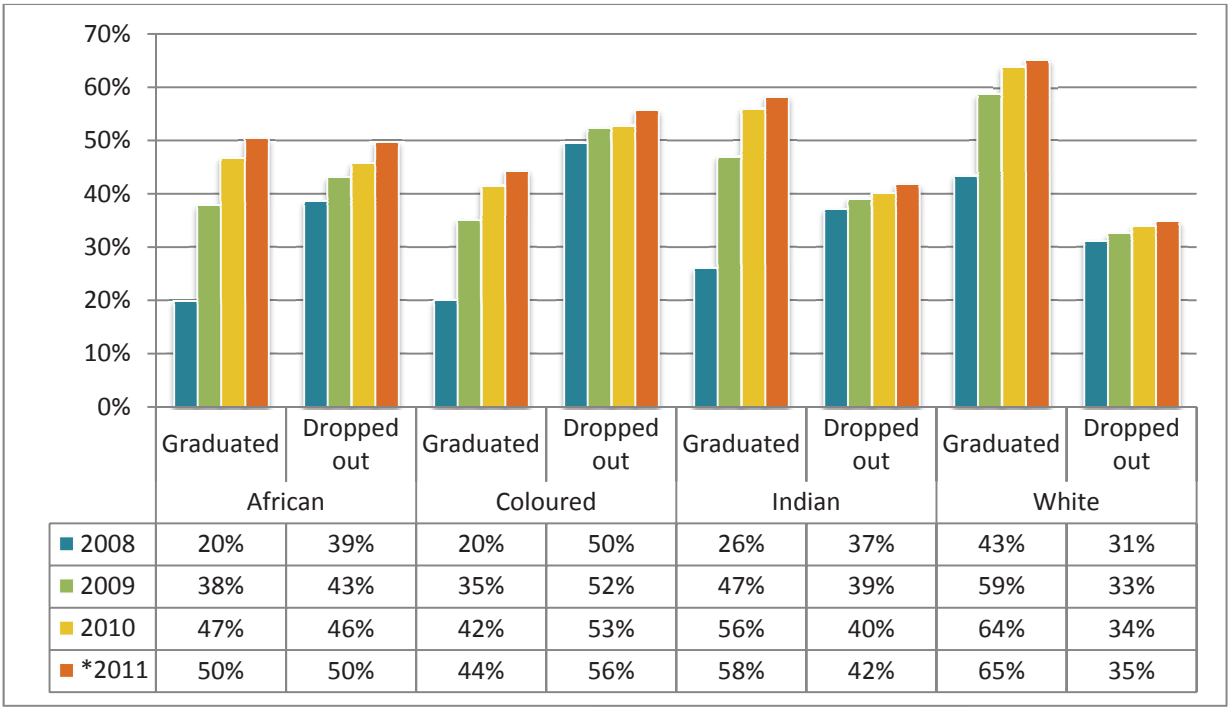


	2008	2009	2010	*2011	2008	2009	2010	*2011
	Percentage (Non-accumulative)				Percentage (Accumulative)			
Graduated	29%	17%	7%	3%	29%	46%	53%	56%
Dropped out	5%	3%	2%	3%	37%	40%	41%	44%

Figure 1: Throughput rates for students who enrolled in 3-year degree programmes in public higher education institutions excluding UNISA in 2006. (Source: VitalStats Public Higher Education 2011, CHE)

In Figure 2 it can be seen that if the completion rates are broken down by race then the performance patterns clearly show the effects of the lingering inequities of the past.

[1] *http://stats.uis.unesco.org/unesco/TableViewer/tableView.aspx?ReportId=3345&IF_Language=eng*



	African		Coloured		Indian		White	
	Graduated	Dropped out	Graduated	Dropped out	Graduated	Dropped out	Graduated	Dropped out
2008	20%	39%	20%	50%	26%	37%	43%	31%
2009	38%	43%	35%	52%	47%	39%	59%	33%
2010	47%	46%	42%	53%	56%	40%	64%	34%
*2011	50%	50%	44%	56%	58%	42%	65%	35%

Figure 2: Racial breakdown of throughput rates for students who enrolled in 3-year degree programmes in public higher education institutions excluding UNISA in 2006. (Source: VitalStats Public Higher Education 2011, CHE)

The data show that the South African higher education system is a low-participation, high attrition system. Furthermore, analysis of throughput rates of students entering the system between 2000 and 2006 indicates that the situation is not improving (CHE August 2013). This situation is wasteful of human and material resources. It is impeding South Africa's development, both economic and social. According to the National Development Plan (2012),

> *The data on the quality of university education is disturbing. South African universities are mid-level in terms of knowledge production, with low participation, high attrition rates and insufficient capacity to produce the required levels of skills. They are still characterised by historical inequities and distortions.*

The problems raised above arise from challenges both historical and recent. As indicated in the quote from the National Development Plan, we have not yet overcome the inequities in educational provision created during the apartheid era. An enormous difference in capacity and resources exists in different areas of the country and sectors of society. In addition, since the end of apartheid in 1994, we have undergone serial curriculum changes at school level, which, while well-intended, have destabilised the pre-tertiary education system and placed great strain on teachers. Pressure placed on schools and education departments to meet quantitative performance targets is increasingly resulting in teachers spending a large proportion of their time drilling learners on how to pass examinations instead of developing learners' intellectual capacity. Entering university students therefore have limited ability to solve unseen problems, to apply their knowledge flexibly and appropriately in varied contexts, to demonstrate a range of cognitive skills,

to extract and integrate salient information in order to create their own, meaningful knowledge and to monitor their own learning. Unless carefully conceptualised interventions are implemented, South Africa will continue to be unable to meet its urgent need for skilled professionals, employment creators and a critical and socially engaged citizenry in order to develop economically, socially and intellectually, as well as playing a role in the global economy.

South African higher education institutions therefore have an enormously challenging task. They must intellectually engage students from a wide range of socio-economic and academic backgrounds while helping them to develop as whole human beings who will be personally enriched and able to contribute to society. Stanford University, in its recent review of undergraduate education (2012), indicated that:

> *...maintaining a climate of intellectual engagement involves more than just admissions. It also requires sustained institutional effort, the continuous application of imagination and resources to provide our students with the opportunities they need to grow into the productive and responsible citizens we hope they will become.*

How much more important is such "sustained institutional effort" in South Africa, given the far greater diversity and needs of our students? We cannot blame the small pool of highly selected students for their lack of success. It is up to universities to work out how to develop the intellectual capacity, professional skills and ethical values of our most academically talented potential students.

2.3 Higher education in South Africa—the opportunity

Across the world higher education institutions are confronting the challenge of how to enable ever larger numbers of students with increasingly diverse characteristics to succeed, as illustrated below (Hénard and Roseveare 2012):

> *Higher education can no longer be owned by a community of disciplinary connoisseurs who transmit knowledge to students. Both the complexity and uncertainty of society and the economy will require institutions to continuously adapt while upholding standards. In practice, institutions will have to learn how best to serve the student community. Students have become the focal point of our learning approach in many areas of the world.*

Moreover, as financial constraints tighten, governments and funding agencies are increasingly holding universities accountable for outcomes.

> *During the past several decades greater societal demands for accountability have prevailed. This has obliged universities to demonstrate that learning is taking place. A greater emphasis is placed on measuring learning outcomes; it is no longer sufficient to measure the "inputs"- what is being taught and how the curriculum is delivered to the students (Altbach et al. 2009).*

South Africa, too, must make students and student success the focal point of higher education. We need to increase our student participation and graduation rates and overcome the racial imbalances in student performance. We could try to do this incrementally, gradually doing what we did before only a little more efficiently. Or we could do something very different.

For higher education in South Africa there is a convergence of at least three imperatives for change (Figure 3). First is the imperative to address national needs, including social justice and economic development. Second is the zeitgeist (spirit of the time) sweeping the globe of universities recognising that they must share responsibility with their students for student success. Third is the imperative to equip students for the 21st century, in which many of the skills that will be most important to their success are different from those most needed by previous generations.

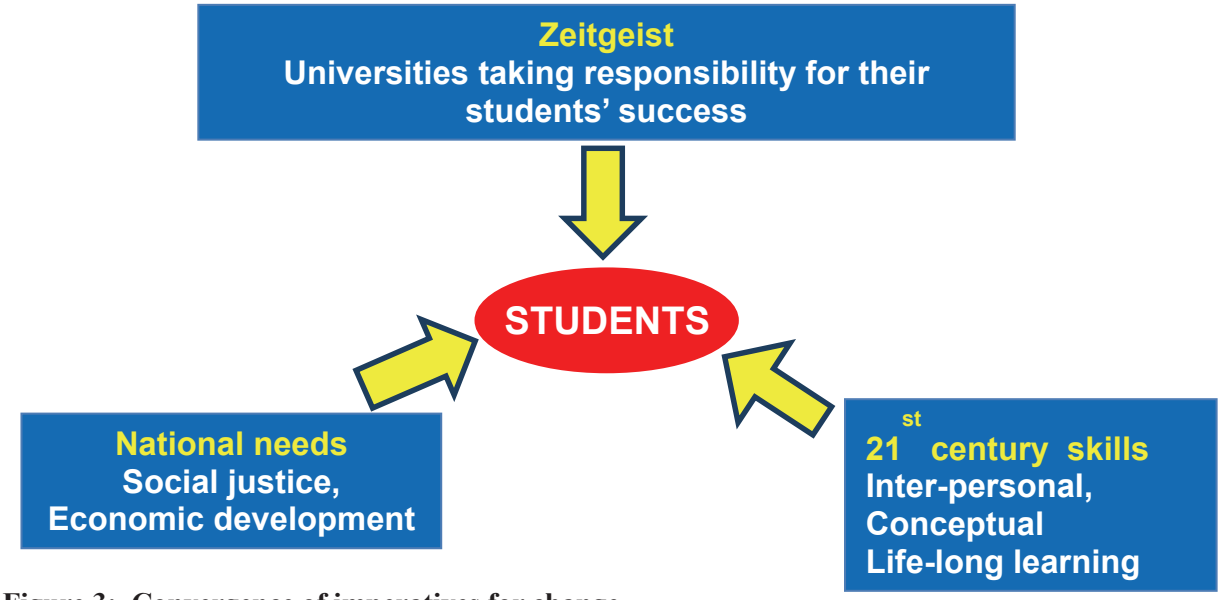


Figure 3: Convergence of imperatives for change

We could use the second period of quality assurance to actively participate in the global debate on the role of higher education, and its implications for the South Africa context. We could look critically at desirable attributes of our graduates. We could embark on a journey of considered action and on-going reflection to improve what we do with and for our students. We could draw together the experience and expertise across the higher education sector to identify good practices and solve shared problems.

We intend to do all of these things. The decision to not conduct another round of institutional audits immediately has created an opportunity to do something new. For the next few years, the CHE will facilitate a Quality Enhancement Project (QEP), working with the higher education sector in a concerted and coordinated way with the goal of improving student success.

The QEP offers opportunities not only to improve what HEIs currently do, but to do some things differently and to do new things. As with HEIs all over the world, there is a chance to rethink the purpose of higher education in the 21st century. For individual institutions, there is a chance to think about what each

institution can offer to the students that make up its particular constituency. There are opportunities to think about how best to meet the needs of students from diverse backgrounds with diverse characteristics, about learning and how best to facilitate it, about how to develop curricular and extra-curricular activities that will engender in graduates the attributes that will enable them to flourish in a changed and changing world, both in South Africa and beyond. Carol Geary Schneider (Kuh 2008), President of the Association of American Colleges and University, writes,

> *...the long-term "college success" question encompasses not only whether students have earned a degree, but also whether graduates are in fact achieving the level of preparation—in terms of knowledge, capabilities and personal qualities—that will enable them to both thrive and contribute in a fast-changing economy and in turbulent, highly demanding global, societal and often personal contexts.*

In the QEP there is an opportunity to revitalise our vision for undergraduate education, what we do, how we do it and why. Stanford University did this in 2011. In their report of their process and findings, they write (Stanford 2012),

> *Too often curricular reform efforts devolve into academic horse trading. Speaking with undergraduates helped save us from this fate, reminding us that our fundamental purpose was not to broker an accord among our faculty colleagues but to create new opportunities for our students to explore, think, and grow…We want our students not simply to succeed but to flourish; we want them to live not only usefully but also creatively, responsibly, and reflectively.*

The QEP also offers an opportunity for the HE sector as whole, not only individual institutions, to engage with the vital issue of how to increase student success in South African HEIs.

3. Quality Enhancement

3.1 Quality enhancement and quality assurance

Quality assurance processes are designed to ensure that specified standards are met and maintained through policies, procedures, monitoring and evaluation. In the context of higher education, the United Kingdom Quality Assurance Agency (QAA) defines quality assurance as,

> *the means through which an institution ensures and confirms that the conditions are in place for students to achieve the standards set by it or by another awarding body (QAA 2004),*

The *Education White Paper 3* (Department of Education 1997), which provided a framework for the transformation of higher education in post-apartheid South Africa, identified quality as one of the "fundamental principles that should guide the process of transformation". The document spells out what assur-

ing quality means, while indicating that the ultimate goal of quality assurance is improvement:

> *The pursuit of the principle of quality means maintaining and applying academic and educational standards, both in the sense of specific expectations and requirements that should be complied with, and in the sense of ideals of excellence that should be aimed at. These expectations and ideals may differ from context to context, partly depending on the specific purposes pursued. Applying the principle of quality entails evaluating services and products against set standards, with a view to improvement, renewal or progress.*

The *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training* (Department of Higher Education and Training 2013) affirms the importance of quality assurance in post-school education.

As indicated in section 1.2, one component of the quality assurance system that was established by the HEQC was a process for auditing institutions. The institutional audits in the first quality assurance cycle were intended to assure the quality of all aspects of South African higher education institutions, while also promoting improvement. According to the HEQC Framework for Institutional Audits (CHE June 2004),

> *The audit will focus on an institution's policies, systems, procedures, strategies and resources for the quality management of the core functions of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, including the relevant academic support services. More specifically, institutional audits will seek to assess an institution's capacity for quality management of its academic activities in a manner that meets its specified mission, goals and objectives, and engages appropriately with the expectations and needs of various internal and external constituencies.*

With the change in approach in the second period of quality assurance from comprehensive institutional audits to mechanisms for improving teaching and learning, the CHE's focus will shift from quality assurance to quality enhancement. Quality enhancement is conceptually different from quality assurance. In a quality enhancement framework, the focus is on deliberate, continuous, systematic and measurable improvement. The UK QAA defines quality enhancement as,

> *the process of taking deliberate steps at institutional level to improve the quality of learning opportunities (QAA 2004).*

The Scottish QAA defines quality enhancement more boldly, focusing not only on opportunities for students, but also on outcomes. The Scottish QAA,

> *has defined enhancement as taking deliberate steps to bring about improvement in the effectiveness of the learning experiences of students (QAA Scotland 2012).*

Quality enhancement is not in opposition to quality assurance. On the contrary, the two sets of processes

should operate in tandem. Quality assurance processes ensure that required standards are met. Quality enhancement processes raise the standards, creating different benchmarks and new standards to be quality assured.

Although the focus of the QEP will be on quality enhancement, the need may arise for the CHE to audit certain aspects of the higher education sector or certain institutions. Should this happen, these activities will be carried out in parallel with the QEP.

3.2 Enhancing higher education as a system

The purpose of the QEP is to help bring about improvements in teaching and learning at the level of both the higher education sector as a whole and of the individual institutions of which it is comprised. Every higher education institution in South Africa has initiatives that are intended to support students in various ways. However, these initiatives may not be coherent. Vincent Tinto (2012, 5), speaking about the USA, writes,

> *Despite years of effort, institutions have yet to develop a coherent framework to guide their thinking about which actions matter most and how they should be organised and successfully implemented. Too often, institutions invest in a laundry list of actions, one disconnected from another. The result is an uncoordinated patchwork of actions whose sum impact on student retention is less than it could or should be.*

In a country like South Africa with a student population characterised by great diversity—academic, cultural, language and socio-economic—an uncoordinated patchwork of actions cannot address the diverse needs of our students. If individual institutions dissipate their limited resources in laundry lists of actions, actions that are often susceptible to the vagaries of short-term funding opportunities or individual champions, no significant progress will be made. The problem of improving student success in South Africa is too big, too complicated, and too important to be solved with fragmented, uncoordinated approaches. Given the high rate of unemployment and the shortage of high level skills in South Africa, especially among young people, making progress towards improving student success is urgent.

This will only be possible if, as a higher education system, we capitalise on our collective knowledge, wisdom, insights and experience to adopt, adapt and invent solutions to common problems. We need to harness the creative energy and critical thinking capabilities of academics, for whom knowledge creation is core business, together with the insights and experience of other university staff and students, to develop innovative and effective solutions to the complex problem of improving student success. We need to engage in shared knowledge creation and work together to improve the higher education system. Significant headway will only be made if there is collective engagement. We need a collective effort to have a collective impact. Kania and Kramer (2011) define collective impact as, "the commitment of a group of important actors from different sectors to a common agenda for solving a specific social problem". They

identify five conditions for effective collective impact: a common agenda, shared measurement systems, mutually reinforcing activities, continuous communication and backbone support activities.

While many examples of successful initiatives at individual institutions exist, large scale student success will only be possible through systematic and systemic planning and interventions at both institutional and national levels. System-wide improvements in student success will require enhancement—deliberate actions, carefully conceived, monitored and constantly adjusted—at the level of both individual institutions and the system as a whole. Institutional initiatives are essential, but a concerted national effort is also essential. Visible improvements in student success in South African higher education will require greater cohesion across individual institutions in priorities and practices shown to be effective. This will contribute to the strengthening of the higher education system.

In conceptualising the QEP, the CHE has drawn on the experience of the Scottish Quality Assurance Agency (QAA), which introduced its quality enhancement framework in 2003. In Scotland, quality enhancement is led by the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee (SHEEC), which comprises DVCs for Teaching and Learning from all public HEIs and the Scottish QAA. The role of SHEEC is spelt out below (http://www.enhancementthemes.ac.uk/sheec).

> *Through its support for and promotion of quality enhancement, the Scottish Higher Education Enhancement Committee ensures that higher education in Scotland remains at the forefront of developing and enhancing the student learning experience and student success.*
>
> *Our strategic aim is to ensure that our HE institutions work together to develop, foster and embed a culture of quality enhancement in learning and teaching, through effective partnerships involving staff, students and other stakeholders.*

Significant headway in increasing student success will also not be made or sustained using ad hoc approaches. Intellectual rigour is essential. Research is needed to develop suitable theoretical underpinnings for what helps or hinders student success. Credible evidence, obtained through reliable and valid means, is essential to monitor and guide interventions.

4. The Quality Enhancement Project

4.1 Focus of the Quality Enhancement Project

The focus of the Quality Enhancement Project is improving student success. Since "student success" can have many interpretations, in the context of the QEP student success is defined as follows:

> *Enhanced student learning with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable.*

This operational definition of student success has three important aspects:

1. Student learning needs to be enhanced. The quality of student learning needs to be enhanced so that students not only receive information but are also provided with the support they need to develop understanding, cognitive and metacognitive skills, productive learning dispositions and sound values.

2. The number of graduates needs to be increased. South Africa needs more graduates to undertake a host of professional and leadership roles in business, industry, government, public service, academia and society.

3. Graduates need attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable. It would be easy to increase the number of graduates by lowering academic standards. This would be counterproductive. Graduate attributes appropriate for high level functioning in the 21st century need to be identified, and ways of effectively developing them need to be incorporated into the student experience.

Improving student success will require systematic, concerted and coordinated action. In the words of Vincent Tinto (2012, 116-117),

> *Student success does not arise by chance. Nor does substantial improvement in institutional rates of student retention and graduation. It is the result of intentional, structured and proactive actions and policies directed towards the success of all students.*

Increasing student success at South African higher education institutions will require alignment of institutional goals, strategies and planning, together with coordination of people and activities across different institutional structures. Increasing student success across the higher education sector is going to necessitate sector-wide alignment of certain policies and practices.

4.2 Nationally coordinated and institutional activities

There are specific problems that are common to all HEIs or to certain sub-sectors within the HEI sector that cannot readily be solved by a single institution. There are good practices at certain institutions that can usefully be shared with other institutions. On the other hand, the contexts of individual higher education institutions in South Africa vary enormously in terms of history, size, student characteristics, geographical location, resources, range and type of educational offerings and institutional culture. What works in one context will not necessarily work in a different context without modification. And ultimately student experience is located at an individual institution.

During the QEP there will be thus be a constant interplay between nationally coordinated activities and activities at institutional level. This approach will promote enhancement of the system as a whole and of its constituent components. Figure 4 illustrates the flow of information between individual institutions (shown in red) and nationally coordinated activities (yellow). The continual flow of information in both

directions will create opportunities for knowledge to be created that can benefit both the higher education sector and individual institutions. Information can also be shared between or among two or more institutions directly.

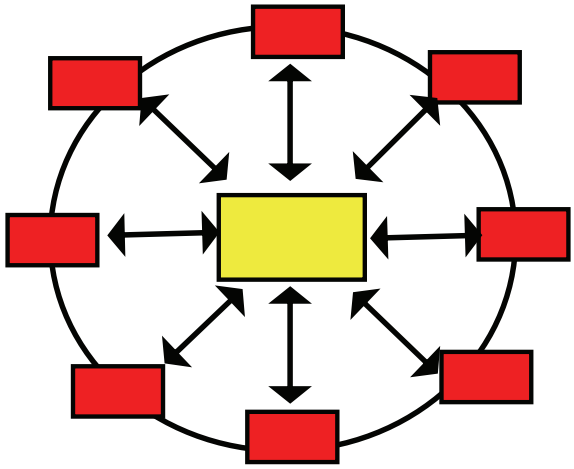


Figure 4: Information flow between institutions, shown in red, and the centre (national level), shown in yellow.

The QEP will be led nationally through the HEQC and its structures. Regular, collective engagements with Deputy Vice-Chancellors (DVCs) Academic and Teaching and Learning (or their equivalent) from all public HEIs and with academic leaders from private HEIs will also play an important role. Nationally coordinated activities will include setting specific focus areas at certain points in the QEP, as well as coordinating, analysing and synthesising inputs from individual institutions and making available resources relevant to improving student success from individual or groups of role players. Institutional level activities will include engagement with the selected focus areas through activities, policies and structures. Institutions will be asked to summarise aspects of this engagement in institutional submissions and reports at various points during the course of the QEP.

It is envisaged that the DVCs will be the points of contact between the CHE and their institutions for the QEP. Given the broad scope of the QEP, considerable coordination will be needed of interactions with other relevant stakeholders and structures within their institutions, including leaders of academic structures and support services, other members of senior management and relevant committees. It will be up to individual institutions to decide how this is most appropriately done within their own institutions.

4.3 Approach

A broad overview of the approach that will be used with public HEIs is outlined below. More detailed information about the process, including time frames, will be available in separate documents. Private HEIs will also be part of the QEP. However, given the large number of private HEIs and their diverse characteristics, a modified approach will be developed in consultation with them.

The approach used in the QEP will be inductive, iterative and interactive. At various points in the project, information will be solicited from institutions, analysed, fed back, further developed, collected, analysed and fed back again. Additional inputs will be accessed from other sources, such as professional bodies, communities of practice, researchers and international experts. Spin-off activities will take place throughout the QEP, some initiated by the CHE, some by other groups or bodies. Some will be short-term, while others may involve creating new structures, working groups or organisations.

It is envisaged that the QEP will comprise two phases of approximately two years each. In each phase, a small number of focus areas related to specific aspects of student success will be chosen for institutional and collective engagement. Institutions will be asked to submit concise documents in which they indicate their involvement with each of the focus areas. The institutional submissions will provide baseline information about institutional priorities, good practices and problems related to these focus areas. The submissions will be analysed and synthesised in order to identify common problems and good practices. The resulting document will form the basis for subsequent, facilitated discussions among participants from various groups of institutions. Reports from these discussions will also be summarised, and will contribute further knowledge about problems, solutions and good practices related to the focus areas.

Towards the end of the phase, institutions will be asked to submit reports on how they have brought about, or plan to bring about, improvements in the chosen focus areas. Several months later, they will receive individual feedback, based on their initial submissions and subsequent reports, in which both good practices and areas for improvement will be identified. A second phase will follow, centred on new focus areas.

Figure 5 represents the processes involved in each phase of the QEP. Yellow represents nationally co-ordinated and red represents institutional activities. Green represents spin-off activities that could take place at many points in the project and involve one or more different role players. The size of the blocks indicates the size of the role players, e.g. small blocks represent individual institutions.

The spin-off activities may take a number of forms. For example, national symposia or workshops could be organised by the CHE or by other role players on certain topics, which could include opportunities for international experts to engage with local participants. For other topics, it may be valuable to create working groups with a limited life span. Some topics could become the focus of projects of existing bodies, such as HESA or HELTASA, either on their own or in collaboration with the CHE. There may be capacity development activities, either for specific institutions or to strengthen capacity across a number of institutions in certain areas of activity, such as institutional research. There will also be extensive opportunities for research, both within individual institutions and across groups of institutions. Information on obstacles and enablers of student success, as well as challenges, problems and solutions, or at least proposed solutions, will be gleaned at every step of the process. Therefore it will be useful to disseminate emerging knowledge on improving student success widely and frequently. As knowledge is put into practice, long-term improvements to student success should result, both for institutions and for the system.

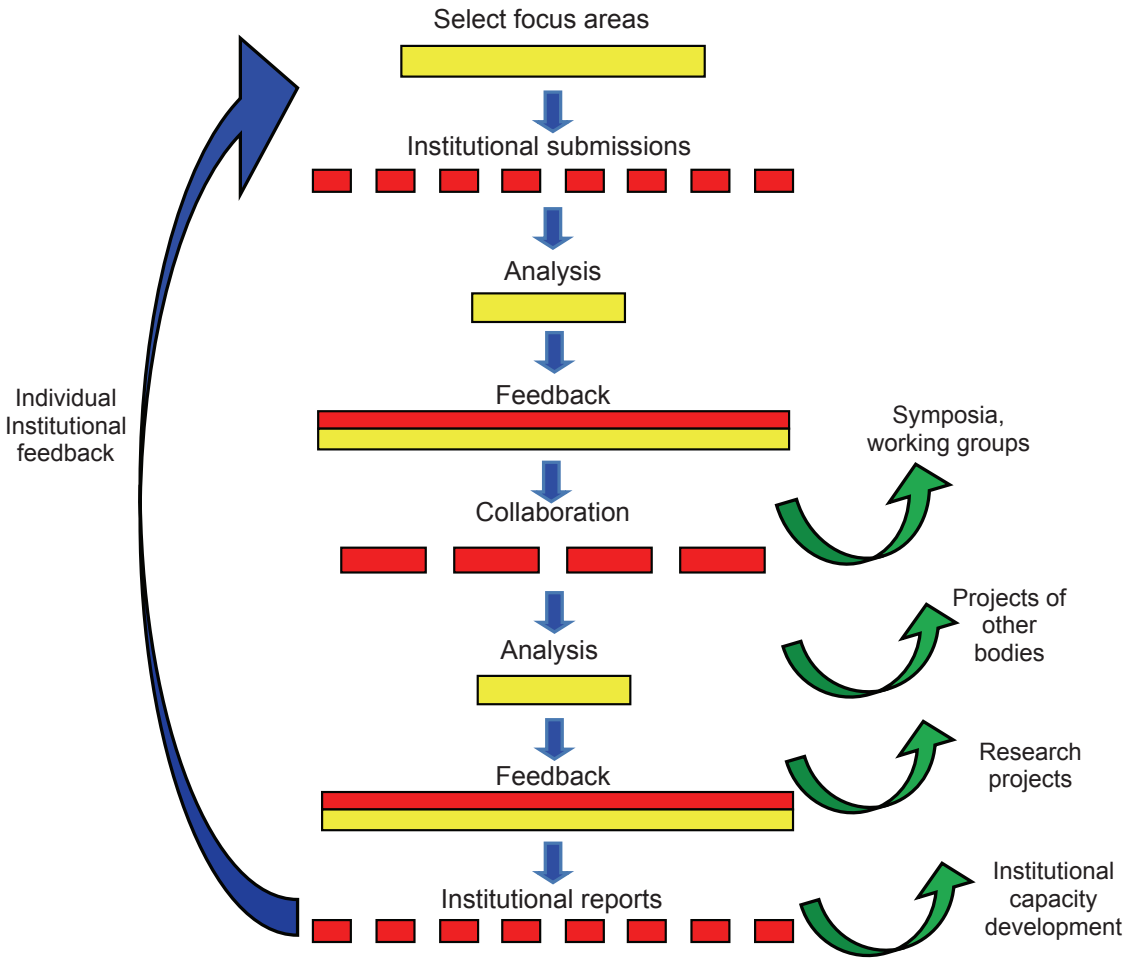


Figure 5: Flow diagram indicating the processes involved in each phase of the QEP.

4.4 Focus areas

During the first cycle of institutional audits, a number of issues were identified that affect student success. These issues can be grouped into the following seven factors:

1. Teaching
2. Curriculum
3. Assessment
4. Learning resources
5. Student enrolment management
6. Academic student support and development
7. Non-academic support and development

Key aspects related to each factor are described below.

Teaching

Aspects of teaching related to the teaching process itself are the specific pedagogical approaches used and the educational philosophy that underpins the choice of approach. The instructional approach will vary for different contexts, which include the discipline, course level, characteristics of the students in the class and nature of the course.

Logistical aspects that impact on teaching are class size, lecturer to student ratio, and the training, availability and qualifications of tutors.

Teaching is affected by the characteristics of the teacher, such as his or her qualifications, experience, proficiency in the language of instruction and knowledge of pedagogies and practices that promote student learning.

Teaching is affected by policies and practices in the institution. These include the extent to which teaching is taken into account and valued in hiring and promotion, how academics' workloads are calculated, what opportunities or requirements there are for development of academics as teachers, how stable the academic workforce is in terms of employment status (whether part-time or full-time, contract or permanent) and turnover, how lecturers are allocated to specific courses and how often and according to what criteria lecturers are rotated among courses.

Curriculum

Key aspects related to the curriculum content are the articulation between incoming students' prior knowledge and skills and course and programme requirements, coherence within and between years of study, progression in terms of conceptual development and level of difficulty or complexity. Another important aspect of curriculum content is the identification and specification of outcomes and graduate attributes, including knowledge, skills, values and dispositions, and indications of how the curriculum is designed to enable students to attain them.

Aspects related to management of curriculum include how staff time is allocated for curriculum development, what the processes and available expertise are for curriculum renewal or updating and who is responsible for oversight of the design and on-going curriculum development of programmes.

A central aspect related to the logistics of the curriculum is how the overall student load is determined and monitored, that is, how many hours students are expected to work, both in class and out of class, and what the expected level of intellectual engagement is. Other logistical aspects are what the prerequisite and progression requirements are, and how the level, standard and credit value of courses are determined.

Assessment

Key aspects related to the content of assessment are the level of cognitive demand and the relationship between course and programme objectives and course content.

Aspects related to the form of assessment are the type and format of questions, the scope and nature of the assessment tasks (e.g. class test, homework assignment, project) and whether the assessment tasks are diagnostic, formative or summative.

Aspects related to the quality of assessment are the consistency, objectivity and fairness of the marking, nature, extent and frequency of the feedback given to students, validity of the assessment tasks, novelty of the tasks (as opposed to tasks that are much the same from year to year so students can practice them), use of a variety of forms of assessment and moderation procedures.

Logistical aspects of assessment include when and how often tests are done, how examinations, including supplementary examinations, are timetabled, when assessment results are made available to students and how and when the results of various assessment tasks are incorporated into student results.

Learning resources

There are a wide variety of learning resources that may be available, supported and maintained to different extents. These include libraries, computer facilities, internet access, on-line learning environments and resources, teaching spaces, including lecture theatres and laboratories, and physical spaces where individual students can study and groups of students can work together.

Student enrolment management

Key aspects related to admission are procedures for deciding how many students to enrol per programme, mechanisms for selecting students into the university and placing them in appropriate programmes, methods for notifying students timeously of the outcome of their applications and registration processes. Aspects related to the on-going enrolment of students include procedures for refusing readmission to non-performing students and monitoring course enrolments, pass rates and programme completion.

Academic student support and development

Key aspects related to the content of academic programmes are the provision of a range of courses and programmes for students entering with differing sets of knowledge and skills, supplementary support in order to develop specific academic skills, such as writing or computer literacy, and additional opportunities to engage with subject-specific content, such as through extra tutorials or Supplemental Instruction. Other aspects related to the development of individuals include curriculum and career advising, sup-

ported personal goal-setting, mentoring and academic monitoring and referral in cases of poor academic performance.

Non-academic support and development

Non-academic support refers to all areas of student life outside of formal academic programmes. Key aspects at the individual level include logistics, such as housing, finance and transport, and physical and mental health.

Aspects at the institutional level include orientation and induction into the institution, being a student and the discipline, and the facilities and opportunities provided for student societies, leadership, residences, community engagement and sports.

Focus areas for Phase 1

It is not feasible to address all seven areas simultaneously in the first phase of the QEP. Further analysis of the audit reports, together with research on international trends and consultation with a range of stakeholders, has led to a clustering of these areas into four focus areas that can usefully form the starting point for institutional engagement in the QEP. For the most part, the chosen focus areas deal with issues at institutional level rather than the level of individual departments or lecturers. This is not to say that individual institutions could not or should not develop their own strategies and activities that also address other aspects of student success. However, in order to make progress at both a sector level and at the level of individual institutions, institutions will be requested to engage with the selected areas. The four focus areas for Phase 1 are:

1. Enhancing academics as teachers
2. Enhancing student support and development
3. Enhancing the learning environment
4. Enhancing course and programme enrolment management.

Given the focus of the QEP on improving student success, enhancing the quality and effectiveness of student learning opportunities and experiences is vital. And the focal point of formal learning opportunities is the class—the interface between students and those who teach them. Most academics in South Africa are hired for their subject matter and research expertise; very few are knowledgeable about how to promote effective student learning. Enhancing academics' understanding of effective pedagogical and assessment practices and how to construct educationally sound curricula will lead to improved learning opportunities for students. So, too, will enhancing the learning environment—the physical and educational facilities and resources that are available to students to promote and support learning.

However, according to Tinto (2012), "access without support is not opportunity". Given the diverse characteristics of students in South African HEIs, different types and levels of support are needed if students

are to have a good chance of success. And an HEI should not admit students who do not have a good chance of success at that institution. Once an institution has admitted a student, the institution has a moral obligation to do what it reasonably can to provide enabling conditions for the student to succeed. Careful consideration must therefore be given as to which students an institution admits. Student success at a particular institution is affected by the institution's course and programme enrolment management policies and procedures—how well the institution matches the characteristics of the students it admits and places into its various programmes with what it is willing and able to provide for its students. Student success is also affected by how well an institution monitors the performance and progress of its student and refers them for appropriate support as needed.

While there is overlap in the four focus areas, it is possible for different groups of people to engage with each area in detail.

5. Anticipated outcomes of the Quality Enhancement Project

As indicated in section 1.3, the shift from quality assurance to quality enhancement will not lessen institutional accountability for quality. Instead, it will take different forms.

The Quality Enhancement Project is intended to provide an enabling framework, impetus and resources that will lead to on-going improvements in student success in South African higher education institutions. The immediate goals of the QEP are to improve the quality of undergraduate provision and the number of graduates with personally, professionally and socially valuable attributes. If the student experience at South African HEIs leads to the development of such attributes, then the quality of graduates will improve.

The long-term goal of the QEP is to develop a quality enhancement mind-set among higher education institutions in which continuous improvement is embedded in institutions' strategic thinking and institutional planning, and institutions routinely collaborate to bring about systematic and systemic improvements to higher education. On-going reflection and evidence-based decision making will enhance HEIs' ability to be learning organisations.

The goals of the QEP can be summarised as:

1. Improving the quality of undergraduate educational provision;
2. Improving the number of quality graduates;
3. Developing a higher education system that is improving continuously as members of the higher education community collaborate to share good practices and solve shared problems.

In order to monitor the QEP, indicators of student success will be developed, some of which will require sector-wide data collection. In addition, individual institutions will be encouraged to develop their own

indicators of student success, both qualitative and quantitative.

It is envisaged that the QEP will provide opportunities for institutional capacity development. For example, institutions vary in their capacity to collect, store and process student, course and programme information needed for monitoring student retention, progress and throughput, as well as for timeous identification of students in need of support and courses with consistently low pass rates. During the QEP it should be possible to help institutions develop tools and skills to undertake these and other related functions. Training opportunities may also be made available for certain staff at specific institutions.

A number of resources will be developed during the QEP by individual or groups of institutions, working groups or other structures. These resources will be made widely available for individual institutions to adopt or adapt to their own contexts. Examples of resources are systems, software and procedures for data collection and processing, policies, models, guidelines, teaching materials and case studies illustrating good practice.

Working groups or other structures may be created during the QEP in order to contribute to student success in specific areas over an extended period. These may lead to new communities of practice. For example, a number of institutions currently offer courses or formal programmes in higher education. A working group might be formed to look into developing shared professional development programmes that could be widely accessible to teaching staff from many different HEIs using mixed-mode delivery methods. As another example, a working group could be formed to create models for first-year experience courses that integrate career guidance, life and academic skill development and exposure to important ideas and ways of thinking in broad subject areas, such as natural sciences and humanities, or topical issues, such as food security and climate change.

The QEP will provide extensive opportunities for research. Intellectual rigour will be essential in establishing what helps and hinders student success in the South African context. Theoretical foundations and credible evidence will be needed. Research on various aspects of student success can be undertaken at many levels, including disciplinary, structural and institutional. By encouraging such research, institutions will accrue the dual benefits of better understanding of what affects their students' success and better integration of teaching and research as core functions within the institutions. Clearly research outputs would also increase, as would opportunities for career advancement for the academics involved through research publications and grants.

During the course of the QEP recommendations for policy will be made, where appropriate, in order to continually align various policies with national priorities and to make the national higher education environment increasingly conducive to student success.

Information gathered during the QEP will be used to create codes of good practice in specific areas related to improving student success. For example, one code of good practice might include guidelines for professional development of academic staff, including how teaching competence is incorporated into

promotion and performance management criteria. Another code of good practice might focus on facilities and services that should be available to students.

Benchmarks for good practice will be formulated, on the basis of both what emerges from the QEP and internationally recognised good practice. These benchmarks will raise the bar of what can be expected of institutions in external quality assurance processes in future in terms of the quality of their undergraduate provision.

More broadly, the QEP provides an opportunity to catalyse a process of social change. In the first audit cycle, there was a need to ensure that fundamental quality assurance processes were in place in all higher education institutions, institutions that had changed shape, size, identity and mission and had very disparate histories in the years preceding the institutional audits. In the second period it is hoped that a process will be set in motion in which individuals within institutions and institutions as a whole engage in the continuous enhancement of the student experience, leading to increased student success. Moreover, it is envisaged that collaboration across institutions will lead to collective impact that has the potential to far exceed what can be done by individual role players.

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