

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE TEACHING DEVELOPMENT GRANTS AND THE QEP

Prof Nan Yeld

Introduction

The purpose of this brief report is to provide a summary of the kinds of activities supported in the current cycle of Teaching Development Grants (2014/15 – 2016/17). Insofar as it is possible, the summary utilises the QEP Focus Area framework as interpreted in the “Synthesis of QEP Institutions Submissions”, 16 February 2015. It is hoped that this will contribute towards alignment between the QEP and TDG initiatives, where this is appropriate, and/or avoid unnecessary duplication of the TDG and QEP initiatives. In other words, where widespread recognition of the need for activities exists, as evidenced in TDG institutional plans and progress reports, it is perhaps not essential to undertake prolonged discussions – these could be focused on areas where new insights and needs have been surfaced or are surfacing. A second purpose is to provide further context for the QEP workshops.

Discussion

The focus areas of the two initiatives do not map precisely onto each other, although the activities within the TDG programmes, and the QEP’s focal areas of achievement or challenge, show a remarkable similarity. Notable exceptions are:

- the inclusion, in the TDGs, of the improvement of academic staff qualifications to enhance disciplinary expertise, relevance and confidence (including workplace experience for academics in applied fields); and
- the QEP’s important focus on course and enrolment management approaches and systems.

The experience of early cycles of TDGs (until 2013/14), and the extensive consultation with the sector through site visits during 2013, resulted in the six TDG ‘programmes’ listed in the table below.

Teaching Development Grant Programmes	Quality Enhancement Project Focus Areas
1. Development of university teachers & teaching 3. Enhancing the status of teaching 4. Researching teaching & learning 5. Managing the TDG	1. Enhancing academics as teachers
2. Tutorship & mentorship programmes	2. Enhancing student support & development
	3. Enhancing the learning environment
	4. Enhancing course & programme enrolment management
6. University priorities	

Following this consultation and the sector’s support for the 6 programme areas, institutions developed detailed three-year plans that laid out, activity by activity, how they would attempt to enhance teaching and learning within these programme areas.

It is not perhaps surprising that there is a high degree of overlap between what institutions identified in early 2014 for the TDGs, and for QEP in late in 2014 in the form of institutional submissions on successful and unsuccessful practices. The table below summarises the main activities of the two national projects.

QEP Focus Area 1: Enhancing academics as teachers

Achievements were summarised in the following descriptive categories:

- Professional development
 - Role of a centralised teaching and learning division and staff
 - Training: induction or orientation, short courses/ qualifications, workshops and seminars, conferences, symposia, and forums, peer learning, research and the scholarship of teaching and learning
- Rewards and recognition
 - Teaching awards
 - Probation and promotion
 - Teaching sabbaticals
- Performance management

TDG Programme 1: Development of university teachers and teaching, enhancing the status of teaching, researching teaching & learning, managing the TDGs

Examples of activities proposed, approved and funded:

- Teaching and learning divisions: payment of staff, development of materials
- Induction programmes
- Qualifications (eg PGDips in the university educator role)
- Workshops, seminars, conferences, peer learning etc
- Training (induction)
- Research development specifically directed at teaching & learning
- Rewards and recognition
- Improvement of qualifications to enhance disciplinary expertise, relevance and confidence (including workplace experience for academics in applied fields)
- Teaching awards
- Assistance with preparation of teaching portfolios for promotion and probation and applications for awards
- Teaching sabbaticals
- Performance management systems that recognise teaching competence

QEP Focus Area 2: Enhancing student support and development

Achievements were summarised in the following descriptive categories:

- Student support & development structures (student services)
- Institution-wide efforts to identify student support & development needs
- Identification and support of at-risk students:
 - Early warning systems
 - Tracking and referral of students
- Institution-wide initiatives to support first-year students
- Academic support and development:
 - Academic literacy and language development
 - Subject-specific academic support and development [extra tuts, SI, etc]
- Non-academic support and development:
 - Mentoring and peer support
 - Life skills development, advising and counselling
 - Support for students in university residences
 - Support for students with disabilities
- Career guidance and workplace-related support:
 - Career guidance and counselling
 - Workplace-related skills employability eg CV writing
 - Links with graduates, employers, professions and curricula

TDG Programme 2: Tutorship and mentorship programmes

Examples of activities proposed, approved and funded:

- Teaching assistants
- Mentors
- Tutors (formal courses)
- Supplemental instruction staffing (coordinators and SI facilitators)
- Training for tutors and mentors
- Coordinators of tutor/mentor programmes
- Early warning systems
- Online tutoring systems
- Careers services: development of online systems for skills employability etc
- Academic advising: posts, training support

QEP Focus Area 3: Enhancing the learning environment

Achievements were summarised in the following descriptive categories:

- Teaching and learning spaces
- Technology-enabled teaching & learning
 - Learning management systems
 - Other technology-enabled learning and teaching
- ICT infrastructure, support and access
- Information and computer literacy
- Libraries
 - Facilities
 - Resources
 - Training and support
- Support to students with disabilities

TDG Programme 6: University priorities

Approximately R89 million was granted to activities such as the following, identified by institutions as overarching, priority areas:

- First Year Experience initiatives: staff, student assistants, approaches
- Acquisition, modification and/or development of appropriate management information and analytics software and approaches
- Early warning systems (software, materials, staff)
- Learning spaces (formal and informal)
- Work-integrated learning opportunities
- Open learning materials
- Winter and summer schools as catch-up opportunities
- 'Graduate attributes' initiatives, and formal

QEP Focus Area 4: Enhancing course and programme enrolment management

Achievements were summarised in the following descriptive categories:

- Selection, placement, admissions and registration
- Readmissions and exclusions
- Enrolment planning and monitoring
- Management information systems (MIS)
- Gateway courses
- Monitoring student performance and identifying at-risk students

recognition of extra-curricula involvement and achievements

- Writing retreats for postgraduate students, staff undertaking PhDs
- Employment of sign language interpreters and other disability-supportive initiatives
- Writing centres (establishing and staffing)
- Costs to institutions of participating in the QEP
- 'Grow our own timber' initiatives
- E-learning (staffing, equipment, materials development etc.)
- 'Literacies' – language, numeracy, computer, e-learning – training courses
- Salaries of Teaching and Learning Division staff
- SASSE and other surveys
- Diagnosis of student needs and placement of students (extended, regular, augmented routes)
- Developing residences as 'living and learning' spaces

On the basis of the site and monitoring visits carried out during 2014, it seems that progress reports on the first year of this cycle, due in April 2015, are likely to raise very similar concerns to those listed in the QEP synthesis report draft.

Concluding comments

From the TDG experience, strongly confirmed by the QEP submissions, it could be argued that any attempts to bring about long-term and meaningful improvements in teaching and learning in South African higher education must, at a minimum, address and resolve issues related to:

- Sustainability of the extensive range of teaching-related initiatives currently in the system
- Continuing tensions between teaching and research in institutional practices
- Continuing inequities between institutions and a lack of clarity about what is meant by differentiation
- Relevance and quality of curricula
- Planning and implementation capacity (institutional and national)
- Appropriate and sustainable levels of monitoring and evaluation in the sector to ensure accountability but not superficial compliance

Nan Yeld
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