

# Institutional feedback report

<b>Name of Institution</b>	University of Fort Hare
<b>Date of institutional visit</b>	21 October 2016
<b>Names of peer reviewers</b>	Prof Gary Swartz Nicholas Munro
<b>Name of CHE person involved in the visit</b>	Prof Diane Grayson
<b>Date draft report submitted to institution</b>	29 March 2017
<b>Date of final report</b>	1 June 2017

## GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO QEP PEER REVIEWER REPORTS

Four focus areas were selected for Phase 1 of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) with which all institutions were asked to engage, namely: (1) enhancing academics as teachers, (2) enhancing student support and development, (3) enhancing the learning environment, and (4) enhancing course and programme enrolment management. In September 2014 each university produced a baseline submission that addressed the following questions for each focus area:

- Which aspects of your institution's Strategic Plan relate to this focus area? (Please be specific by quoting from the Strategic Plan).
- What activities do you currently have in place related to this focus area that are successful? What evidence do you use to conclude that they are successful? (Do not provide detailed evidence, just a description of the type of evidence you collect and a short summary of the results.)
- What activities related to this focus area have you initiated during the past three or four years that have not been as successful as you had hoped? In what ways were they unsuccessful? What do you think might be the reasons for the lack of success?
- What activities have you recently implemented or are you planning to implement in the next 12 to 18 months related to this focus area? Why have you chosen these particular activities? What is the need or problem they are intended to address?
- What are the challenges or problems related to this focus area that still need to be addressed in your institution?

The submission also included an introductory section on the contextual features of the institution that are salient to student success, a description of how the submission was prepared, and a concluding section on other activities the institution was undertaking to promote student success and challenges being faced.

Universities were asked to submit final reports by 11 December 2015 that indicated improvements that had been made or were being planned since the baseline reports were submitted. The stated aim of the report is shown below.

The aim of the institutional report is to demonstrate efforts to bring about enhancements in each of the four Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) focus areas since the beginning of Phase 1 of the QEP in February 2014, reflect on the journey towards enhancement and assess the extent to which the efforts have resulted in improvements.

Because of widespread student protests in the last few months of 2015, some reports were submitted early in 2016. In the final report, for each focus area universities responded to the following questions:

- Summarise what the university considers to be the key issues in [this focus area] in one or two paragraphs.
- During Phase 1 of the QEP, what changes at institutional level (a) have been made, (b) are in progress, or (c) are in the planning stages that relate to enhancing academics as teachers?

- Provide one or more (but not more than 5) exemplars to illustrate specific aspects of the changes that are successful. Provide evidence for claims of success. Where an activity is in the planning stages, indicate what evidence will be collected.
- Provide one or more (but not more than 5) exemplars of changes that have not been successful and suggest reasons.
- If possible, identify one or more promising practices related to this focus area. Describe the practice and provide evidence for success. Suggest what the key features might be.
- Identify the main challenges the university still faces in relation to this focus area.

The document also included an introduction that described how the report was prepared and a concluding section on reflections on Phase 1 of the QEP.

During 2016 and early 2017 individual institutional visits were carried out by two peer reviewers and the Director: Institutional Audits. The CHE communicated with the DVC Teaching and Learning or Academic to find a suitable date for the visit, and then a formal letter was sent to the Vice-Chancellor, which included the names of the peer reviewers and a request to indicate whether he or she felt there was a serious conflict of interest. In addition to logistical matters, the letter described the purpose and format of the visit as follows:

The purpose of the institutional visit is to provide a structured opportunity for institutional leaders to engage with peer reviewers external to the institution about the journey they are taking towards improvement in the QEP focus areas, the milestones achieved, the challenges encountered along the way and the plans for further improvement. It is also an opportunity for institutions to receive feedback on their engagement with the focus areas and suggestions for what else they might consider doing, or doing differently, based on what is being learned in and with the sector. Please note that we are interested in what is being done at your university that relates to the four Phase 1 focus areas, not just designated QEP activities.

The broad frame for the visit is appreciative inquiry (AI), originally developed by Cooperrider and Srivastva (1987)<sup>1</sup>. AI is a strengths-based approach to change management that uses the “positive core” of an organisation as the starting point for growth and improvement. In contrast to problem-solving – trying to fix what is – it employs a generative method to envision what does not yet exist. While it is impossible for peer reviewers to engage in a full-blown AI process, the institutional visit is intended to focus on the positives as a springboard for thinking about what to enhance and how.

During the visit we would like to meet with the following groups of people over the course of the day:

1. Senior management (60 minutes)
2. Key role players involved with Focus Area 1 (80 minutes)
3. Key role players involved with Focus Area 2 (80 minutes)
4. Key role players involved with Focus Area 3 (80 minutes)

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<sup>1</sup> Cooperrider, D.L. & Srivastva, S. (1987). Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In Woodman, R. W. & Pasmore, W.A. (Eds), *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, Vol. 1, Stamford, CT: JAI Press, 129-169.

5. Key role players involved with Focus Area 4 (80 minutes)
6. Senior management (30 minutes for feedback)

The team will have read the university's QEP baseline report and final report. At the meetings, the team may ask for further information beyond what was in the two documents. The university may also wish to bring additional information to the meetings.

The selection of participants is up to you. However, we hope that you will be able to be part of the first meeting, and if possible, the last. For the meetings with senior management, we would like to speak with people who have the authority and responsibility to implement and drive initiatives at institutional level that relate to the four focus areas of Phase 1 of the QEP<sup>2</sup>. For the meetings on the focus areas, we hope that students will be included.

Several weeks before the institutional visit, the two peer reviewers were sent the institutions' two reports, two articles on Appreciative Inquiry and the peer reviewer manual, which contains, among other things, a list of possible questions and detailed guidelines for the peer reviewer report. Immediately prior to each institutional visit, the peer reviewers and the Director: Institutional Audits spent most of a day preparing for the visit by going through the institution's two submissions in detail. During this preparatory meeting, several specific questions for the senior management were formulated and areas in which the panel wanted more information were identified for each focus area. The meetings that took place during the institutional visit were audio-recorded, and the audio files were sent to the peer reviewers after the visit for reference.

Each peer reviewer report is based on three data sources: the institution's baseline submission, the institution's final report and the content of the meetings during the institutional visit. As stated in the letters to the VCs, institutions could provide additional information during the visit. Some institutions did provide further documentation to elaborate on specific issues during the visit or, by agreement, emailed additional documentation immediately after the visit; in these cases such documentation was also taken into account in writing the report. It was necessary to limit the scope of the work in this way to ensure that the work could be completed within a specified time frame and also to be fair to all institutions.

Following receipt of the peer reviewers' reports, the CHE undertook a process of editing and harmonisation of the reports (to ensure a reasonable level of consistency among them) before sending them to institutions. In the initial letter to each VC it was indicated that the reports would be sent to the institutions for corrections, but that institutions were not expected to add new information at this stage. After the corrections were received from institutions, the final report was produced; new information was not included. It is hoped that the report will be a useful resource for an institution in its own journey to improvement. In addition, the reports will be among the documents that the CHE will use to produce a document synthesising what has been learnt during Phase 1 of the QEP across the sector. The final reports will serve at the Institutional Audits Committee and the Higher Education Quality Committee for information.

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<sup>2</sup> (1) Enhancing academics as teachers, (2) Enhancing student support and development, (3) Enhancing the learning environment, (4) Enhancing course and programme enrolment management.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The University of Fort Hare was founded in 1916 in the small rural town of Alice, primarily to provide tertiary education for black students. It soon established itself as the home of aspiring African leaders and intelligentsia, not only for South Africa but also for other Southern and East African countries. Under apartheid, its role was forcibly diminished, and when apartheid ended there was competition among universities for academically capable black students. For a number of reasons during the 1990s the University declined and risked closure, but subsequently found its feet again. In 2004, as part of a national reconfiguration of the higher education landscape, it absorbed what had been a campus of Rhodes University in East London (now Buffalo City), which has added an urban base to its existing rural base. It also has a campus in Bhisho.

The University comprises five faculties: Science and Agriculture, Social Sciences and Humanities, Law, Education and Management and Commerce, each headed by a dean. A new Faculty of Health Sciences was launched in 2016 and was in the process of being established. The University is headed by a Vice-Chancellor, two Deputy Vice-Chancellors, the Registrar and the Chief Financial Officer. Most of its 13,000 students come from the Eastern Cape, and are dependent on NSFAS financial support. The student numbers have grown rapidly, from 8,700 in 2004 to 13,000 in 2014, which has not been matched in the increase in teaching staff numbers from 300 to 330. As a result, teaching staff are overloaded.

Institutional management has a clear focus on achieving academic success, and has instituted a number of initiatives in support of the academic project. The institution appears to have performed well within its financial limitations, recognising its constraints, with a clear focus on sustainability of the institution. The institution has placed emphasis on the importance of teaching and learning, and continues to seek innovative approaches to development within its constraints. Overall, there appears to be a holistic focus on the student experience.

In the new strategic plan currently being developed (to begin in 2017) funding has been identified as a focus area by management to address the substantial maintenance backlog and to provide resources for the institution's operations and development. In addition, the institution is busy identifying ways in which it can operate more efficiently, as well as ways in which things can be done differently in order to work effectively within resource constraints. Currently, support services consume half of the budget; there is an intention to use ICT to increase efficiency. Management indicated a drive to be more creative and aggressive in sourcing funding, as lack of funds holds the institution back, especially in trying to address its very high student to staff ratio.

A common view in the institution seemed to be that they need to increase student numbers in order to generate more income, but this would likely exacerbate the staffing and infrastructure problems. On the other hand, there is a drive to increase post-graduate students, which now stand at 23% of students, post-doctoral fellows and research, both as an income source and as an investment in the future as some post-graduates will become academics. There are various research incentives, such as tuition waivers for post-graduate

students and a bonus of R60 000 to supervisors when their students complete a doctoral degree and R20 000 for masters degree. As one management member put it, “In times of need, you can invest to generate a surplus or you can eat your seed. We continue to invest in research because times will get better...UFH will not eat its seed.”

There was a strong sense of collaboration among senior management and coherence in institution-level initiatives. Improvements are clearly being made in certain areas, although the progress in all faculties did not seem to be equal, and the sharing of best practices perhaps not as deliberate as it could be.

The institution appears to be deliberate in its actions and in aligning its processes to achieve its strategic aims in each of the four QEP focus areas, guided by its Strategic Plan 2009-2016, in which the focus areas are encapsulated. This manifests in comprehensive actions from management which stress the importance of quality in teaching and learning. The activities of the Teaching and Learning Centre, particularly the introduction and implementation of the PGDipHET, illustrate this commitment to teaching quality.

Senior management indicated that participating in the QEP was a very valuable experience for the University, as it gave them an opportunity to reflect critically on who they are, why they are there, what they do and how, to get feedback from students and staff (academic and support), and then identify gaps and areas for improvement. One management member indicated that it gave them an opportunity to get a 360° view of the institution as a whole, and to interact with a range of stakeholders about how everyone can work together on the core business.

The University took an unusual approach to preparing its two QEP reports. A small Institutional Quality Enhancement Project Committee was formed under the leadership of the DVC of Academic Affairs. Academic issues were identified by a task team by means of structured interviews to ascertain both students’ and academics’ perspectives; focus groups were used to solicit information from academic support units. The DVC: Institutional Support headed another committee that solicited information related to support issues by commissioning reports from the major support units.

## **2. FOCUS AREA 1: ENHANCING ACADEMICS AS TEACHERS**

*(Including professional development, rewards and recognition, workload, conditions of service and performance appraisal)*

### **THE INSTITUTION’S STRENGTHS**

While scholarly principles of teaching and learning (and related activities aimed at enhancing academics as teachers) are seemingly embedded throughout UFH, the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) is a key unit that is responsible for operationalizing these principles and activities. The TLC is the custodian of the institution’s Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education and Training (PGDipHET), provides ad hoc teaching development workshops, is

the service provider of the induction programme for new academic staff and manages student evaluation of teaching. Moreover, although not directly related to enhancing academics as teachers, the TLC also offers direct academic development services to students (see QEP focus area 2).

TLC's portfolio (i.e., student and staff service delivery and teaching quality enhancement) is broad and runs the risk of rendering the centre unfocused and overworked. However, the impression created is of a centre that is in touch with both students' and academic staff's development needs, and is a central and positive role player in enhancing academics as teachers. Reported staff perceptions suggest that the TLC is highly regarded in the institution, and that the work it does around enhancing academics as teachers is viewed as necessary and important. It was reported that in excess of 200 UFH lecturers have gone through some form of training and development offered by the TLC.

In the baseline (2014) report, the University indicated that there is widespread use of the University's Learning Management System, Blackboard, with usage totalling 570 courses and 8620 students in the second semester of 2014.

The office of the University Planner runs an annual student satisfaction survey; in 2013 the satisfaction level was found to be 76%. It also runs an annual staff satisfaction survey; in 2013 79% of academics felt that their relationship with students was good or excellent.

### **APPROACH TAKEN TO IMPROVEMENT**

UFH's 2009-2016 strategic plan alludes to the enhancement of academics as teachers. A specific strategic objective of "excellence in teaching and learning" signals an overarching institutional aspiration around how teaching should be conducted and improved upon. The strategic plan also specifically affirms the value of professional development and the scholarship of teaching and learning among its academic staff. The TLC seems to take primary responsibility for the professional development of academic staff through induction programmes, workshops, and the postgraduate diploma in higher education.

### **IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN AND PROGRESS MADE**

UFH has implemented several improvements that can be conceptualised as being part of its mission to enhance academics as teachers. These improvements are detailed below under six headings: policies and systems; TLC development programmes; expansion of Vice-Chancellor teaching excellence awards; annual teaching and learning week; mentoring; and faculty-specific initiatives.

*Policies and systems: Teaching workload, teaching evaluation, performance management, and promotion*

A revised teaching workload policy was introduced in 2013, although it cannot be properly implemented because of the high student to staff ratio.

Teaching as a key performance area in the institution's performance management system seems to have recently been embedded. The performance management system, although officially implemented recently, is not being adhered to in all departments; it seems to be treated as a compliance exercise rather than a developmental opportunity.

Students evaluate modules and academics, although student compliance with this evaluation activity is reportedly low, while the regularity with which these evaluations are implemented varies by faculty and academic. Academic staff members are apparently encouraged to facilitate student evaluations of their teaching, and uptake of this is reported to be generally high. A standardised electronic evaluation (with customisation options) is available. TLC manages the evaluations, which was reported to involve:

- Analysis of the evaluation
- Feedback directed to lecturer and head of department

Negative feedback prompts a conversation between the TLC staff member and the lecturer concerned, with the aim of developing strategies for improvement and encouraging the lecturer to discuss the feedback with his/her head of department. Feedback is conceptualised as part of ongoing critical reflective practice, and TLC discussions with academic staff members apparently assume this focus.

A formalised institutional strategy for how feedback from teaching evaluations is managed does not appear to be in place. Academic staff are responsible for initiating peer reviews of their own teaching. It was noted that promotion is not possible without formal evaluation of teaching from both students and peers. This is in line with the institution's Promotions Policy in which teaching and learning performance is one of the criteria for promotion for academic staff. .

Individual faculties appear to be responsible for implementing the teaching workload policy and performance management system. Teaching quality as a key performance area is part of the performance management system, however there does appear to be some debate around how teaching quality can/should be evaluated (e.g., through pass rates, retention).

#### *TLC development programmes*

Faculties are responsible for encouraging academic staff to participate in the TLC teaching and learning workshops. The 3-day induction programme is compulsory for all new academic staff members, while attendance at other workshops and the PGDipHET is voluntary. However, recently it has become possible for academics to register for individual modules of the PGDipHET, and it has become compulsory to complete the module on *Assessment and Moderation of Student Learning* in order to apply for promotion. This has had the effect of increasing the number of registrations in the Diploma programme, as academics' awareness increases of the complexity of university teaching and the skills

required has grown. Specific training in technology-enhanced teaching and learning seems to have also been introduced for academics.

#### *Expansion of Vice-Chancellor Teaching Excellence Awards*

The Vice-Chancellor's Teaching Excellence Awards (originally reserved for two academics) have now been extended to include awards for academics from each faculty. The recognition of teaching excellence at faculty and institutional level is likely to enhance the visibility and value of this activity, and thereby encourage continued interest in the development of academics as teachers. It is worth noting that the vast majority of award winners are PGDipHET graduates.

#### *Annual teaching and learning week*

UFH reports hosting an annual teaching and learning week, which consists of a week-long mini-conference with presentations from academic staff from UFH and from sister institutions, and invited speakers from other parts of the country.

#### *Mentoring*

In some cases, new academic staff are engaged in informal mentoring relationships with senior academics. This, however, seems to be more formally practiced within discipline specific research (e.g., academic staff collaborating on discipline specific research projects). Newly appointed academic staff (specifically those appointed as part of the New Generation of Academics Programme) are apparently formally assigned to mentors, which focus on both research expertise and enhancing teaching. .

Some new lecturers teach large classes, and do not necessarily have markers or teaching assistants to help them.

#### *Faculty specific initiatives*

Faculty specific initiatives mentioned in discussions included:

- Management & Commerce: A target has been set to have 90% of academics within the faculty complete the PGDipHET. The faculty aims to schedule discipline specific conversations about teaching and learning. Evaluation of teaching by students is reportedly compulsory for all academics and modules.
- Science & Agriculture: A teaching development grant has been used to assist with enhancing teaching strategies for large classes.
- Law: Many academics have taken short courses offered by the TLC. Almost all modules having a presence on Blackboard.

- Education: The faculty has introduced faculty specific projects on teaching to large classes and has made use of a teaching development grant.
- Social Sciences & Humanities: Academics have undergone TLC training on teaching to large classes. The use of technology to enhance teaching and learning is embedded in academics' teaching.

#### *Planned improvements*

UFH reported having plans to enhance blended learning in all undergraduate modules. This planned improvement is, however, dependent on a Historically Disadvantaged Institutions (HDI) Development Grant. It is assumed that the grant will not only assist students in their learning, but will also serve as a platform to enhance academics' teaching strategies and skills.

#### *Extent to which the improvements are being or have been embedded in the institution*

The introduction of the teaching workload policy and system, and the performance management system can be viewed as principled improvements towards enhancing academics as teachers. These systems are still in their infancy at UFH, and expectedly there are teething problems with the practicalities of implementing them. For example, many academic staff members are reported to have extremely high teaching loads that do not adhere to the workload policy, however, resolving this is dependent on the expansion, recruitment and retention of additional academic staff. Finding a way to address the high teaching loads will allow staff members time to develop their teaching (and research) skills.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

The panel suggests that the teaching workload policy is a strategy to persist with. Notwithstanding the very real staffing constraints that influence how the policy is implemented in practical terms, it may be useful for UFH to explore how other institutions have worked with the practical implementation of teaching workloads. A university that has worked with this issue in depth is the University of KwaZulu Natal.

UFH appears to have effective course and lecturer evaluation tools in place. The panel suggests that the institution reflect on how the process and regularity with which modules and lecturers are evaluated could be enforced, and formalise how these evaluations are used developmentally. In addition, the approach adopted at present does not appear to be consistent between faculties and schools, and perhaps a more co-ordinated and consistent approach could be considered. This would also feed into performance appraisal, which could help change the perception of it as mere compliance into an opportunity for personal development.

The performance of the TLC is commendable in what they achieve with what would be considered as very few resources. This, however, is likely to manifest in high workloads

which may in time demotivate staff if not addressed. We therefore encourage management to reflect on the resources allocated to this centre.

### **3. FOCUS AREA 2: ENHANCING STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT**

*(Including career and curriculum advising, life and academic skills development, counselling, student performance monitoring and referral)*

#### **THE INSTITUTION'S STRENGTHS**

In 2010, UFH introduced a compulsory credit bearing course for all first year undergraduate students, called Life, Knowledge, Action (LKA). LKA is based on a humanising pedagogy, and therefore draws on students' existing knowledge and identities to enhance their life and academic skills in order to succeed in university. Despite mixed responses on the value of the LKA course by students and staff, the course is undoubtedly a strength that has been embedded in institutional practice over the past few years in that it plays an important role in socialising students into the University.

In addition to the compulsory and institution wide LKA course, improving "the student experience" is part of UFH's strategic plan. Improving the student experience is conceptualised to include improvements in student support services, such as health care, counselling, residence, sport, and student governance and societies.

The TLC offers several academic support services to students, including the management and delivery of academic literacy and writing skills development (through a writing centre), and tutor and Supplemental Instruction leader training.

Other support and development services in the institution are housed under the Dean of Students' portfolio, and include counselling, health, residence, student governance and societies and sport.

In addition, although the roll-out over the past few years has apparently been problematic, a Student Tracking System was introduced.

#### **APPROACH TAKEN TO IMPROVEMENT**

UFH uses a two-pronged approach – institutional level and faculty level support. There are multiple institution-wide processes in place that address student support and development. In addition, faculty level interventions are being put in place.

#### **IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN AND PROGRESS MADE**

UFH recently rolled out Wi-Fi to its residences. Although this roll out technically enhances the learning environment (i.e., QEP focus area 3), UFH conceptualises this as also being part of its student academic support and development strategy.

A Disability Unit (DU) was also recently established at UFH on both the East London and Alice campuses. This unit, although understaffed and under-resourced, forms an important component of enhancing student support and development at the university.

The main forms of academic support offered to students are tutoring and Supplemental Instruction (SI). The TLC offers training for both tutors and SI leaders, which appears to be very effective. However, not all departments send their tutors to the TLC for training. A recent improvement affecting SI is the facility now available for SI leaders to book rooms online for their sessions.

The Student Counselling Centre is championing a first year experience programme, and developed a narrative around this concept in 2015. A specific staff member in the counselling unit has been tasked to lead this programme, and it is intended to be fully implemented by 2018.

There have been efforts for several years to put in place an online student monitoring and tracking system. Initially, a Norwegian-funded system was developed that made use of the University's MIS, ITS. However, when ITS was upgraded, the tracking system had to be rebuilt. The way the system is supposed to work is that lecturers upload students' marks to Blackboard after each test. The student tracking system administrator is then meant to run the system at pre-determined intervals and this generates emails that go to deans, deputy deans and faculty managers, who should act on the risks identified. But the system is breaking down at many levels. For one thing, there is no interface between ITS and Blackboard. The names of lecturers allocated to particular courses are not always updated, and lecturers do not always upload marks timeously. Thus the student tracking and referral system is not yet fully embedded and functional in the institution. It is undergoing redesign to be incorporated as an integral part of the ITS system.

In the interviews it became apparent that students are mostly not aware of the existence or purpose of the student tracking system. In addition, students seem to be referred (or present themselves) for counselling at the end stages of academic and personal crises when remediation is potentially not possible, or extremely difficult.

However, there are efforts to put in place monitoring and support initiatives in some faculties for students at risk. For example, students in the Law faculty who fail a module twice are flagged and referred to the Dean (or lecturers) for academic counselling and referral. Exam committee meetings in other faculties may also serve to flag students who are struggling academically. In addition, a programme-based academic help desk, which offers assistance with career and curriculum counselling, has been piloted within the Accounting programme.

The various Foundation Provisioning Programmes (FPPs) are also conceptualised by UFH as offering student support and development. In the Faculty of Science and Agriculture, 40% of new students are reportedly directed to FPPs, while 20% of first year Law students enrol in the law FPP. On the basis of the NBT results, UFH claims that around 80% of their first

year students should be directed to a FPP; space, staffing, and student attitudinal challenges, however, constrain this proportion of placement in FPP's.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

Amidst difficult financial and staffing constraints, UFH has done well to implement various initiatives aimed at supporting and developing their students. The following suggestions are offered as possibilities to enhance student support and development at UFH in the future.

Given the mixed responses by students and staff about the value of the LKA course, it may be useful for UFH to implement an in-depth evaluation of the current LKA offering. This evaluation could aim to revise current course content and the ways in which it is offered. In principle, the course is an institutional strength, but perhaps there are ways in which it could be updated, differentiated from the National Senior Certificate Life Orientation curriculum, or even integrated with the proposed first year experience programme. It is suggested that synergies between the proposed FYE programme and the LKA course are explored, and a formal examination be considered for the LKA course. The University is encouraged to contact the National Resource Centre for the First Year Experience, based at the University of Johannesburg, for suggestions.

Student tracking is certainly a key strategy that is used in the current global higher education student support and development movement. Therefore, the technical difficulties that UFH has experienced with its student tracking system should continue to be problem-solved. Referral to relevant student support structures and systems (e.g., academic counselling by Deans and lecturers, Student Counselling Centre, the Writing Centre) should ideally be actioned as early as possible in a student's programme. In addition, various staff members at UFH (e.g., lecturers, faculty managers) are apparently responsible for entering test marks into Blackboard, and then facilitating a referral and support response for students who are failing. It is probable that the ways in which this monitoring during semesters is implemented also needs to be reflected upon.

UFH could consider the potential value of assigning its student counsellors to specific faculties, or more radically, devolving student counsellors (and advisors) to specific faculties. Other South African higher education institutions (such as UP, UCT and UKZN) have implemented faculty-based student advising and/or counselling services in an attempt to align student support and development functions to the academic/faculty enterprise. In the same way that faculty specific teaching and learning interventions benefit students from specific faculties, it is suggested that faculty specific student support services may be a strategic way to enhance student support and development in the institution.

Communication of student support and development services, and opportunities for students at UFH, may benefit from being strategically rethought. From the interviews, it is evident that students may not be aware of the services available to them. Students experience information-overload during orientation, and may not always be open to receiving different forms of communication (e.g., general student emails, Facebook, Twitter, Blackboard, hard

copy notices and posters). It is likely that a multi-pronged and strategically timed coherent approach to student communication is needed, with students receiving targeted information via multiple forums and modalities (e.g., orientation, during lectures, from mentors and tutors, via email, at strategic times during the semester). Another option could be to explore the University of Johannesburg's strategy of implementing several online self-help resources and sources of referral information for students. UFH could consider implementing these kinds of resources for their students via their student portal or Blackboard as one strategy towards enabling students to access communication about support and development opportunities when they individually need it and/or are open to receiving it. Annual orientation for student representatives and faculty councils about the student services available is perhaps also required.

Given the staffing constraints reported at UFH, the institution could explore possibilities of employing senior students in various appropriate ways in the institution. Instead of viewing students as only clients, as they progress and become integrated into the university system, they could potentially become service providers as well (e.g., administrative aids during registration and orientation, work study placements in academic and student support departments). In addition to filling much needed gaps in service delivery at the institution (due to staffing constraints) these employment opportunities would enable students to develop their employment skills and employability. The panel suggests that the University consider creating a work-study office to coordinate what could become a large number of campus-based work opportunities for students.

The university should consider the introduction of a co-curricular transcript, where student services to the institution, public, and general social/community contributions are recognised formally, which students can use to enrich their CVs. NMMU can provide an example of how to do this.

**4. FOCUS AREA 3: ENHANCING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**  
*(Including teaching and learning spaces, ICT infrastructure and access, technology-enabled tools and resources, library facilities)*

**THE INSTITUTIONS' STRENGTHS**

The overall aim of Management is to improve the whole university experience of student in order to improve student success. However, the growth in student numbers in previous years has resulted in UFH growing to the limits of its infrastructure capacity. This environment requires careful planning of resources, particularly with respect to the use of venues, and timetabling becomes a critical success factor. Management appear to understand the constraints of the University well, both with respect to physical spaces, and financially, and takes care to monitor and maintain sustainability.

Promoting technology-enabled learning is included in the Strategic Plan 2009-2016 and significant funding for technology and network enhancement await approval of the DHET HDI grant initiative.

### **THE APPROACH TAKEN TO IMPROVEMENT**

Several plans, such a campus, network, library and information systems master plans are in place. A disability infrastructure improvement plan has been developed and is being rolled out to increase accessibility of University facilities to all. It is, however, understood that the director of facilities has just recently been appointed and will take some time to settle into what is a complex environment.

A comprehensive spatial development plan has been developed that indicates how the Alice and Buffalo City campuses can be integrated with municipal plans for the benefit of all concerned. This will help revitalise and develop the two municipalities, but will require them to ensure provision of adequate bulk services.

### **IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN AND PROGRESS MADE**

The UFH has fundamental challenges related to space. Both the Alice and East London campuses were designed to cater for less than half of the current student numbers. Alice has the additional challenge of having old buildings, some that are almost 100 years old. There is a significant noted backlog in maintenance at both campuses created by years (two decades, according to the baseline report) of neglect. In 2014, for example, the backlog was R478 million; in 2016 only R21 was budgeted for maintenance. UFH has investigated this and has firm plans to address this backlog once funding is secured. Funding, however, was still problematic at the time of the visit due, in part, to #FeesMustFall, as well as the general lack of outside resources.

Providing adequate student housing is a challenge. The town of Alice has very little private accommodation, making it essential for the University to provide housing for most of its students. The target is 90%. At present, residences are overcrowded due to the unsanctioned practice of “squatting”. The University approved plans to build a new 2046 bed facility, but there was litigation related to tenders, which was only resolved in November 2015. At the time of the visit, 610 beds had been completed. In East London, currently the University leases private accommodation for 42% of its students; in some cases landlords do not look after the facilities properly.

Security in a broad sense at both campuses is an issue, with no access control system other than in the third party residences. Video surveillance is also minimal. Security has been identified as one of the primary issues for students, and the university is investigating possible strategies to address this.

Library provision is not adequate for student numbers. The use of electronic resources is beginning. The Library is part of the South East Academic Library System (SEALS), a

consortium of Eastern Cape university libraries that allows for sharing of resources. A major project is underway that will improve the situation in Buffalo City – a shared library is being built by UFH, UNISA and WSU. The contract was awarded in July 2015 and completion is scheduled for March 2018. This is a very nice example of inter-institutional collaboration.

Wi-Fi access has been broadened and the internet connection speed has been upgraded to a 1 GB fibre line. Plans are in place to further increase this to 10 GB. There is Wi-Fi in the residences and the Library, but not everywhere on campus. University-wide roll-out is affected not only by finances but also by cumbersome procurement processes. UFH has plans to provide wireless “everywhere” but this depends on the approval of the DHET HDI grant.

It was reported that the East London venues are optimally utilised. Recently, teaching venues at the Alice campus are being centrally allocated, although it seems that some of the smaller venues are not yet part of the central allocation.

There has been a significant increase in the use of Blackboard, approximately 75% of modules, although apparently it is largely used for uploading of content. Turnitin plagiarism detection software has been integrated into Blackboard. It was not clear to the panel how staff development in the use of e-learning is conducted, other than mention being made of workshops.

The University provides computer laboratories, but these are deemed to be inadequate. NSFAS students are allowed to purchase electronic devices costing up to R4000. Beyond this, student access to electronic devices and to the internet off campus was not discussed, although these are essential for the effective use of blended learning.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

It was reported that campus capacities were constrained, and not fully optimised, as the previous optimisation engine was not functioning, and there was a need to purchase a new one. It was also noted that the exam scheduling system was separate to the venue allocation system, which ideally would be in the same system. The institution is encouraged to prioritise the management of venues in a formal way by conducting a space audit and then ensuring that all teaching spaces are available for centralised timetabling and venue allocation.

The current larger lecture rooms are raked rooms fitted with permanent seating. As it builds new buildings (and refurbishes old ones), the University should endeavour to provide both flexible physical learning environments (classrooms that can be reconfigured with access to different teaching modalities) and flexible virtual learning environment (access to materials independent of space and time). Where procurement processes are interfering with timeous enhancement of the learning environment, these should be investigated and possibly modified.

It appears that currently there are no designated student learning spaces. The University is encouraged to consider how learning spaces for both individual and collaborative student

learning can be created. Such spaces can be combined with access to food and drinks. Some existing spaces could double up as learning spaces, such as residence dining halls, wide passages and foyers and even outdoor spaces, provided seating and Wi-Fi are provided.

The use of Blackboard is growing, and it is suggested that the University consider using student assistants, who may be technologically competent, to assist staff in using Blackboard, such as by helping them upload resources. This can assist in developing the use of the LMS, rather than just provision of content, and possibly help lecturers who may be less technologically savvy than some of their students.

#### **5. FOCUS AREA 4: ENHANCING COURSE AND PROGRAMME ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT**

*(Including admissions, selection, placement, readmission refusal, pass rates in gateway courses<sup>3</sup>, throughput rates, management information systems)*

##### **THE INSTITUTION'S STRENGTHS**

The importance of enrolment planning appears to have been comprehensively addressed in a cohesive manner throughout the institution. Centrally planned annual targets are set at faculty, campus and study level and circulated to faculties for input. Faculties decide on how to allocate student numbers per programme. During the registration period, daily enrolment reports are produced and widely circulated, including enrolment statistics relative to targets, to enable careful monitoring.

Course load reports are generated regularly and circulated to faculties, which then investigate cases where the course load is too high. This often occurs when students change courses and fail to cancel the old courses. If left uncorrected, it has financial implications for students as students are charged per course.

Retention rates are high, mostly over 90% in the first year of study.

On-line registration has been implemented.

##### **APPROACH TAKEN TO IMPROVEMENT**

The identified challenges appear to be approached constructively, with an understanding of the importance of addressing the needs of enrolling students in the current academic environment. The university appears to be acutely aware of the need to communicate and involve students in the decision making process.

As far as possible, online processes are being used to increase accessibility and efficiency.

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<sup>3</sup> “Gateway courses” are those courses that have a large impact on students’ ability to progress. Typically they are prerequisites for other courses, and often they have large enrolments. At many universities, examples of gateway courses are first year Mathematics and Economics. In some cases, if students fail a gateway course they automatically have to extend their studies by one or two semesters.

## **IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN AND PROGRESS MADE**

Although the University is demonstrating success in enrolment planning at the macro level, there are challenges at the level of individual courses. In particular, some venues get overcrowded because the way in which the Management Information System (MIS) is being used does not allow for this level of oversight. In its final report (2015), UFH suggested that either course size could be capped or a dashboard system needs to be acquired that would allow for easy monitoring of course sizes relative to venue capacities.

In 2015 all students were registered online. Students were happy to discover that they could register online with their smartphones via the East London server even when the Alice server was down because of load-shedding.

It was reported that in the past students were able to amend their registrations to take on additional courses, resulting in curriculum overloads for those students. The system has been changed to not allow such instances, warn administrative staff of such occurrences, and only allow administrative staff to override to allow such requests. Faculty Managers perform a manual check of online registrations.

Applications for the following year close on 31 October each year. Students who qualify on the basis of their Grade 11 marks are provisionally accepted, while a certain number of places are set aside for older and for international students. More provisional offers are made than places available, based on historical data on realisation rates. From January 2016, students with high enough NSC marks are being sent SMSes to notify them of whether or not they have been accepted. Students are not required to notify the University whether or not they are accepting the offer, so the University only knows which students will enrol when they register. There is an extended registration period (from 18 January to 4 February in 2016), with lectures beginning 10 days later. There are some walk-in students who have good results.

From 2017 applications will also be done online, using a system developed at the University of Johannesburg and redesigned by UFH to be included as a standard component of the ITS system.

Placement into mainstream or foundation programmes is based on NSC points. Many students write the NBT tests, but the results are not being used for placement.

Some formative qualifications in the Sciences and Humanities have been structured to reduce the number of options and help students complete their qualifications more quickly. However, the University website is not being kept up to date, so there is incorrect information on it, including relating to curricula.

Students who are at risk of exclusion are sent warning letters. They may be counselled individually to take a reduced course load, although it seems there is no standard institutional practice in this regard.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENT**

In its final report (2015) the University identifies the need to improve its ability to manage and use information as a weakness. The panel concurs. The University's ability to use institutional data for decision-making is limited, at least in part, by its software. Many South African universities make use of HEDA, and the University is encouraged to purchase it. HEDA now provides site-based training and support for university staff. There was feedback during the visit that the website was not up to date, and therefore in some cases incorrect. The institution should ensure that there is a webmaster who liaises with faculties and service departments and updates information regularly.

The University should consider implementing a one-stop shop during registration to address curriculum advising, registration, financial aid and accommodation needs, as is done at many other institutions. CUT, for example, has a large on campus venue with all of the support departments present during an extended registration period.

## **6. SUMMARY**

Institutional management has a clear focus on achieving academic student success, and has instituted a number of initiatives in support of the academic project. The institution appears to be deliberate in its actions to align its processes to achieve its strategic aims, and performs well within its financial limitations, recognising its constraints, with a clear focus on sustainability of the institution. This manifests in comprehensive actions driven by the management team. There was a strong sense of collaboration among senior management and coherence in institution-level initiatives, and improvements are clearly being made in certain areas.

Overall, there appears to be a holistic focus on the student experience. A concurrent focus on enhancing student support and development is evidenced through both physical and technology support structures, with a focus on the student as a whole.

The approach that UFH has taken towards the QEP, as well as more broadly, relating to the institution's approach to teaching and learning, appears to be self-reflective, open and critically considered. The institution should be commended for its concerted and mindful participation in the QEP, and for all the improvements it has introduced over the past few years.

In the important area of developing academics as teachers, it was evident that there is clear support from the highest levels of the institution. Enhancing academics as teachers has been strongly driven by the PGDipHET, which appears to be functioning well and is a strength of UFH. Recognition of excellent teaching remains a challenge, although progress has been made through the introduction of additional faculty-based teaching awards. However, there was not a coherent indicator or proxy for how to evaluate and measure good teaching, or for how teaching is included in performance appraisals and criteria for promotions. The

University is encouraged to benchmark its promotion criteria against other universities that have taken a lead in this area, such as Rhodes and the University of KwaZulu Natal. In addition, the University is encouraged to reflect on how the workload model might be modified so as to be implementable within its current context.

In the area of student support and development, a number of noteworthy initiatives are in place, although the panel did not get a sense of the scale, for example how many courses have SI leaders. In addition to tutors and SI leaders, the University may wish to consider implementing a mentoring scheme for all first year students. One of the oldest and most successful mentoring programmes is run by the University of Limpopo. The panel noted that the University has been trying to get a student monitoring and referral system going for several years, an important initiative for a university that has such a high proportion of vulnerable students. The University could consider contacting NMU, which is developing such a system as part of its Siyaphumelela grant.

In terms of the learning environment, UFH faces major infrastructure challenges, in common with other Historically Disadvantaged Institutions, in the need for both maintenance and new buildings. There are several noteworthy initiatives, such as the new student residences that are being built, the proposed new site in East London, and the library under construction that will be shared with UNISA and WSU. Roll out of Wi-Fi is taking place, but seems to be delayed by procurement processes, which the University should investigate. The panel suggests that the University consider how it might provide more learning spaces for individual and collaborative study, by making use of “nooks and crannies” and outdoor spaces.

In the area of course and programme enrolment management, the University seems to have effective and efficient systems and processes in place. It may wish, however, to institute a one-stop shop during application and registration processes. In addition, the panel encourages the University to purchase the HEDA software and ensure its institutional research staff receive training in order to be able to use institutional data for decision making.

A comment which applies across the four focus areas relates to the sharing of best practices, and the implementation of initiatives across all faculties. It is understood that the faculties operate autonomously, however, it would be beneficial to formalise the sharing of good practices among faculties to extract greater value of initiatives developed.

Funding remains an important area of concern for the University. The DHET funding formula provides a perverse incentive to increase student numbers in order to bring in more input subsidy, but this would exacerbate the already serious problems of too few academics with too high a workload and too little physical infrastructure. The panel noted that the Management is considering alternative funding sources. One wonders if there might not be ways of capitalising on the University’s illustrious history and famous graduates to source donor funding; a funding drive among alumni could also bear fruit.

Management should also consider the ways in which it communicates with students. While it is clear that there are strong communication mechanisms in place, there is perhaps a need for consolidation and refinement of these to provide a more co-ordinated communication model. The University could consider implementing a single reference point, or a one-stop service, in the form of a call centre and a drop-in centre, which provides comprehensive solutions to students without them having to be informed by multiple sources, as has been implemented in some other universities. This would have a positive impact on service delivery, which is becoming relatively complex. On the other hand, the University is commended on the way in which it endeavours to involve students, to solicit their input and to address their needs.

Finally, the panel thanks the University of Fort Hare for the open and positive way in which it participated in the interviews and is reflecting on its own journey. We wish the University well as it continues its journey.



# COUNCIL FOR HIGHER EDUCATION VISIT TO THE UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE



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## APPENDIX: Programme

### PROGRAMME 20 OCTOBER 2016 MAIN BOARDROOM EAST LONDON

Time	Group	Names
08:30 – 08:45	ARRIVAL TEA/COFFEE FOR Extended Management Team and CHE DELEGATES	
08:45 – 09:45	Extended Management Committee	
	Vice Chancellor	Dr. Mvuyo Tom
	Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs	Prof. Larry Obi
	Deputy Vice Chancellor, Institutional Support	Prof. Gilingwe Mayende
	Registrar	Prof. Michael Somniso
	Chief Financial Officer	Mr. Niesh Ravjee
	Director Human Resources	Mr. Sagie Ramsammy
	Director Properties and Services	Mr. Mzwandile Sokupa
	Acting Director Institutional Advancement	Mr. Lizo Phiti
	Chief Information Officer	Dr Chris Johl
	Director, Planning and Quality Assurance	Prof Rod Bally
	Dean of Education	Prof George Moyo
	Dean of Management and Commerce	Dr Ntombovuyo Wayi
	Acting Dean of Law	Dr Nombulelo Lubisi
	Dean of Science and Agriculture	Prof Nomakhaya Monde
	Dean of Social Sciences and Humanities	Prof Baba Tshotsho
	Health Sciences	Prof Eunice Seekoe
	Dean of Students	Mr Brian Gallant
	Acting Dean of Research	Prof Wilson Akpan
	Director , Teaching and Learning	Dr Noluthando Toni
	Director, Community Engagement	Ms Alida van Dyk

09:55 – 11:05	Focus Area 1: Enhancing Academics as Teachers	Names
	Director Teaching and Learning	Dr. Noluthando Toni
	Manager Teaching and Learning	Dr. Vuyisile Nkonki
	Coordinator PGHET	Dr. Patricia Muhuro
	Deputy Deans	Prof. Fhulufhuwani Nekhwevha Prof Susan Smith Prof Antony Okoh



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	Prof. Adele Moodly Prof. Lindelwa Majova-Songca Prof. Munacinga Simatele Ms. Bronwyn Bachelor
Deans/ Coordinator	Prof. George Moyo Dr. Nombulelo Lubisi Dr. Ntombovuyo Wayi Prof. Nomakhaya Monde Prof. Baba Tshotsho Prof Eunice Seekoe
SRC Academic Affairs Officer Alice	Sicelo Mbulawa
SRC President	Mr. Luxolo Nqala
SRC Academic Affairs Officer East London	Mr Luxolo Nqala
University Librarian	Mr. Andile Magocoba
Director, Postgraduate Studies	Dr Mamamelela Matlhako
Director, Community Engagement	Ms Alida Van Dyk
Director Planning and Quality Assurance	Prof Rodrick Bally



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11:15 – 12:25	Focus Area 2: Enhancing Student Support and Development	Names
	Dean of Students	Mr. Brian Gallant
	Facilitation Coordinator, Teaching and Learning	Ms. Joni Van Heerden
	Language and Writing consultant, Teaching and Learning	Ms. Martha Chigovanyike
	Student Developer	Mr. Sibusiso Ncengwa
	Counselling Unit	Mr. Prince Dabula
	Chief Information Officer	Dr. Chris Johl
	Acting Chief University Library	Mr. Andile Magacoba
	Disability Unit	Mr. Sam Van Musschenbroek
	Manager , Sports	Mr Loyiso Langa
	Director Planning and Quality Assurance	Prof. Rod Bally
	Deputy Deans / Acting Deputy Deans	Prof. Fhulufhuwani Nekhwevha Prof Susan Smith Prof Antony Okoh Prof. Adele Moodly Prof. Lindelwa Majova-Songca Prof. Munacinga Simatele Ms. Bronwyn Bachelor
	Chief Information Officer	Dr Chris Johl
	Director Life Knowledge and Action (LKA)	Dr. Mbiji Mahlangu and Mr. Zwelakhe Madalane
	Director, Postgraduate Studies	Dr Mamamelela Matlhako
	Student Finance	Mr. Alberto Lai Wing
	Director, Postgraduate Studies	Dr Mamamelela Matlhako
	Director International Affairs	Dr. Mbiji Mahlangu
	Director, Community Engagement	Ms Alida Van Dyk
	SRC President	Mr. Luxolo Nqala
	SRC Academic Affairs Officer Alice	Sicelo Mbulawa
	SRC Academic Affairs Officer East London	Luxolo Nqala
	SRC Campus Premier Alice	Sonwabiso Mamkeli



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SRC Campus Premier Alice	Thandikhaya Matokazi
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## Lunch Break 30 Minutes

13:05 – 14:15	Focus Area 3: Enhancing the Learning Environment	Names
	Psychological services	Dr. Nomfundo Mlisa Mr. Prince Dabula
	Disability Unit	Mr. Sam Van Musschenbroek
	Security Services	Mr. Travolta Poni
	Teaching and Learning Centre: Technology Enhanced Learning	Ms. Siyanda Ntlabathi Mr. L. Mkonqo
	Director Properties and Services	Mr. Mzwandile Sokupa Mr. Langa Mbude
	Director International Affairs	Dr Mbiji Mahlangu
	Chief Information Officer	Dr. Chris Johl
	Sports Manager	Mr Loyiso Langa
	Student Developer	Mr Sibusiso Ncengwa
	Acting Chief University Library	Mr. Andile Magacoba
	Supply Chain Management	Mr. Luyanda Mema
	Institutional Forum	Mr. Vuyani Booi
	Student Residences	Ms. Thobeka Heshula
	SRC President	Mr. Luxolo Nqala
	SRC Academic Affairs Officer Alice	Sicelo Mbulawa
	SRC Academic Affairs Officer East London	Luxolo Nqala
	SRC Campus Premier East London	Sonwabiso Mamkeli
	SRC Campus Premier Alice	Thandikhaya Matokazi
	SRC Residence Officer East London	Yonela Gxothiwe
	SRC Residence Officer Alice	Aphiwe Xhala



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14:25 – 15:35	Focus Area 4: Enhancing Course and Programme Enrolment	Names
	Counselling Unit	Mr. Prince Dabula
	Deans/ Coordinator of Programmes	Prof. George Moyo Dr. Nombulelo Lubisi Dr. Ntombovuyo Wayi Prof. Nomakhaya Monde Prof. Baba Tshotsho Prof Eunice Seekoe
	Faculty Managers	Ms. Noncedo Magacoba Ms. Zandiswa Mnguni Ms. Kunjuzwa Mkiva Dr. Mpumelelo Ndlovu Ms. Maria Smith
	Acting Deputy Registrar	Dr. Rose Masha
	Manager Student Administration	Ms. Musa Gcilitshana
	Chief Information Officer	Dr. Chris Johl Mr. Cedric Stevens
	Foundation Programme Coordinators:	Ms. Rashmi Scott (SSH) Ms. Palesa Makwetha (M&C) Ms. Ntombi Mnconywa (M&C) Prof. Gillian Bartlett (M&C) M. Pumezo Kwinana ( Science and Agric) Ms Brownyn Batchelor(Law)
	Manager Marketing : Institutional Advancement	Mr. Khotso Moabi
	Director Planning and Quality Assurance	Prof. Rod Bally
	Manager Exams	Ms. Noxolo Mhambi
	SRC Academic Affairs Officer Alice	Sicelo Mbulawa
	SRC Academic Affairs Officer East London	Luxolo Nqala
Time	Group	Names
15:45 – 16:15	Senior Management	
	Vice Chancellor	Dr. Mvuyo Tom
	Deputy Vice Chancellor, Academic Affairs	Prof. Larry Obi
	Deputy Vice Chancellor, Institutional Support	Prof. Gilingwe Mayende
	Registrar	Prof. Michael Somniso
	Chief Financial Officer	Mr. Niesh Ravjee
	Director Human Resources	Mr. Sagie Ramsammy
	Director Properties and Services	Mr. Mzwandile Sokupa
	Acting Director Institutional Advancement	Mr. Lizo Phiti