

8. APPROACHES TO BUILDING EDUCATIONAL CAPACITY IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION SECTOR

We argue, on the basis of the significance of higher education and the performance patterns discussed above, that decisive and concerted action is needed to make a substantial difference to the capacity of the higher education sector to improve graduate output to meet national needs. The systemic nature of key obstacles to such improvement makes it essential for there to be a comprehensive but focused approach involving policy, planning, resourcing and capacity building, within an effective blend of incentives and accountability.

The development of a comprehensive approach constitutes a considerable undertaking for the sector and its key stakeholders, and will by its nature require consultation and negotiation as well as leadership. It is thus not the intention of this paper to present a comprehensive plan but rather to propose some key considerations and elements that analysis of the situation suggests must be taken into account.

8.1 A COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO IMPROVEMENT

Because the existing performance patterns in the sector are embedded in long-standing systemic conditions, changing them calls for a multi-faceted and multi-level approach, including the following key elements:

- Clarity and commitment in national goal-setting and planning**

A clear focus in setting output goals and strategic direction for the sector, together with aligning policies and resource distribution accordingly, is a necessary condition for achieving significant positive change. Goal-setting must of course be dynamic and informed by the constraints of our context, but it must be equally strongly informed by rigorous and evolving assessment of what the country needs from higher education. A central argument of this paper, arising from educational development experience, is that performance in the higher education system does not have to be deterministically confined by factors outside of the sector's control, influential though they are; on the contrary, change in the educational processes within higher education can produce significant change in outcomes. The political will to negotiate broad goals that are not unreasonable but nevertheless increasingly challenging is consequently a key means of mobilising energy and innovation towards meaningful progress.

The DoE's recent shift towards a greater emphasis on output goals, and negotiation with individual institutions on their mission and targets, represents an important step in this direction.

- Establishing effective frameworks for teaching and learning**

The evident ineffectiveness of the traditional curriculum structures in South African higher education may serve as an example of how an inappropriate framework restricts achievement. The need for effective frameworks applies not only to structures within which formal teaching and learning take place but also to professional development and capacity building in higher education. Without effective frameworks, effort and resources are not well utilised.

Existing frameworks are usually embedded in the system and consequently resistant to change. However, being prepared to examine them and change them as necessary is particularly important in the South African context, where inherited systems and approaches have some significant shortcomings in relation to contemporary conditions, and can in themselves be an obstacle to development. It is ultimately the responsibility of the state to establish effective frameworks, but given the nature of higher education, the involvement and expertise of the sector are critical.

- **Identifying key educational strategies for improving graduate output**

Unsatisfactory performance in the higher education sector is long-standing, and the obstacles to improvement – particularly the tensions between widening participation, increasing success rates and enhancing quality – are commonly seen as intractable. Identifying educational strategies that can address these tensions and contribute to significant improvement of outcomes is thus a central challenge for the sector which neither traditional teaching approaches nor isolated initiatives are likely to be able to meet.

Developing the kinds of educational expertise needed to identify and implement interventions that will be effective in our context should be a priority, and should provide the rationale for an educational capacity-building approach for the sector.

- **Establishing an effective approach to professional development**

Since the progress of the sector ultimately rests with the staff, creating a successful professional development system is a key investment for higher education. As will be argued below, the establishment of structures for this purpose is a necessary but not sufficient condition, since a central challenge is to create an environment where professional development is valued and sought. Approaches to how this might be achieved are discussed below.

8.2 THE SIGNIFICANCE OF ‘EDUCATIONAL EXPERTISE’

It has been argued that the challenges for the sector, particularly those inherent in the four elements of development outlined above, are primarily systemic. Key problems, such as the tension between equity and efficiency, are ones that the sector has not been able to resolve over many years. This indicates that simply continuing with current approaches – doing more of the same – will not change the embedded patterns. The substantive question, then, is to what extent the sector has the capacity, in terms of expertise as well as resources, to develop and implement fresh and more effective approaches and strategies.

It appears that the systematic knowledge of the educational process that is necessary to do this is currently not in adequate supply in the sector at large. As is still the case in many countries, our higher education sector relies predominantly on ‘craft knowledge’ of the educational process, with academic staff teaching much as they were taught and with traditional approaches strongly reinforced by departmental cultures. Craft knowledge of this kind has served higher education well in conditions of

stability and continuity, but, on the evidence of the output patterns, is failing to help produce solutions to the educational problems of the contemporary context. These problems confront many academic staff with challenges for which their own academic backgrounds have not prepared them – such as the challenge of developing students from highly diverse educational and linguistic backgrounds, or the growing demand for e-learning. The key limitation of craft knowledge is that, lacking a systematic or theoretical basis, it does not provide conceptual and analytical tools for dealing with ‘non-traditional’ situations. As discussed earlier, traditional teaching approaches are not working optimally for many students. The new educational challenges in higher education call for research-based and scholarly approaches to be brought to bear on teaching-and-learning practice in areas where craft knowledge is not sufficient.

Kreber’s (2002) distinction between ‘excellence’ and ‘expertise’ in teaching provides valuable insights into the nature of our current capacity and what is additionally needed in the sector. ‘Excellence in teaching’, of the kind celebrated in traditional institutional teaching awards, is commonly associated with high levels of craft knowledge, excellence in the discipline, and personal charisma. ‘Teaching expertise’, by contrast, is based on systematic knowledge of teaching and learning processes in higher education, acquired through literature, reflection and research, and is associated with the post-Boyer (1990) concept of ‘the scholarship of teaching and learning’. Kreber and others in fact distinguish between teaching expertise and the scholarship of teaching and learning, in that the latter involves publication and formal peer review. In the interests of brevity, however, we use the term ‘educational expertise’ here to refer broadly to the application of systematic knowledge or research to the development and implementation of educational processes, whether or not it involves peer-reviewed publication.

In arguing for the importance of educational expertise in our context, we are not suggesting that there should be an expectation that all academic teaching staff should become specialists in the scholarship of teaching and learning; there is of course a range of key contributions that academics need to make to society. What we believe to be essential for effective educational development, however, is that there should be a level and spread of educational expertise in the sector that is sufficient for leading, designing and implementing educational processes that lead to the outcomes the country needs. This expertise needs to be available at different levels and in different forms, including the following:

- There needs to be a sufficient number of educational specialists, at appropriate academic levels, to lead educational management and development at national and institutional levels, to provide specialised educational design and teaching services, to provide professional development opportunities, and to disseminate systematic educational knowledge within the groupings of academic staff – departments or programme teams, for example – that are responsible for mainstream provision. Educational specialists have aspects of the educational process as their main field of study and research, though they may come from, or work mainly within, specific disciplinary areas.
- There is an important need for a sound level of educational expertise in a number of ‘mainstream’ academic staff – that is, disciplinary specialists in regular academic departments, schools or faculties – sufficient for effectively leading and managing the design and delivery of mainstream courses and programmes, and guiding the selection and work of programme and large-course teams. Capacity to interpret and operationalise national and institutional

educational policy is a critical aspect of expertise at this level. Staff in this category continue to see their home disciplines as their main affiliation but develop interest and secondary specialisation in education in their subject areas.

- In addition, there should be an expectation that all academic teaching staff should in time gain a basic level of educational knowledge, sufficient for effectively implementing appropriate educational approaches. Some level of professionalisation of teaching is increasingly being required of academic staff in developed countries (whose educational challenges are not as demanding as South Africa's).

These are not intended to represent exclusive categories – there would normally be a continuum of levels of educational expertise in a system – but rather examples of areas in which capacity should be developed. It is acknowledged, however, that the place of educational expertise in higher education, as well as its relationship to standard disciplinary research and scholarship, remains controversial in South Africa. Dealing with this issue is thus a leadership challenge.

8.3 CONDITIONS FOR THE GROWTH OF EDUCATIONAL EXPERTISE: THE ISSUE OF ENGAGEMENT

If the need for educational expertise is accepted, it is necessary to consider what is in place and what conditions are required to facilitate its growth.

The CHE, through the HEQC, is the only statutory higher education body with an explicit mandate for capacity-building in relation to teaching and learning. The HEQC is now geared to taking this mandate forward, indirectly through the audit and accreditation processes and directly through its Quality Promotion and Capacity Development (QPCD) directorate. Other organisations with an interest in this area include professional higher education bodies (particularly HESA), various professional and disciplinary associations, and the institutions. A number of academic staff development initiatives, including postgraduate qualifications, have been introduced in institutions and regions. Outside of the sector itself, the ETD SETA has a contribution to make to facilitating professional development, though the nature and potential impact of this contribution has not been clearly established.

Despite the efforts being made, however, what is presently in place is inadequate for meeting the needs of the sector, in terms of both structures and resources. There is, for example, no national network to support teaching-and-learning development. Notwithstanding recent changes in the allocation of the 'Teaching Development' grants provided for in the national funding framework, funding for educational capacity building and research is very limited at national and institutional level. The thinness of our present structures is evident when they are seen against the networks that have been established in various first-world countries. While direct comparisons with developed countries may not be valid, it is important to recognise the implications of the fact that our relative shortage of capacity-building resources is compounded by the greater extent and significance of our developmental needs.

However, in the experience of many involved in this field, the main obstacle is not just structures and resources but the marginalisation of teaching-and-learning development in the higher education system, and the lack of engagement of academic staff in capacity-building in this area. Participation in formal and non-formal professional development initiatives is commonly limited to a small minority of intrinsically-motivated academics, and efforts to expand are frustrated by lack of recognition of educational expertise. This is by no means only a local concern – lack of engagement is an issue in higher education institutions in many systems, particularly in research universities (see for example Elvidge 2004) – but it has added significance in South Africa because of the high stakes involved.

As noted earlier, teaching (undergraduate teaching in particular) is by far the largest part of the core business of higher education in South Africa, so it is often puzzling to observers outside the sector that there are problems with the status and professionalisation of teaching. The issue is internationally recognised as complex, being rooted in competing conceptions of the purposes of higher education and what constitutes valid scholarship. In many institutions, the dominant values and attitudes are dismissive of educational expertise as an intellectual domain. Notwithstanding concepts like ‘research-led teaching’, tensions between teaching and research are manifested in a range of ways. Within institutions, teaching and research compete for academics’ time.²³ While many academics are committed to their students and to teaching their disciplines, engagement with educational innovation, and with gaining the expertise needed to meet contemporary educational challenges, is commonly (and perhaps increasingly) perceived as contrary to career interests. At sector level, it is apparent that there are similar tensions between national output needs and the way institutions see their own identity and corporate interests. In these circumstances, the prospects of building the sector’s educational capacity are not good unless there are changes in values and attitudes.

Given the nature of higher education, the aim has to be not to create conflict between teaching and research, which would be highly counter-productive, but rather to establish an effective balance between these (and other) key elements of higher education as legitimate and essential manifestations of scholarship (Boyer 1990). As suggested above, an effective balance can be reached by the valuing of different academic roles and levels of educational expertise – from specialist to basic understanding – and recognition that complex educational challenges can only be effectively met by collaboration between staff with complementary capabilities, in groupings such as programme teams.

In summary, capacity building in teaching and learning is not simply a challenge of appropriate provision but rather of how to ensure positive engagement on the part of institutions and individuals. The following section offers a view of how this might be achieved.

8.4 PROMOTING ENGAGEMENT THROUGH ACCOUNTABILITY AND INCENTIVES

Given the nature of the academic community, increasing positive engagement with educational capacity building depends on strengthening the recognition and status of ‘teaching’ and

²³ It appears also that in some institutions entrepreneurial pressures and inclinations are placing a growing emphasis on for-profit consultancy and professional short-course teaching, possibly at the expense of regular (particularly undergraduate) teaching.

educational expertise. We argue that, in the South African context, this depends in turn on ensuring that effective educational performance becomes important to both institutions' and individuals' status and advancement. This calls for a combination of push and pull factors: on one hand, promoting fair accountability for educational outcomes across the sector, and on the other, establishing educational expertise as an intellectually stimulating and rewarding area of academic work.

We contend that a key reason why educational performance, and hence educational expertise, is not experienced as a priority in the sector is that there is a lack of real accountability for the outcomes of the educational process, particularly in the institutions. Institutions accept responsibility for the exit standards of their qualifications (though these are benchmarked and measured with differing degrees of rigour). There is also debate on and a general sense of responsibility for the appropriateness of the content of programmes and disciplinary majors. There is, however, little accountability for the 'size and shape' and representivity of the graduate output at any institutional level, and in many programmes there is no assessment of, and thus no accountability for, overall graduate attributes. Institutions have been predominantly input-orientated in their planning, and in many cases output data that are pre-requisite for accountability – particularly longitudinal performance data such as cohort studies – have not been readily available or analysed in depth in the institutions. The DoE has placed greater emphasis on output by setting broad national output goals in the NPHE, establishing funding incentives in relation to efficiency, and, recently, requiring institutions to include output targets in their formal enrolment plans. However, the national goals do not translate readily into institutional goals, and while institutions may be focusing more on efficiency, it is not apparent, at the time of writing, that there is a concerted effort across the sector to substantially improve output in line with identified national needs.

In the absence of clear accountability for improving graduate output, many institutions have not placed a premium on improving the effectiveness of their educational processes or, consequently, on investing in the capacity-building necessary to achieve this. In a number of universities, despite some awards for teaching, the reality is that disciplinary research, particularly in its traditional manifestations, remains the predominant route to status and access to funding. While the technikons historically placed greater weight on teaching, it appears that the new Universities of Technology are increasingly emphasising research and consultancy in an effort to establish new identities. The merger process itself has been a major distraction. Other forces that might be expected to focus institutions' attention on improving teaching and learning are growing but still at an early stage of development. Examples include the national quality assurance system, which is in its first audit cycle, and market forces and consumer consciousness, which are becoming more evident but are still suppressed by a range of factors, including the instability arising from the changing 'institutional landscape'.

Establishing such accountability – with due regard to what can reasonably be expected of institutions – is primarily the task of the state, but should be supported by the sector itself as a key means of clarifying and fulfilling its public obligations and hence retaining public support. If improving output became psychologically and materially important to institutions in this way, it could be expected to influence values and practice significantly.

However, as experience in many contexts has shown, accountability by itself is not enough, and risks resulting in a narrow compliance that compromises quality.²⁴ We suggest that, to encourage academic staff to engage willingly and proactively in developing their educational expertise, there are two sets of motivating conditions that can be put in place:

- The first condition is ensuring that expertise in ‘teaching’, that is in all aspects of the educational process, is genuinely recognised and valued by the institutions as essential to the core business of higher education and the success of the institution. This involves recognition of the scholarship of teaching and learning as well as of expertise in practice. It would be manifested in concrete ways such as criteria for selection, promotion and scholarly awards at all levels, as well as in the overall institutional culture. The recognition and reward of teaching is primarily a responsibility of institutional leadership.
- Second, there need to be opportunities to show that ‘improving teaching’ can in fact make a significant difference to the outcomes of the educational process. Particularly because of the widely-reported difficulties of teaching in contemporary conditions, demonstrating to the academic community that the educational process is intellectually challenging as well as important, and that applying educational expertise can improve career satisfaction as well as results, is a key to creative engagement.

Experience in other contexts indicates that establishing incentives such as prestigious teaching fellowships, professional educational networks and stimulating projects can achieve much in establishing the credibility of educational expertise. (This is evident in the positive outcomes of initiatives such as the Carnegie Fellowships in the USA and the UK’s Learning and Teaching Support Network and National Teaching Fellowships.)

In summary, raising the profile of teaching and learning, in terms of accountability, recognition and scholarship, is essential for successful capacity-building and hence for enabling the higher education sector to enhance its contribution to national development. Establishing a coherent framework for this work is a practical first step. Structures and initiatives that might give effect to a productive combination of accountability and incentives are suggested in the sections below.

8.5 ACCOUNTABILITY: DEVELOPING CHALLENGING EXPECTATIONS OF THE SYSTEM

It has been argued (in section 4) that improving graduate output should be accepted as a specific and unequivocal priority for the higher education sector, in terms of policy, planning, resourcing and implementation. Achieving this calls for complementary responsibilities on the part of the state and the institutions. In order to establish graduate output as a focal point for the sector, we suggest that the state and sector roles should include the following:

- A central state role is to identify and continue to refine broad graduate output goals that reflect national needs, in consultation with the sector and other stakeholders. It is recognised

²⁴ There is a growing body of critical literature on this key topic, much of it in response to the imposing on institutions and academics of various forms of accountability that are seen to be intrusive and counter-productive to the academic project. An example of a comprehensive treatment of this topic is D’Andrea and Gosling (2005).

that, since the future is unpredictable, goal-setting must be flexible and responsive while still providing clear guidance for the sector. Planning approaches related to the concept of 'strategic direction' may be relevant here. While broad shape and size goals are clearly important, the lack of certainty about what specific skills will be needed in the future means that graduate attributes such as quality and adaptability are at least as important as the shape of the output.

- Given the many possible distractions, resource shortages and competing interests affecting the sector, we would argue that it is desirable for the state and the sector collectively, through its representative bodies, to enter into a professional compact designed to enable key output targets to be met, in the national interest. This would call for the negotiation of demanding but attainable output targets, for sector commitment to focusing efforts on meeting the targets, and for state commitment to creating conditions, including fair resourcing arrangements, that make the targets achievable. Such a compact would be in the national interest, and would be advantageous for the state and the sector in clarifying goals and responsibilities and gaining public support.
- Notwithstanding the desirability of the sector's accepting collective professional responsibility for improving output, institutional autonomy means that negotiating goals and strategic direction with the individual public universities is key to meeting national needs. The output of the system, being the aggregate of the output of the institutions, is at present dependent on decisions taken in the individual institutions that may be more strongly influenced by internal interests than by national needs. While there are arguments that the market's invisible hand is effective in shaping graduate output in large, developed economies (see for example Williams 2003), judging from the performance patterns this has evidently not been the case in South Africa. Similarly, while the new funding framework may not have been in place long enough to assess its effects, the steering mechanisms it incorporates may not be sufficient in themselves. The performance patterns suggest that, in current South African circumstances, improving graduate output should not be left to market forces and indirect steering.

The negotiation of output goals must of course take full account of institutional capacity and mission but should also be strongly informed by the institution's potential to contribute to meeting national needs. For example, while a national goal may be that 30% of graduates should be in SET, the universities with the strongest SET establishments should be expected to produce a much higher percentage. It will clearly be a central state responsibility to monitor progress and ensure that the aggregate of the institutions' output moves closer to meeting the national goals as a whole.²⁵

- As discussed in section 7, it is also a state responsibility to establish frameworks and conditions in which the sector can work effectively towards meeting its goals. A fundamental element of this is to ensure that policies and resourcing mechanisms are well aligned with

²⁵ Since the time when the main research for this paper was completed, the DoE has begun to negotiate some aspects of provision differentially with individual institutions, making special funding available to boost expansion in some strategic subject areas. As it takes account of differential capacity to contribute, this is a welcome development which, it is hoped, can be taken further in future.

the central strategic goals, with particular reference to graduate output. Major policies bearing on this include the higher education qualifications and funding frameworks.

The state and central sector bodies, particularly the CHE and HESA, also have a key role to play in building educational capacity. First, clear goals and expectations, together with positive and well-informed bilateral relationships between the DoE and the institutions, can in themselves contribute to institutions' acceptance of the profile of the student body they need to take responsibility for, and can hence stimulate innovation. Further, judging from experience in other countries, national structures and networks can be vital in enabling the sharing of good practice and the development of educational expertise, as discussed in section 8.6 below.

Successful performance of these central roles, which is critical for the improvement agenda, requires substantial capacity in the national bodies concerned. Research-informed interactions with the institutions and other stakeholders, on sometimes complex issues, call for strong educational and technical expertise as well as a sound planning and monitoring system. While there are individuals with advanced expertise in these areas in the DoE and the CHE, it would appear that the existing resources do not match the growing scale of the work that is needed. Capacity development in this area may thus be a priority.

It is acknowledged that building commitment to improved performance through clarifying and strengthening roles and responsibilities is a complex and potentially contested undertaking. However, establishing some appropriate form of professional, development-oriented compact between the sector and the state, as suggested above, may be a key means of focusing the institutions' efforts and creativity on meeting the sector's main challenges. It is also in line with the changing relationship between the state and the institutions in the provision of public services.

As far as individual institutions are concerned, it is of course their responsibility to devolve accountability to their academic units in whatever ways are effective for them. A pre-requisite, however, is that all institutions need to have an effective and as far as possible standardised system for tracking and monitoring student performance, with the capability to generate the kind of data needed not only for reporting purposes but also as a basis for educational interventions. There may well be a need for capacity building in the institutions in this regard.

A mechanism which has been identified by the HEQC as having the potential to focus the educational agenda effectively is the institutional Teaching and Learning Strategy. The Teaching and Learning Strategy is a comprehensive statement of an institution's educational philosophy, mission, goals, approaches and resources. It is intended to bring the institution's various education-related policies into a coherent framework. It explicitly reflects the level of priority the institution attaches to its educational role and goals, and addresses the way the institution sees the relationship between teaching and research. Used well, therefore, it can be a key tool for aligning the institution's major policies and strategies with its central educational goals.

Teaching and Learning Strategies thus have the potential to enable successful devolution of responsibility and accountability for educational outcomes within the institution. They can also have a strong developmental role, as noted below.

8.6 A FRAMEWORK FOR CAPACITY BUILDING

8.6.1 Some key characteristics

Establishing appropriate accountability for educational outcomes is, we argue, a necessary condition for highlighting the importance of teaching in higher education, and should in itself improve the recognition of educational expertise and hence engagement in professional development. However, as international experience with quality assurance indicates, approaches that are predominantly compliance-orientated have limited success, may have unintended consequences, and do not offer stimulating conditions for creativity (see for example Rowland 2006; D'Andrea and Gosling 2005). It is essential, then, that a system of positive incentives should be built up as an integral part of the approach to capacity building.

In the first instance, strengthening the definition and recognition of teaching, in its full sense, in institutional appointment, promotion and performance management criteria is essential for demonstrating that educational expertise is valued, and for promoting positive engagement. However, since there is no material substitute for intellectual status in higher education, a comprehensive approach to improving teaching needs to include not only interesting opportunities for professional development but also mechanisms for stimulating and celebrating high achievement. Like conventional research awards, some capacity building initiatives can serve more than one of these purposes.

While little systematic research has yet been done on this subject in South Africa, a preliminary needs-analysis investigation carried out for the HEQC in 2002 (D'Andrea et al 2002), together with the experience of some institutional and regional initiatives, suggests that the following would also be important considerations in the development of a capacity building framework for our context:

- **A multi-level approach**

Formal and non-formal professional development in South Africa is at present characterised largely by small-scale regional or institutional projects, often driven by a group of committed individuals. To increase impact, there is a pressing need for a form of national co-ordination that can provide coherence while retaining the benefits of local initiative. This can best be achieved through a multi-layer approach that operates at the level of national and regional networks, discipline-specific networks, institutions, and individuals.²⁶ Possible initiatives at the different levels are outlined in section 8.6.2.

- **Dedicated funding**

Given the importance of the educational function of higher education to South Africa's development, it is noteworthy that only a very small fraction of the total budget is earmarked for educational development and capacity building. The DoE's introduction of foundation programme grants is an important step in the direction of curriculum reform but – even taking account of recent changes in the allocation of the Teaching

²⁶ A strong example of a multi-layered approach that operates at these levels is the system that has been put in place in the UK, particularly through the agency of the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

Development subsidy – there is little national funding for mainstream educational improvement initiatives or educational capacity development, particularly at national level.

In contrast, developed countries are investing major and growing sums in improving teaching and learning, even though the needs in those contexts are not as acute. The differential in available state resources is of course acknowledged, but at the same time, given the high financial and opportunity cost of poor performance in higher education in South Africa, there is a strong case for substantial state investment in improving graduate output through educational capacity development. Dedicated, accountable funding is a pre-requisite for such initiatives to be undertaken on a professional, committed and sustainable basis.

- **Formal study and research programmes**

In higher education, a theory- and research-informed approach to professional development is essential, and the provision of high-quality formal study and research programmes, leading to recognised qualifications up to doctoral level, must be at the heart of this. Given that the great majority of students of higher education studies will be academic staff, there is a particular need for adequate resourcing of such programmes and the research projects within them.

- **A networking rather than didactic approach**

A finding of the HEQC's 2002 needs-analysis investigation was that a majority of the academic staff interviewed indicated a strong preference for the provision of networking opportunities – allowing for learning through co-operative projects and interchanges with peers – rather than didactic workshops. While the investigation was not a formal representative study, and while there are shortcomings in the preferred approach (see below), the underlying call for authentic situated learning as the basis for capacity building should be seriously considered.

As noted earlier, the development of an approach to capacity building that is best suited to the South African context must be strongly consultative. It should also, however, be professionally driven and informed by knowledge of relevant theory and research as well as experience in other contexts. A recommendation for initiating a process of determining an appropriate approach is offered in section 8.6.3.

8.6.2 Possible elements of a capacity building framework

This section provides an outline, informed by practices in some other countries, of the kind of structures and initiatives that might go into a framework for a capacity building system in South Africa. It is not intended to be comprehensive or prescriptive but rather to provide examples for debate.

- **A national body as driver**

The significance and complexity of improving teaching and learning in South Africa calls for a central body to take responsibility for leading and co-ordinating the establishment of an educational capacity building system. As is the case with dedicated funding, the importance of the task and the consequences of continuing under-performance justify investing in structures that can begin to do for educational capacity development what the NRF does for disciplinary research.

It is not suggested that a new national body should be established for this purpose. There appears to be a case for expanding the HEQC's Quality Promotion and Capacity Development Directorate to take on this role. In any event, the responsible body would need to establish strong relationships with the DoE and other sector bodies, as well as with the institutions.

Its responsibilities could include:

- establishing a policy and resourcing framework for capacity building that will enable professional development to be undertaken in accordance with strategic priorities, through peer networks, in institutions, or by other means;
- leading or stimulating the identification of educational strategies that can be used to significantly improve student performance, and of the kinds of educational expertise needed to implement them;
- promoting the establishment of national and regional peer networks;
- administering an educational innovation fund – perhaps arising from the existing Teaching Development funds – designed to support substantial initiatives in professional development and educational research;
- leading or stimulating developments in the field, such as the establishment of professional standards for higher education teaching.

- **National and regional networks**

National and regional peer networks dedicated to improving teaching and learning may well be the core of a capacity building system, with adequate resourcing and professional co-ordination being key to their success. On the basis of the experience of other contexts and to some extent of local professional and academic associations, the most successful networks may be those that are discipline-specific or represent cognate clusters of disciplines. Such networks have obvious advantages such as common discourses, and are often intrinsically motivated (Saunders *et al*, 2004). Their main shortcoming may be over-emphasis on craft knowledge, which would need to be addressed through professional leadership. There would also be significant organisational and logistical challenges involved in running such networks in South Africa, given our geography and infrastructure. In addition to disciplinary networks, the same kind of approach could provide a basis for

supporting a range of other key groups or practice communities, such as senior and middle academic managers, academic planners, and professional staff that have an influential role in teaching and learning.

- **National educational innovation funding**

The establishment of a national educational innovation fund for higher education would enable priority development initiatives to be designed and implemented across the system in a co-ordinated way, with need-driven capacity building as an integral element. It is common for funds of this kind to be administered by a central agency, with major initiatives being identified in accordance with national priorities, and institutions bidding for funding on agreed criteria. Dedicated funding of this kind has a unique role in stimulating positive change.

- **Initiatives in the institutions**

Institutions will remain a key site for professional development – for the provision of formal and non-formal programmes and as hosts for national and regional networks. Apart from being the major beneficiaries of innovation funding, institutions can be motivated to promote professional development through their reward and performance management systems. Teaching and Learning Strategies are particularly valuable for identifying key goals and what is needed to achieve them, and can thus provide a valuable basis for capacity building.

- **Initiatives focusing on individuals**

Finally, there are a range of initiatives such as fellowships and other awards for educational expertise that are designed to recognise the achievements, leadership or leadership potential of individuals. Such awards can be controversial if seen as divisive or failing to recognise the collective effort involved in most educational initiatives. If they are linked to the scholarship of teaching and learning, however, they can have a positive role in both stimulating and honouring advances in theory and practice. In this way they can serve as an example of capacity building and raising the status of educational expertise going hand in hand.

8.6.3 Summary and recommendation

The main elements of the case for building educational capacity in the higher education sector are as follows:

- Educational expertise, at different levels and in different forms, is necessary for successfully addressing central challenges in South African higher education, for substantially improving the current performance patterns, and thus for meeting the country's high-level human resource needs.
- Building capacity in educational expertise depends not only on the provision of effective professional development opportunities but also, critically, on positive engagement on the part of the academic community. Engagement, in turn, depends largely on raising the status of educational expertise through strengthening accountability and incentives.
- Accountability for the educational outcomes of the higher education sector can be strengthened in various ways, particularly, it is argued, through developing professional compacts between the state, the sector and the individual institutions. A clear focus on graduate outcomes, in terms of quality as well as quantity, is justified by the importance of meeting national needs.
- Incentives for developing educational expertise are linked to the status of 'teaching' in all its facets and to the intellectual and material rewards for quality and expertise in this area. Clear recognition of educational roles in the core business of higher education, together with support for initiatives that can demonstrate the effectiveness and intellectual challenge of the 'scholarship of teaching', are key to positive engagement.
- Alongside promoting engagement, capacity building calls for the provision of effective professional development opportunities and networks at different levels in the sector. The priority now is for leadership and co-ordination through national structures and dedicated funding. As is the case with all significant endeavours, investing in capacity development, particularly in periods of transformation, is called for and warranted by the importance of ensuring positive outcomes.

It is therefore **recommended** that the CHE, in consultation with the DoE and relevant sector bodies, develop detailed proposals for structures and projects that would constitute a comprehensive approach to educational capacity building in the higher education sector. This is not intended to obstruct or delay specific initiatives but rather to create a framework for support and co-ordination. This paper has suggested key parameters for such a development.