

# Institutional feedback report

<b>Name of Institution</b>	University of the Free State
<b>Date of institutional visit</b>	9 November 2016
<b>Names of peer reviewers</b>	Prof Kriben Pillay Prof Johan Schoeman
<b>Name of CHE person involved in the visit</b>	Prof Diane Grayson
<b>Date draft report submitted to institution</b>	25 January 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 the Free State (UFS) has been in existence since 1904, when it opened as a university college, and became an independent university in 1950. In its 110 years it has changed its identity, the composition of its student body and its relationship to society in many ways. The University has three campuses: Bloemfontein, QwaQwa and South Campus. The latter two, each with its own campus principal, were incorporated into the University in 2003 as part of the government-led restructuring of higher education. Its 32 694 students (2013 audited figures) are distributed across seven faculties, in decreasing size of enrolments: Education, Humanities, Natural and Agricultural Sciences, Economic and Management Sciences, Law, Health Sciences, and Theology.

Since the establishment of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in 2012, its role and importance in the institution have grown considerably. Moreover, the employment of faculty teaching and learning managers, the approval of an institutional Quality Enhancement framework, external departmental reviews, faculty-based learning designers and developers, and the creation of a teaching and learning sub-committee of Senate to be implemented in 2017, show commitment to narrowing the gaps in the institution's strategy for enhancing quality. The fact that the CTL presented a strategy to Senate in 2014 around the areas listed below is to be commended, not only for its vision, but also for the growing evidence of its realisation, as will be highlighted in later sections of the report:

- Raising awareness of quality teaching and learning;
- Developing excellent teachers;
- Engaging students for success;
- Building an organisation for change and teaching and learning leadership;
- Aligning institutional policies to foster quality teaching and learning;
- Highlighting innovation as a driver for change; and
- Evidence-based change through assessment.

The panel observed widespread high-level engagement with the focus areas. For example, there is an institution-wide curriculum review process as well recognition of the need for good data analysis and increasing emphasis on it. In addition, most new projects are accompanied by research to collect relevant data about their effect.

While improvements are clearly being made in certain areas, a sense of ownership of, and commitment to, institution-level improvements by senior management (beyond the rectorate) did not come through in the documentation or in the discussions with stakeholders. The absence of deans from any of the sessions during the institutional visit restricted the panel's appreciation of the full extent of commitment from the senior management. Like

many traditional South African universities, UFS has a strong faculty structure, which is also potentially its weakness, in that faculties can be managed autonomously with no institution-wide coherence when it comes to matters affecting the quality of teaching, learning, and student success. The reference to resistance to change and working in silos was a feature of many of the conversations that the panel had with the various groups during the visit. It appears as if there are many individual improvements throughout the institution, but a lack of uniformly implemented policies in this regard.

One of the limitations identified during the visit was the fact that no students were present, so the panel could not get their perspectives. This was especially a problem in Focus Area 2.

## **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**

The institution has a Vice-Rector: Academic, whose portfolio includes overseeing teaching and learning, in addition to a well-functioning Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) and promotion criteria that include teaching quality, although the mechanisms for promotion primarily on the basis of teaching and teaching-related scholarship, as occurs in some other universities, is still to be formalised. The *Academic Promotions Policy* in place requires staff to perform across the scholarships of teaching and learning, discovery and engagement with different demands in each area, depending on their level of appointment. The development of academics in the scholarship of teaching and learning is mostly concentrated in the CTL, which presents a series of modules that help academics develop a variety of skills.

The establishment of the CTL in 2012 was an important step forward in the University's ability to help staff to reflect on, change and improve their teaching. The CTL approach is based on the importance of research to provide evidence, not only of the effectiveness of suggested practices, but also of the impact of current practices. The findings of this research are informing concrete interventions to improve teaching and learning at the University. The panel learned that the institution was indeed linking a research project to every new endeavour.

In 2012, the CTL undertook a comprehensive mapping exercise to understand the teaching and learning needs of academic staff, and strengthened its Academic Staff Development (ASD) division. In 2013, ASD offered orientation sessions for newly appointed academic staff and developed a series of academic staff development courses. They also presented workshops on teaching and learning tools and skills, organised lunchtime sessions with innovative presenters and used short, internet-based videos sent via email to raise awareness of new trends in teaching and learning. ASD also promoted the scholarship of teaching and learning by providing practical support for academics who intend making presentations at conferences or who are in the running for national and international teaching and learning

awards, and by recognising innovative lecturers in-house through the Vice-Chancellor's Teaching and Learning Excellence Award and the Innovation Awards for excellence in teaching and learning.

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

There appears to be an awareness of the importance of changing institutional culture and pedagogies to welcome new and different students, and the need to adapt teaching and learning practices to the demands of larger classes and of a new generation of students. Yet, in the area of teaching and learning and student success, and despite considerable improvement since 2009 in terms of success rates, the UFS is performing below the national average (80%) and below other comparable institutions.

The institution is therefore conducting needs-analyses and then designing interventions, doing surveys and setting up committees or task teams with focused briefs. In addition, activities in this focus area are geared towards the identification and development of faculty-specific approaches to address the needs of academic staff. New development and training interventions, such as course development and design, learning facilitation, difficult dialogues, and other interventions, are also presented. Delivery of these interventions takes place through a range of platforms, from individual consultations and workshops, to just-in-time support on the Teaching and Learning Portal. ASD keeps records of participation in these workshops and produces an annual report of its activity that includes participants' feedback.

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

The panel was informed that the awareness of CTL by various departments has been growing. The Director indicated that HODs approach CTL more readily than in the past, that there is more synergy between faculties and CTL and that multiple stakeholders are working together. There is more focus on collecting evidence and using it to measure impact, which helps generate buy-in from academics.

We would like to commend the good faculty-based initiatives we were told about, such as the Faculty of Education's response to the University's Quality Enhancement Framework, the widespread appointment of teaching assistants and the Health Science's faculty-based induction course and masters and PhD programmes in Health Sciences Education.

The 'Decoding the Disciplines' project endeavoured to establish a critical and reflective learning community among lecturers in the Faculty of Law through regular meetings, workshops, open sharing and ongoing reflection. The aim was to identify general and subject specific problems in their teaching and search for possible solutions to problems identified.

It is clear that the institution has put in place a number of initiatives to support the development of a new generation of academics to, among other things, develop competences in specific aspects of teaching and learning. Various policies have been developed to enhance

academics as teachers. The *Professional Development Policy for Newly Appointed Academic Staff* established a new term and structure for academic staff members' permanent appointments. The Policy ensures that newly appointed academic staff members are afforded the opportunity to become established in their positions as academics, through fulfilling a teaching role during a period which is characterized by induction, orientation and guidance, while being consistently supported and encouraged to maintain their professional development as both educators and researchers.

Newly appointed academics are required to participate in induction programmes. These activities are often one-off or of short duration. Additionally, professional development activities need to be accommodated within the teaching and research workloads of academics. Moreover, seminars, workshops, and training of various kinds do not lead to formal qualifications, making it less attractive for academics to use teaching/research time to attend. While much good work is being done by highly committed staff, it appears as if there may be a lack of an overall, coherent institutional approach to many aspects in this focus area.

The institution is currently constructing a continuous professional development (CPD) system that will require permanent academic staff at all levels to participate. In this regard, the induction programme will be aligned with a proposed new continuous professional development policy that will require new academic staff to receive more in-depth teaching and learning training throughout the year. The new orientation only involved 16 new staff in 2013, which quadrupled to 59 in 2014. In addition to a new orientation programme, the CTL developed three new courses *Design your course*, *Teaching your course* and *Assess your course*, which had 68, 11 and 33 attendees, respectively, from 2013 to 2014. It is currently not compulsory for academics to attend, while the time commitments for these courses should not be underestimated.

The Performance Management System (PMS) will support the monitoring of these requirements from a developmental perspective. Evidence from the PMS, which is collected annually, will be included as part of promotion applications under the Promotions Policy of the University. The implementation of the PMS for all members of staff commenced in 2014 and continued during 2015. The outcomes of the PM process affect the award of short- and long-term incentives. The PMS includes teaching as one of the areas of performance of academics. The short-term incentive, a yearly cash bonus, is linked to achieving strategic objectives. The proportion paid to employees depends on their performance against the operational and strategic objectives in their individual performance plans. The long-term incentives, merit notches and exceptional merit, encourage loyalty and thereby improve staff retention.

In addition, a new workload model was approved and implementation was being planned by the Performance Management Technical Committee. It will form part of the new performance plan for academics. A review of the PMS, however, revealed that more buy-in is needed by academics.



Subsequently, a Viability Model for academic departments as well as a Workload Model to manage the individual work allocation of academics was piloted in one faculty during 2015. The collaborative work across different departments produced a departmental viability model and a workload model for departments that uses a clearer and less compliance-driven approach. The Workload Model consists of six major roles of an academic including: Scholarly Teaching and Learning, Postgraduate Activities, Scholarly Research Activities, Scholarly Service to the Community, Scholarly Service to the University and Faculty Management Activities. An evidence-based score is calculated to indicate the extent and distribution of workload.

The CTL has recently established the Excellence in Teaching and Learning Awards to recognise lecturers' innovative teaching and learning practices and dedication to student success. The awards also provide an opportunity for academics to showcase and share success stories, lessons learned and tried-and-tested practices.

The CTL module makeover programme, which offers assistance to academics with the redesign of modules, and the Module Assistance Programme (MAP), which has been designed to help develop appropriate interventions in identified modules, are pertinent examples of how staff capacity development and engagement data can support the improvement of teaching and learning. Part of the funds secured from the Kresge Siyaphumelela Project is dedicated to the piloting of MAP in collaboration with the relevant academic departments. The pilot began with a review of 24 high-risk modules (modules with historically high failure rates) at the UFS. As part of the process, an individualised profile was created for each of the 24 modules and communicated back to the relevant lecturers and department heads. The profiles included student demographic data, student engagement data, performance data (high school and university) and tutorial attendance data, in an effort to provide the lecturers with a holistic view of their modules and students over a three-year period. A total of seven modules from Natural and Agricultural Sciences, seven modules from Economic and Management Sciences, nine from the Humanities and one module from Law were reviewed.

This resulted in changes to the structure of classes, by introducing online preparation quizzes as well as other supplementary material (such as videos, articles and websites) to ensure that students came to class well-prepared. This included:

- Introducing three levels of homework questions, to scaffold student learning, but also assist students in understanding their own progress.
- Introduction of revision sessions in the format of interactive discussions and practical application of knowledge by completing previous test and/or examination papers.
- Online Blackboard activities, structured feedback on assignments/homework questions, development of basic templates for question answering, adaption of learning material and general in-class tips on time management.

- Some lecturers adopted a case study approach making the module information practical. This also improved the motivation of students as they could observe the real-world application of theory.

Lastly, the Academic Leadership Programme (ALP) that assists Heads of Departments to cultivate the relevant leadership skills is a project tasked by the University's senior management, in collaboration with the Human Resource Department. It has a long-term aim to assist with the development of a talent pipeline within faculties or departments and to provide HODs with the relevant skills to ultimately effect positive change in this and other focus areas.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

With the appointment of the previous VC, there was a significant step-change and increase in the research criteria required for promotion, which, perhaps not surprisingly, diminished the perceived value of teaching endeavours, at least within the purview of the applicants. Consequently, the current reward and recognition approach at the institution creates a persistent perception that higher status and value are attributed to achievements in research than in teaching excellence. Moreover, the rapid increase in student enrolments at the institution has resulted in a steady increase in the ratio of students to academic staff members and an associated increase in teaching load. As a result, academics feel compelled to continuously make tough trade-offs when considering scholarly outputs as a result of the tension between research and teaching workload.

To ameliorate the above, it would be valuable for quality teaching to be foregrounded in the university's mission statement. The institution would also do well to highlight the value of discipline-based educational research that not only leads to improved teaching and learning but can also be used to bolster the research portfolio of staff for promotion purposes across all faculties, as is done, for example, at UWC. Other suggestions for improvement are: require new academics to participate in a formal induction programme that can earn credits towards a Post-Graduate Diploma in Higher Education; develop promotions criteria that allow promotion up to full professor level primarily on the basis of teaching and teaching-related research, as is done, for example at UKZN; require all faculties to use teaching portfolios for promotion and performance appraisal and do not leave it up to individual deans; offer professional development for mid-career and senior academics, not only new academics, and provide incentives to participate (e.g. performance appraisal, Continuous Professional Development points, teaching-related grants and sabbaticals, experienced teacher awards). In addition, given the increasing student to staff ratios at the UFS, appointment of more logistical and administrative support staff should be considered to lighten the time-related pressures on academic staff.

The faculty-based teaching and learning managers are clearly playing a very important role in enhancing teaching and student support, but their positions are ill-defined and somewhat precarious. It is suggested, therefore, that there should be a job description and a career path

for this position, especially since some are appointed on non-academic conditions of service. A problem at most South African universities is the binary division of staff into academic and non-academic or support. It is recommended that a third category of staff – professional – be considered, and that appropriate conditions of service and career paths be developed for a range of professional staff, including academic development staff.

The panel recognises that the University conducted a pilot project on student evaluations, which did not yield satisfactory results. Nonetheless, some form of regular student evaluations of courses and lecturers is needed, which should be considered during performance appraisal of lecturers and used as another form of data when considering how to continuously improve the quality and effectiveness of academic offerings and the student experience thereof. Feedback to students, even if it is to the following year's students, is also important so that they see that their input is taken seriously.

Support is needed for academics in overcoming reluctance to engage with data for fear of being blamed for students' performance. Appropriate mechanisms are also needed for academics and HODs to make better use of data that can support their work, given their central role in bringing about change in teaching and learning.

### **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**

The establishment of the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) in 2012, now with a staff complement of over 120 personnel, is proving to be a major driver of teaching and learning at UFS. Reporting directly to Vice-Rector: Academic, the CTL runs a number of student success initiatives that feed either directly or indirectly into the various faculties. A feature of the CTL's work is the emphasis on data analytics in taking an evidence-based approach to help make informed decisions about the quality of interventions and in shifting the culture of student support at the university. For instance, it was reported that CTL has 8 years of longitudinal data to determine the impact of tutorials on module performance.

As indicated under Focus Area 1, the institution has appointed a teaching and learning manager in each faculty, which appears to have had a major influence on the quality of teaching within the different faculties. These teaching and learning managers work in close liaison with the CTL. The panel also noted the widespread use of a tutor system, which not only enhances the learning of undergraduate students, but also provides much-needed income to senior students.

The 2014 report indicates that more than 325 tutors were in the New Academic Tutorial Programme (NATP) system, and NATP was offered in 80 modules across the institution, in

six faculties on the Bloemfontein Campus, and three on the QwaQwa campus. Statistics show that for students who regularly attend tutorials, a 5-15% improvement has been observed in their performance (relative to those who do not attend).

There is also the Young Adult Learning Programme (YALP), which offers a set curriculum one-year opportunity to deserving matriculants with Admission Point scores lower than 20 to gain access to the University Preparatory Programme.

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

It is evident that there is a concerted effort to break down working in silos and to leverage partnerships in different domains of teaching and learning. This will be further formalised by the establishment of a Senate sub-committee for teaching and learning. At the heart of the institution's efforts is the Centre for Teaching and Learning, with its strong focus on data analytics to enhance student success, but also initiating and rolling out surveys (e.g. SASSE), running academic staff development programmes, doing research, and providing a resource to the teaching and learning managers in the faculties. It is also evident from the conversations during the institutional visit that UFS is a university in transition, and that there is a growing awareness that the compartmentalised structures of the past, e.g. student support services, needs greater integration with the growing range of services being offered to students, the majority of whom are first generation students and second-language speakers. It was verbally reported that the strong centrality of the CTL, and the collaborative network that is being forged, is nurturing a rapidly growing awareness at all levels of the institution of what resources are available across the various sectors to enhance student success. Communication now goes beyond email notices and is through actual relationships, e.g. between academic advisors and academics, and residence managers. There is a feedback loop between the CTL and the teaching and learning managers in the faculties that is pivotal to this consolidation. There is also a strong emphasis on an evidence-based approach to determining the efficacy of student success initiatives and to effectively communicating the results thereof. It was also stated that the data shows that there is an overwhelming demand for the support offered to students. In some cases this demand is met, but in others cases it is difficult to keep up with it, but this challenge is being monitored more closely than in the past.

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

In the final QEP report it was noted that strategies and programmes implemented aim to address two critical barriers that jeopardise student success: i) the articulation gap between school and higher education at first-year level; and ii) challenging transitions between first and second year and between second and third year. These were highlighted as areas of concern in the 2014 report. Overall, the performance indicators for undergraduate studies (module success, qualifications achieved with distinction, number of graduates, throughput and attrition, and progression towards higher degree learning) showed improvements in 2015. Examples of contributing interventions are given below. These examples build on the

two main structures for student support and development listed in the 2014 report, namely the Student Affairs portfolio and the CTL.

Key interventions of the CTL, which have been acknowledged, in some cases even internationally, include the implementation of the DHET's Teaching Development Grant (TDG), the UFS's common first-year module, UFS101, UFS access programmes, and the use of the DHET Foundation Grant in several programmes.

The University Preparation Programme (UPP) supports the learning of students with potential but whose Admission Point (AP) scores are not sufficient to enter mainstream programmes. However, according to the final QEP report, the CTL is in the final stages of seeking approval and accreditation for a SAQA-registered Higher Certificate in Foundation Development and Access in Humanities and EMS to replace the current UPP, which will allow 'access students' the chance to obtain a SAQA-registered qualification that will grant them access to further Higher Education studies at a variety of institutions across the country, and will enable them to apply for NSFAS bursaries, which is not an option for UPP students. UFS is also seeking approval for Higher Certificates in Natural Sciences and Education. The certificate programmes will be piloted in TVET colleges with which the University is collaborating.

The New Academic Tutorial Programme (NATP) was established in July 2007 with 55 tutors in two faculties. As per both reports, the New Academic Tutorial Programme (NATP) provides: a contextualised version of Supplemental Instruction in high risk modules; language development, for both Afrikaans and English; customised models for residences and for the Unit for Students with Disabilities; and, as mentioned in the final QEP report, tracked all the students' academic progress to create an early warning system for those at risk. Cohorts of UPP alumni who join extended degree programmes are automatically included in the Programme for Academic Student Success (PASS). From 2013, the cohort grew from 642 to 1 800 students in 2015. The programme has been rebranded as A-step, and tutors are trained and managed by Teaching and Learning Coordinators in faculties.

The Unit for Academic Literacy (UAL) provides specialised literacy courses in collaboration with faculties across the university, presented by trained and experienced facilitators of the UAL pedagogical approaches. As stated in the final QEP report, these courses range from full-year subjects to custom interventions, and could be implemented by other institutions, adapted to their needs. The 2014 report indicates that 4414 English-medium students and 828 Afrikaans-medium students were enrolled in language development modules, and 5256 undergraduate students were provided access to generic literacy courses.

The final QEP report describes the Academic Facilitation Sessions (AFS), a programme established by the Faculty of the Humanities, in collaboration with the UAL, for first-year students. It aims to use experiential learning, social constructivism and cooperative learning to integrate literacy skills into disciplinary content. Its success has been affirmed by qualitative and quantitative studies, indicating its possible transference to other faculties.

While the AFS is only offered in the Faculty of Humanities, courses conducted by the UAL are intended for all faculties.

The UAL works with academic departments in the initiative “The Write Site” to help students develop their skills as academic writers. As of 2015, 325 staff members and undergraduate and Honours students were assisted, and efforts are being made to establish a writing centre on the QwaQwa campus. This is a marked increase from 2014, when only 120 students and 10 academic departments were assisted.

Universal Design for Learning (UDL) aims to promote effective teaching and more accessible learning, and was introduced as a pilot project in 2014-2015. Staff members from the Curriculum Development and Innovation (CDI) focus area underwent a series of training workshops on UDL. In addition, brief UDL sessions were held with the Faculty of Law Learning Community and Teaching and Learning Managers.

The compulsory UFS101 programme, oriented towards first-year students, teaches information literacy and critical thinking that aim to disrupt existing knowledge and ways of thinking, equipping students to understand and engage with complex human problems from multiple perspectives. It emphasises broad knowledge rather than early specialisation, and may be of value to other institutions in developing critical thinking in their students. The module was piloted in 2011 with 200 students and in 2016 served 5 000 students across three campuses. As of 2014, UFS101 comprised seven units, each of which entailed two lectures, with either a learning experience, a tutorial, or both. Two units were presented in the first semester and five units in the second semester. It was reported that the overall outcomes of this module were ‘very positive’, with engaged students becoming catalysts of change in the teaching and learning environments. By 2015, the module had changed to comprise eight units, presented over two semesters, with one unit on information literacy being presented in two semesters. The remaining seven units dealt with critical thinking. The ‘upgraded’ version, implemented in 2015, has an increased focus on student academic success skills, including computer literacy, education plans for career aspirations, and enhancing critical thinking skills. In addition, the pedagogy was changed from enormous classes to small discussion groups of 40 students, each facilitated by a well-trained teaching assistant and using a flipped classroom approach in which students engage with on-line material in preparation for class. The course was offered to 5060 students in the first six months of 2016 and data from the student evaluation show that 65% of the students report that UFS101 contributes to their success in first year, with 80% reporting that the second semester module on “Big questions” helps with developing critical and complex thinking.

The Siyaphumelela project aims to make better use of data analytics to improve student success by improving the effectiveness and efficiency of initiatives. Regular and effective communication of enrolment and success rates to departments and faculties has already been noted, and Heads of Academic Departments and Deans are requested to join a workshop on the usefulness of data analytics in understanding and assessing student-centred initiatives. This may be a practical measure for other institutions in this sector.

The Academic Advising system focuses on first-generation students, and aims to break the cycle of credit overload, in which students who are falling behind register for more credits than they can cope with, and study debt. The system supported 2 000 students during 2013 registration. In 2012, 361 peer academic advisors and 46 staff were trained. The system was expanded to the QwaQwa Campus in 2014. An increase in the number of students receiving individual and group level advising occurred in 2015. Academic advising was significantly scaled up in 2015 with 365 students receiving individual level advising and 6588 students participating in group advising sessions. The development of digital tracking platforms for improving academic advising is underway.

The Programme for Academic Student Success (PASS), situated within the CTL, was developed to meet the needs of students between different years of study by providing comprehensive academic support, at high impact times of the academic year, to a specific group (UPP and extended degree) of at-risk, undergraduate students. Research is currently being pursued as to: a) whether PASS has had a causal role in academic performance; and b) how to develop an institutional programme structure. To address the area of transitioning from grade 12 to first year the Before University Survey of Student Engagement (BUSSE), which has had a positive impact through academic advising, will be made compulsory for all first year students in 2016. Data analysis concerning teaching and learning has been implemented through the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE), on both institutional and national levels, and is being funded by the Kresge Foundation.

Compared to the 2014 report, three national surveys were not mentioned in the final QEP report, namely the College Survey of Student Engagement (CSSE), the Classroom Survey of Student Engagement (CLASSE) and the Lecturer Survey of Student Engagement (LSSE), and so it is not known whether these were discontinued or experienced any success.

Students Affairs (SA) was highlighted as a main structure in integrating the student into different campus experiences, focussing on career development as well as the development of a portfolio of the student's curricular and co-curricular activities. In the final QEP report, it was elaborated on that the curricular approach of the SA structured programmes focussed on selected students and particular student groups, and targeted seven areas: student life; residence life; student governance; careers development; universal access; student counselling and health and wellness. Located within SA are Student Counselling and Development and the No Student Hungry Programme. The reports indicate that SA has made a fundamental contribution to the realisation of the UFS human project, although there is insufficient systematic evidence to unequivocally declare the success of this project between 2009 and 2014.

The No Student Hungry Programme of providing deserving students with access to meals in exchange for participation in student life and the community was mentioned as a promising programme in the 2014 report. It was noted that by 2014, both the QwaQwa and South Campuses had been reached, and the team met regularly with students.

An early-warning system is being piloted by teaching and learning managers, which will allow the monitoring of 'at risk' students. While this is still in its development phase, it was reported that it is envisaged that the next phase institutionally could be a 'robot system', similar to what operates at UKZN, where 'at risk' students are identified so they can carry a lower credit load in order to ensure a higher success rate.

The Student Success Portal is an e-learning initiative where students can source a variety of life skills resources, such as videos and e-guides, through online provisioning that uses Blackboard as the platform. This is proving to be a success with huge numbers of students – currently 18,000 hits per month – accessing the portal. The portal was constructed in collaboration with the faculty teaching and learning managers, but has become a central referral resource for academics who have identified students in need of additional help.

It should be noted that the above comments are based on the two written reports and the meetings with staff. Unfortunately, no students were present at the meetings, so the panel could not get a sense of their views on the various initiatives.

### **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

The UFS would benefit from a coordinated institutional student success strategy. The terms of reference of the about-to-be-formed Senate Teaching and Learning committee, which will position student success as a critical goal within teaching and learning in all faculties and will develop a more sophisticated approach to using data and learning analytics, are still in the process of being established. The development of such a strategy should be considered by the new committee.

It must be noted that the strategies mentioned in the 2014 report as being less successful than was hoped – mobile learning, student tracking, the DVC: Academic student forum and compulsory class attendance– were not mentioned in the final QEP report, but are areas that are recommended for further attention as they are beneficial to improving the overall quality of teaching and learning.

The panel recommends the development of a guiding framework for CTL-Faculty partnerships, which would allow for greater clarity, coherence and continuity in the work of the Teaching and Learning Managers and their relationship with CTL. The lack of such a framework could result in faculties acting independently and incoherently in areas that require institution-wide implementation of strategies and policies related to student success.

The institution should consider formalising the co-curriculum as is done, for example, at SUN and NMU, to enable students to gain credits for various leadership, mentoring and sports activities that could bolster their chances of formalising the acquisition of soft skills (so-called portfolio building) that will improve their chances of finding employment.

While a number of students are employed on campus in various capacities, the panel suggests that the university form a central work-study structure that would coordinate work



opportunities for students on campus. Such a coordinated function opens up the possibilities for greatly increasing the number of students who may be able to gain work experience and address financial needs. In addition, it could help alleviate the burden on overstretched staff.

**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 INSTITUTION'S STRENGTHS**

There has been a concerted effort by the institution to improve its teaching and learning spaces. The ubiquitous access to Wi-Fi that exists across campus is an enviable asset to the institution, made possible by careful planning, which included a coverage audit and a phased approach. Moreover, the institution has strong leadership in ICT and Facilities and has been deliberate and evidence-based in its implementation of improvements in this focus area.

**THE APPROACH TAKEN TO IMPROVEMENT**

The Senior Director: Facilities participated in a bench-marking visit to the Netherlands, Germany and the UK to see teaching and learning spaces and get ideas on how to adapt the university's spaces. A survey is underway to assess what resources are currently available in lecture venues. A detailed maintenance plan indicating the level of maintenance required has been developed.

To inform on-going improvement in the provision of e-learning services, the institution conducted a large-scale survey during 2013 to assess how staff and students are currently using technology, as well as the access they have to technological resources. The research revealed some key findings that show the value of technology for supporting improvements in student success. The institution realised that blended learning is more than a mere combination of face-to-face and online learning methods; it requires a fundamental redesign that transforms the structure of, and approach to, teaching and learning. The implementation of blended learning provides an opportunity to rethink class contact time with the goal of enhancing engagement and to extending access to internet-based learning opportunities.

**IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN AND PROGRESS MADE**

There are various initiatives underway at the institution regarding learning spaces, inter alia, dealing with energy, waste management, and water conservation. The purpose is to address issues of sustainability by including environmental responsibility as part of the core values of the institution, addressing not only the built but also the natural landscape of the campuses; setting minimum performance standards; and seeking synergy with the global university community, as well as offering leadership to local communities.

In addition, there has been a concerted effort by the institution to integrate residence life as an extension of the learning space. Ubiquitous campus Wi-Fi access and the re-allocation of

foyer space in the residences provided for a seamless integration of campus and residence life. Off campus, or so-called day students, are also assigned to a college system which provides them with access to resources within the residence environment. Admittedly, the uptake of the college system by day students appears to be on a small scale and we would encourage the institution to ameliorate this situation.

An audio-visual production facility was established and finalised in 2015 to increase students' success rates through access to teaching and learning content in efforts to create more effective learning environments. In addition, there has been a major shift towards the use of the Blackboard learning management system, accelerated by the recent #FeesMustFall campaign. Its use has grown significantly in all faculties at the institution, especially at the undergraduate level. In 2013, 2 503 modules and 25 148 students were registered on the system. The system is mainly used to distribute course content, to make announcements, for assignment submission and plagiarism detection and prevention. While this is an improvement from no online presence, it does not make use of the full potential of technology for teaching and learning. However, the fact that there is a learning designer and a technical developer allocated to each faculty will likely increase the effective use of blended learning in the university.

The institution has invested in *Questionmark*, an e-assessment system used worldwide for computer-based and computer-assisted assessment. E-assessment presents a solution to the problem of providing sufficient feedback to students by saving time in terms of grading, allowing rapid access to results, and maintaining an automatic data record. By employing an e-assessment system, regular formative assessment tasks can be incorporated into every module and customised and timeous feedback can be provided to students. The implementation of *Questionmark* involves collaboration between UFS faculties, the CTL, ICT Services, and the University of Pretoria, which has used the software for some time.

The CTL, in collaboration with ICT services, launched the Electronic Teaching and Learning Environment Project (ETALE) project. The need for this project originated from the renewed international focus on teaching and learning, the rapid growth of new technologies, and the need to be a competitive institution of learning. A two-year project on both national and international trends in the use of technology in teaching and learning was implemented, and the digital profile and teaching and learning needs of staff and students at the institution were researched. The ETALE project consists of the following five components:

- Determining the digital identity of staff and students;
- Focus groups with faculties and support services;
- An evaluation of Blackboard as institutional Learning Management System (LMS);
- An analysis of ICT infrastructure and systems; and

- International and national benchmarking.

In addition, ICT Services has worked towards placing the UFS campuses under a pervasive wireless blanket, which includes all administrative buildings, all student aggregation areas, all open areas and student residences. The project was initiated in 2014 and completed in 2015. A DHET technology grant enabled the upgrade of the wireless infrastructure of the QwaQwa campus. Overall, the Wireless project has now been placed in maintenance mode and caters for smaller extensions where required. Strong leadership at ICT Services has resulted in encouraging progress towards systems integration at the UFS, starting with recent policy and protocol changes. In addition, ICT Services are in conversation with DIRAP about what is required to replace the current system of department- and source-based data with an institutional data warehouse, owned by ICT Services. These are similar to initiatives at UCT and collaboration with them in this regard is encouraged. Unfortunately, internet access outside the campus in Bloemfontein is unreliable and the capacity of the city to improve the situation is very limited. The problem needs to be addressed at national government level.

Rapid growth in student numbers, coupled with the modular and semester systems and parallel-medium instruction, has put physical facilities for teaching/learning and assessment under pressure. Whilst the absolute availability of space is not insufficient as such, the failure to achieve optimal utilisation of lecture venues via effective timetable scheduling has been identified as a quality risk for teaching and learning. This has spurred measures that are well underway to optimise the utilisation of existing space for teaching/learning and assessment. In this regard, the implementation of the Abacus computerised timetable system to alleviate the scheduling problem is an important step in this process.

Several key challenges were identified. The required physical expansion of facilities to accommodate growth in student numbers was challenged by effective governance and management frameworks and systems. Maintenance of student residences and other buildings at the university had been seriously constrained by capacity and internal inefficiencies. This capacity included the limited number of staff, the lack of attention paid to processes and controls, and, to some extent, the skills gap with precision maintenance. Facilities Planning also experienced challenges in relation to the execution of projects, including the capacity of contractors, as well as their ability to do time- and quality management. The management of building and maintenance projects has been substantially improved, including by bringing staff into the same building and having contracts with all contractors. As a result, the backlog has been significantly reduced.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

An external review of the institution's Library and Information Services (LIS) recommended that the LIS and the CTL should cooperate more closely. The LIS spaces should enhance the student experience and support research. A clear articulation of responsibility towards students and technology is needed between these two sections.

The inadequate infrastructure and technology in classrooms and lack of technical support for staff in this regard pose a significant challenge to excellence in teaching and learning on campus. Moreover, capacity to provide the necessary resources and training to students and staff in technology-assisted learning are not always readily available and it is suggested that the institution embarks on capacity-building in this regard. One possibility is to make greater use of technologically-savvy student assistants, as part of a work-study programme (referred to in focus area 2).

The institution is working hard to establish innovative programmes to enhance student learning, yet cited the fact that there are limited spaces and infrastructure on campus to support student-student interaction. The lack of proper spaces on the campus where students can work collaboratively, and insufficient infrastructure, limits full student participation in learning in and out of class. The university is encouraged to think creatively about possible spaces, both inside and outside, that could become learning spaces. In this regard, it would be useful to look at CUT, which has conceptualised the whole campus as a learning space, including putting up solar charging stations to create outdoor learning spaces.

It would be useful to establish a university-wide committee in which facilities staff sit with academics, CTL staff and learning designers to conceptualise and plan teaching and learning spaces that support the university's teaching and learning philosophy.

## **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 HEQSF alignment process, which began in 2011, greatly assisted the institution to reduce its programme and module offerings, to allow for greater efficiencies to be realised by the simple principle of reducing scale in order to better manage a range of teaching and learning quality indicators through the resultant narrower delivery focus. According to the 2014 report, aligning enrolment planning started three years prior to the report, and included a review of the UFS Programme Qualifications Mix.

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

In the 2014 report, it was noted that there was continued reference to the need for better ICT infrastructures, while in the final QEP report the sense was that there were major turnarounds with ICT projects. This major improvement was clarified in the interviews as being the result

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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.

of strong leadership in the ICT Services division, where the head comes from a corporate background where deadlines cover short time spans relative to what is experienced in university environments. This has impacted positively on what was noted as major weaknesses in the 2014 report, i.e. the application and registration processes at the university.

It was apparent during the visit that the approach taken to improvement was to focus on the creation of strong systems related to student administration across all phases of student life (also referred to as the 'UFS Student Walk'). The PR-ENG project holds much promise for enrolment processes (i.e. application, admission and registration), because a number of management systems have been re-engineered.

This will allow the institution to do enrolment planning in a more realistic manner. This project has four phases:

Phase 1: Contextualisation and scoping, which identified entities and how they inter-relate to provide a framework for the structure of the project.

Phase 2: As-is analysis, including the in-depth analysis of the as-is process environment to identify major risks and inform the optimisation and integration of to-be processes.

Phase 3: Optimisation, given the outcomes and deliverables of the as-is analysis-phase, to identify potential optimisation opportunities.

Phase 4: Integration of the to-be processes into a single institutional timeline and 'flow' to enable a seamless administrative process model for the institution.

## **IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN AND PROGRESS MADE**

Key areas of concern in this focus area for UFS were declining first-time entering undergraduate enrolments and a dropout rate of roughly 40% after five years of study. Higher AP criteria were proposed in the 2014 report as a means to raise the pass rates and decrease the drop-out rate (where it is determined by academic performance). It was also envisioned that more academically able students would apply, being attracted by higher AP criteria. However, as the final QEP report indicates, this did not happen. It was realised that the higher AP criteria did not adequately measure the quality of students applying or enrolled at UFS, nor did they improve the pass rate attributable to this strategy. In addition, weaknesses in academic administration processes were identified that affected the realisation of applications into registrations.

As a result, the Student Administration Process Engineering project (PR-ENG) or 'UFS Student Walk' was designed. It is an institutional project aimed at analysing and optimising processes related to student administration (from application to graduation), mainly through coordinated management. These processes included thirteen primary processes, their various sub-processes, as well as nine enabling processes. As of 2016, the project has entered its implementation phase, and has delivered the following: a design that specifies rationalised,

simplified, and standardised processes to allow for extensive knowledge sharing; an institutional “Heartbeat” timeline that organises all processes into a chronological order showing dependencies, enabling an end-to-end integrated system support; and allocation of accountability and responsibility for the individual processes, resulting in a risk mitigation framework. The panel was very impressed with this project and the rapid progress that has been made towards addressing what was a serious enrolment problem, i.e. not meeting enrolment targets for several years in a row to suddenly increasing enrolment by 7000 students in one year, from 31 000 in 2015 to 38 000 in 2016. This is a good example of what an institution can do when it reflects honestly on its problems and then works systemically and systematically to fix them. The University also made some structural changes, such as appointing an additional Registrar: Administration and Systems; notifying students in advance with lower AP scores that they would be admitted to extended degrees, not mainstream, thus retaining these students that otherwise would have been lost to other institutions, and doing accurate enrolment planning, including having an in-house developed dashboard to monitor enrolment.

Other projects relating to academic administration include digitization of student and physical records of the University, which is an on-going project.

Regarding academic rules, the 2014 report notes that a new set of rules was to be implemented in 2015. The report also notes that the quality of the faculty rulebooks has improved, as has the enforcement of academic rules.

An important development has been the establishment of an appeals committee in each faculty, which provides for better administration of ‘at risk’ students who were previously attended to by the Registrar, and which resulted in an administrative bottle-neck and inefficiencies in the tracking process.

The UFS chose a phased approach to curriculum review. The first part is nearly completed, and focused on formal compliance with policy, and with whittling down the PQM and module catalogue. This addressed the issue of academic inefficiency due to uncontrolled expansion. Already, the number of modules on offer was dramatically reduced, and an up-to-date module catalogue was collated. The second part focused on then subjecting existing curriculum to external critical reviews to ascertain the extent to which the UFS curriculum is in line with national and international trends in the programmes/disciplines. While there has been some resistance, the response from departments has generally been positive.

Resulting improvements have been that clear and effective systems (including internal and external peer review) are in place to evaluate programmes on a regular basis. Review findings are used for staff development, curriculum improvement and increasing student access and success rates.

## **SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS**

The 2014 report made mention of the research project on using the NBTs for placement, which was conducted with the CHED, but the final QEP report did not comment on this. It would be useful if this could be reported on.

It is recommended that particular attention be paid to gateway courses, as those universities that addressed the pass rates in these courses, which created a throughput bottleneck, improved student success. Improving the pass rates in high-failure gateway courses can be effected through appropriate pedagogical and curriculum interventions. At UKZN, for example, a thorough examination of prerequisites for all programmes was undertaken and some gateway courses were removed from particular programmes where it was established that in some disciplines they had no particular relevance to the desired learning outcomes and were unnecessarily retarding student progression.

There is also a need to develop an approach to tracking student progress throughout their degree. The UKZN robot system is a good example, where 'at risk' students are identified at the end of each semester and are colour-coded on the system as either amber or red and are given a reduced credit load to make the curriculum more manageable for struggling students. This Academic and Monitoring Support system is accompanied by specific academic support interventions to help bring the students back to green, which is the colour code for good academic standing.

The feedback that there is a move to go back to structured programmes is also welcomed as this has a number of advantages, such as reducing the PQM, but, more importantly, better managing students' academic trajectories. This initiative might also help address the change fatigue experienced by staff by ensuring that the overall academic project is more manageable and focussed.

It was mentioned in the final QEP report that a success rate of 50% in all modules is yet to be achieved in the faculties. This is of concern, especially as the national benchmark is 80%. However, given the range of teaching and learning initiatives that have positively been reported on, there should be improvement in the near future, especially when the institution realises a more co-ordinated student success strategy, including an articulating framework that brings institutional coherence to very promising CTL and faculty-led projects.

## **6. SUMMARY**

UFS is a university in transition in terms of identity, focus and student population. In terms of the students it serves, it appears to be making the transition very rapidly from holding the perspective of coping with under-prepared students to seeing itself as an under-prepared university for the new generation of South African students. The evidence for this came through more in the interviews than through the reports, which tended at times to be disjointed and lacking in detail or specific data. What arose in the interviews was that there

is a lot of data for many interventions, either being piloted or already in the implementation stage. On the other hand, the university's identity vis-à-vis teaching and research does not seem to be fully formed yet, and there is an opportunity with a new Vice-Chancellor to develop institutional consensus and buy-in.

There seems to be a good relationship between CTL and the faculties, but there is no strong framework to embed processes in the Faculties to ensure continuity, relying instead on the commitment of individuals. The lack of presence of the deans at the interviews prevented the panel from understanding their perception of the relationship between the faculties and CTL. It was observed that there is a need for institutional coherence in policy, with agreement on implementation by deans of faculties.

The panel also did not get a sense of the students' voices from the reports or the institutional visit, as no students participated in any of the interviews. However, it was understood that the recent student unrest and the start of the end of year exams may have impacted negatively on their availability for the interviews.

### **Focus Area 1: Enhancing Academics as teachers**

The University considers the key issues in enhancing academics as teachers to be in terms of activities related to professional development, reward and recognition and workload.

The CTL is very strong and is making a major contribution to the institution. Conditions of service for academic development staff is an issue. This is a national issue as staff appointments are currently confined to two categories – academic and non-academic. But in many other countries there is a third category of professional staff. This is something to consider in terms of a career trajectory for this category of staff, who cannot be held accountable for outputs expected of academic staff, nor be confined by the career paths of non-academic staff.

It was noted that while there is higher education research, there was little evidence shown of discipline-based education research that would fall under the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, except in the Health Sciences, which is not only a model for UFS, but for the country as a whole. UWC provides a good example of how this type of research can be promoted and rewarded across an institution. Using examples such as UKZN, UJ and UP, UFS is encouraged to look at achievements in teaching and teaching-related scholarship as a pathway for promotion up to the level of full professor.

It was noted that the CTL is playing a very important role in the professional development of academic staff. The development of a CPD framework, as noted in the report, is encouraged, which will help ensure that all academics, not only newcomers, are involved in ongoing teaching development. The proposed teaching and learning conference in 2017, in common with the practice at a number of other universities, is a good way to increase the focus on teaching and learning institutionally.



The induction programme for academics is not mandatory, and it is a recommendation that all academics be required to have some form of training in university education. Several universities, such as SUN, spread the induction into university teaching programme over a whole year. At some universities, such as UKZN and Rhodes, there is an opportunity to obtain credits for the formal induction programme and use them towards a PGDip in higher education.

It was noted that UFS has encountered a problem with systematizing student evaluations for academic staff development, and the institution is encouraged to get this on track as student evaluations, together with the process of module evaluations which are taking place, and a robust system of individual peer evaluations and performance management that is focused on staff development, can make for an environment where teaching and learning competencies of academics are enhanced. To highlight this focus, some institutions prefer the term “performance development” to “performance management.”

### **Focus Area 2: Enhancing Student Support and Development**

There is evidence of many wonderful initiatives. The widespread use of student advisors is particularly noteworthy. UFS is probably the only university in the country that has implemented advisors on such a large scale, and the model would be valuable to share with the sector. UFS101, a compulsory first-year module, has matured into a more engaging experience for the students, and is also an important initiative to share with the sector.

The student success portal shows great promise. Other noteworthy initiatives include the Write Site, Academic Literacy courses and A-STEP tutorial programme. The Foundation Higher Certificate, to be offered in partnership with TVET colleges, is a very important initiative for potentially enabling many more students to access higher education without further straining the already highly constrained resources at higher education institutions. The university is encouraged to monitor this initiative and share progress with the sector.

While the advisors and faculty Teaching and Learning Managers play important roles in supporting, and to some extent, monitoring, students, a student monitoring and support system is needed, which includes referral and follow-up. Academic Monitoring and Support is a strong aspirational feature of UFS, in wanting to monitor, support and track students.

From the reports and interviews, there appears to be no institution level, co-ordinated student success strategy. It is recommended that a formal framework for student success be devised, which clearly articulates the institution’s philosophy in this area and provides a coordinating and enabling tool for realising this philosophy.

It is recommended that work-study opportunities for students be co-ordinated centrally, both to help students financially and with work experience and to help the university alleviate the burden on its staff. There are many possible roles students can play in addition to being

tutors, e.g. students can assist academics who are not computer literate (this particular gap was mentioned a few times in the interviews.)

### **Focus Area 3: Enhancing the Learning Environment**

The panel was very impressed with the ICT head, who has accomplished a great deal in a short space of time. The provision of ubiquitous Wi-Fi, and the carefully planned way in which this was done, are noteworthy.

It was also noted that there have been enormous improvements in facilities planning and addressing maintenance backlogs, with credit due to the head and his staff.

Learning spaces where students can not only study alone but also work collaboratively need to be increased. Useful examples of how this might be done are CUT, which has conceptualized its entire campus as a learning space, including outdoor spaces with solar charging stations, and SUN. It is encouraging that the head of facilities undertook a benchmarking trip overseas and that university is working on a campus master plan around learning spaces.

In order to ensure alignment between the built environment and the institution's educational philosophy, it is recommended that there should be a forum or structure where there can be conversations between facilities and those concerned with teaching and learning about what is needed and how this can be achieved.

Progress is being made in incorporating ICT into teaching and learning. The fact that UFS has a learning designer and a developer in each faculty is impressive.

### **Focus Area 4 : Enhancing course and programme enrolment management**

UFS is to be congratulated on addressing what has been an ongoing problem, meeting enrolment targets, as well as inefficiencies in academic administration, in a short space of time through the PR-ENG project that is underway. The project is impressive in its design and scope, and is already yielding results.

The university has also made substantial progress in reducing its course offerings to eliminate a variety of administrative and pedagogic inefficiencies that impact on student throughput and success.

There is a need for a tracking system that can be used to monitor students' progress across the entire degree, where students and designated staff can flag students who are falling behind before they get an official notification that they are at risk of being excluded. UKZN's robot system is a good example of how this can be done.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, UFS is to be congratulated on what it has achieved, the considered and evidence-lead way in which it is tackling challenges, the numerous examples of innovative approaches and the clear commitment to its students. The conversations during the interviews revealed much optimism for the future in dealing with ongoing challenges, such as curriculum reform, that are naturally a part of all institutions in a sector that is grappling with making post-apartheid transitions.

## APPENDIX: Programme



**Council on Higher Education (CHE) Quality  
Enhancement Project (QEP) Institutional  
Visit Programme 9 November 2016  
Council Chamber, George Du Toit Administration Building**

Wednesday 9 November 2016		
Time	Focus Area	Key role players
08:00 – 09:00	<b>Rectorate Members</b>	Prof Nicky Morgan Acting Rector / Prof Lis Lange Vice-Rector: Academic
09:00 – 10:30	<b>FOCUSAREA1: Enhancing Academics as Teachers</b>	Prof Francois Strydom: Director CTL Mrs Tiana van der Merwe: Deputy Director Curriculum Delivery and (CTL) Mrs Tamika Otto (CTL) <u>Faculty Teaching and Learning Managers:</u> Ms Elzmarie Oosthuizen (Natural and Agricultural Sciences) Prof Adri Beylefeld (Education) Dr Corlia Janse van Vuuren (Economic and Management Sciences) Dr Manie Moolman (Law) Dr Thomas Resane (Theology) Ms Jackie Storer (Humanities) Dr Johan Bezuidenhout (Health Sciences) Mrs Susan Van Jaarsveld: Senior Director Human Resources Mr Pieter du Plessis: Director Office of the Vice-Rector Operations Dr Renalde Huysamen: Director Human Resources
10:30 –	<b>Tea</b>	
11:00 – 12:30	<b>FOCUSAREA2: Enhancing Student Support and Development</b>	Prof Lis Lange Prof Francois Strydom: Director CTL Mrs Tiana van der Merwe: Deputy Director Curriculum Delivery and (CTL) Teaching and Learning Managers (see previous slot) Mr Jacques Botha: Director IIS DIRAP Ms Lise Kriel: Deputy-Director MIR DIRAP Mrs Lana Hen-Boisen Mrs Evodia Mohoanyane (CTL) Dr Vic Coetzee: Senior Director ICT Services Mr Francois Marais: Director Administrative CTL Dr Annette De Wet: Language Development (CTL) Mr Pura Mgolombane: Dean Student Affairs Dr WP Wahl: Assistant Director Residence Life
12:30 –	<b>Lunch</b>	
13:00 –	<b>FOCUSAREA3: Enhancing</b>	Mrs Tiana van der Merwe: Deputy Director Curriculum Delivery and Dr Vic Coetzee: Senior Director ICT Services

<b>14:30</b>	<b>Learning Environment</b>	Mr Nico Janse van Rensburg: Senior Director Facilities Planning and Management
<b>14:30 – 16:00</b>	<b>FOCUSAREA4: Enhancing Course and Programme Enrolment Management</b>	Prof Lis Lange: Deputy Vice Chancellor Academic Dr Vic Coetzee: Senior Director ICT Services Dr Saretha Brüssow: Director AP DIRAP Mr Jacques Botha: Director IIS DIRAP Ms Lise Kriel: Deputy-Director MIR DIRAP Ms Sharon Paulse: Deputy Director Programmes DIRAP Ms Jemina Gopane: Officer QE DIRAP
<b>16:00 – 16:30</b>	<b>Rectorate</b>	Prof Nicky Morgan Acting Rector / Prof Lis Lange Vice-Rector: Academic

Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) / Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP) / ICT Services (Information and Communication Technology Services) / Academic Planning (AP) / Institutional Information Systems (IIS / Monitoring and Institutional Research (MIR)