Quality Enhancement Project

Institutional feedback report

Name of Institution	University of Limpopo
Date of institutional visit	26 October 2016
Names of peer reviewers	Ms Susan Benvenuti Dr F Southway-Ajulu
Name of CHE person involved in the visit	Professor Diane Grayson
Date draft report submitted to institution	31 March 2017
Date of final report	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)[1]. 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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[1] 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[2]. 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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[2] (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 Limpopo (UL) was formed when the University of the North, founded in 1959, and the Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA), founded in 1978, merged in 2005. In 2015, the two institutions were unbundled. The University of Limpopo now operates on the main campus in Turfloop and a smaller campus in Polokwane. In view of its setting, the majority of its student population of about 19000 comes largely from the rural surrounding communities.

The management of the University is largely centralised, with the Vice-Chancellor supported by, until 2015, a single Deputy Vice-Chancellor Academic and Research (this position has now been split into two), executive deans, directors and the registrar. The University comprises four faculties: Health Sciences, Humanities, Science and Agriculture and Management and Law. The faculties are in turn comprised of schools. Therefore, while management decisions may be taken centrally, each faculty and its respective schools implements these within its own context.

In response to the HEQC Institutional Audit of 2009 and the subsequent engagements with the CHE over several years to bring the audit to a close, a planning culture has now been inculcated across the institution. A multi-year strategic plan, UL2020, was developed, which is operationalized through Institutional Annual Performance Plans (IAPPs). UL2020 is cascaded down to faculties and then schools, each of which develops its own strategic plans that addresses its own features and needs, but are aligned to the University strategic plan. Quarterly reports are presented to the relevant Senate committee. There have been roadshows for each faculty to help them understand that higher education is becoming more regulated, but that planning can help them enhance what they do. An Office of Strategy and Performance has been created to monitor planned implementation of the IAPP and UL2020, as well as evaluate impacts using instruments it develops.

From the two reports and discussions during the visit, it appears that the University engaged deeply with the four QEP focus areas, in some aspects even before the QEP began. When the baseline report was written (in 2014), the University already had its strategic plan in place and had obtained a Teaching Development Grant (TDG). Given that there was clear alignment among UL2020, the TDG and the QEP focus areas, an integrated planning and monitoring process encompassing the three elements was implemented. As stated in the final institutional report (2015):

> In reflecting on how we have dealt with the first submission, the follow-ups on the submissions and the numerous supporting workshops (QEP Inkundla, 2014; QEP Institutional Workshop, March 2015; Symposium on Enhancing Academics as Teachers, June 2015; Assessing Pedagogical Competence workshop, June 2015), we came to an appreciation of the critical need to approach QEP activities in an integrated way.

Initially, leading up to the first report, a large team, convened by the DVC and consisting of deans and directors, was tasked with coordinating and developing activities. For the final

report, the production was coordinated by a smaller team led by the DVC Teaching and Learning. It is therefore apparent that the management of the University played a leading role in defining and overseeing the activities designed to respond to the four focus areas.

One of the positive experiences for the University was the realisation that higher education challenges are sector-wide and that many of their challenges were not unique.

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

Enhancing academics as teachers is an explicit goal in the University's strategic plan, UL 2020. One of the most important enablers of this goal is the Centre for Academic Excellence (CAE), headed by an experienced and capable Director. The CAE runs a number of professional development workshops, including in teaching, assessment, curriculum development, preparation of learning materials, the use of Blackboard and academic planning. It also runs 4-day induction workshops for new academics. At the request of individual academics, the CAE conducts individual teaching appraisals. Human Resources (HR) also arranges workshops.

There are a number of teaching-related policies, which are given to all academics, including the Teaching and Learning Policy, Assessment Policy and Recognition of Prior Learning Policy.

There are School and Faculty Teaching Awards. In addition, in 2014 Vice-Chancellor's Teaching and Learning Excellence awards were instituted.

Another significant strength of UL is the recognition and acknowledgement of teaching as being on a par with research in terms of promotion criteria. In 2013 the University modified its promotions criteria to enable academic staff to be promoted to associate professor and full professor primarily on the basis of their contributions to teaching and learning in higher education.

THE APPROACH TAKEN TO IMPROVEMENT

An indication of the serious regard UL has for teaching and learning is the move undertaken to create two DVC positions – one focused on Teaching and Learning and the other on Research – where previously the two were handled by a single DVC. This should increase the focus on teaching and learning and student success in the institution.

UL has a stated three-phase approach to enhancing academics as teachers, which is part of its Teaching and Learning Master Plan. Phase 1 focuses on upgrading staff qualifications to increase the number of academics with PhDs. Buy-out grants funded through the NRF and

TDG are being used to support sabbaticals for academics to complete PhDs. This is the main focus until 2017. The second and third phases will focus on developing pedagogical qualifications, and advancing the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SOTL), respectively.

UL made a concerted effort to advertise its support of the QEP by running roadshows to provide information to academics in order to achieve support and buy-in. The idea was to demonstrate the value of improvement projects to UL (and the sector more broadly), as well as to individual academic staff, students and other stakeholders. The message focused on moving towards best practice.

IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN AND PROGRESS MADE

There are many interventions and projects being undertaken across the University in support of this focus area. In accordance with the University's plan, the number of staff with PhDs increased by 18 between 2014 and 2015. Other notable changes are described below.

Professional development

Workshops, seminars and symposia are some of the interventions used to support professional development. This includes workshops on the use of Blackboard and the Turnitin anti-plagiarism software.

In 2014 the University initiated an annual symposium where winners of the CHE-HELTASA National Excellence in Teaching awards are invited to UL to share their expertise. This was a one day event in 2014, and increased to two days in 2015, when not only external award winners presented but also the University's own participants in the national Teaching Advancement at Universities project.

Some academics are already undertaking formal qualifications or modules towards formal qualifications in higher education. There are discussions underway to work with the Universities of the Witwatersrand (Wits) and Venda to offer a series of short courses, which could lead to a PGDipHE. Such a consortium approach is being used successfully in the Western Cape, where the four universities collaborate to offer a PGDip in Higher Education. UL is also working with Wits and UniVen to develop an online teaching evaluation tool, which is expected to be operational in 2016.

UL has formalised much of its focus on teaching and learning and it was reported that policies relating to teaching and learning were either reviewed and updated or written, as required. A comment made during the interviews was that the QEP provided impetus and validity to many of the projects and undertakings that were either underway or in the planning phase.

In the baseline (2014) submission it was reported that many lecturers were not producing study guides for their modules. From 2016 all academics are required to produce study

guides. The School of Education has produced a template that is being used as an exemplar for the institution.

Reward and recognition

UL has focused on reward and recognition of excellence in teaching and learning in several ways:

- *Promotions:* effectiveness in teaching and learning is a recognised path for promotion to Associate and Full Professor. This creates a positive association with T&L and allows academics with commitment, knowledge, passion and a scholarly approach to their T&L to both advance their careers and support both students and other academic staff. It should help to create critical mass around T&L, including Scholarship of Teaching and Learning, to further enhance UL's ability to deliver high quality higher education to its students.

- *Teaching and Learning Awards:* these are offered at various levels, from the VC's awards through to faculty and school levels. These serve to motivate and inspire a focus on quality teaching and learning, as they offer both recognition and fairly substantial financial awards.

- *TAU Fellowships:* UL has three staff members participating in the Teaching Advancement at University (TAU) fellowships, who will be role models in teaching and learning at the University.

- *Teaching and Learning Monograph*: this has been introduced to both showcase innovations in T&L and to serve as a resource for academics.

Workload

Teaching and Learning is part of the formal workload for all academics. This is to both recognise time spent teaching and to ensure equitable distribution of responsibilities. The workload model also serves as a tool to enable schools to identify required teaching hours and therefore to plan for staffing. However, some academics are reportedly overworked due to staffing shortages. UL struggles to find and retain enough suitably qualified academics.

It was not clear to the panel how workloads are actually allocated, or whether the components of the workload model are specified.

Performance appraisal

Performance appraisal systems are already in place for directors, deans and above; implementation for academics is planned for next year. Lecturer evaluations are already in use, although it is not clear to what extent these are done or how they are used and monitored.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

The current induction programme of four days is very short. Given that the University is involved in the collaborative development of short courses on teaching and learning, the panel suggests that these courses could form part of a more extended, compulsory induction into university teaching for new academics. It would be advisable for academics who take these courses to be able to earn credits towards a PGDiP in HE. In addition, the University could consider including a discipline-based component in the induction programme as is done, for example, at Stellenbosch University.

If it has not already done so, the panel suggests that the University look critically at the components of the workload model, how effectively the model is being applied at departmental and school levels and how comparable work allocations are across faculties (allowing for contextual differences). If the workload model makes provision for professional development, it could also assist schools in planning for sabbatical time for completion of higher degrees as well as to ensure that all staff are participating in some form of professional development. This could help to improve levels of attendance at courses and workshops. Participation in T&L focused committees and working on some of the academic support initiatives could also be factored into the workload model. In addition, the panel suggests that young academics be allocated a lighter teaching load and a senior academic as a mentor so that they are able to develop themselves as academics.

New hires and younger academics could be the focus for strong professional development as in many cases they have energy and motivation to try new ideas. They are also often more open to development as they want and need support and encouragement, since they have yet to gain confidence as teachers and discipline experts.

A move towards requiring academics to acquire higher degrees and undertake professional development appears to be underway and could be positively supported by building both into future conditions of service, as is the case in a growing number of countries. A way to help do this is to create a Continuous Professional Development framework for the institution.

It seems that there is a plan to implement performance appraisal for academics next year. The panel encourages the University to implement an appraisal system that has a developmental focus, rather than using it as a compliance exercise.

At present student evaluations of courses and lecturers are initiated by lecturers on a voluntary basis. It is recommended that there be a minimum requirement for how frequently student evaluations need to be conducted. The collaborative development of online evaluations that the University is currently busy with should make implementation easier, although there may be challenges in getting student participation. Feedback should be used for developmental purposes (for the course and lecturer); students should also receive feedback on actions taken as a result of their input, even if only in the following year.

UL is encouraged to identify more experienced academics who may not be research active in their disciplines anymore but may be strong candidates for following the teaching focused path for promotion. Academics who demonstrate a passion and commitment to T&L could be supported in developing expertise in T&L through formal qualifications and encouraged to develop as researchers in the SOTL arena.

Developing subject specific teaching and learning expertise within particular departments and schools could also allow UL to play a leadership role in focused areas of higher education. Encouraging academics to innovate and publish could help to further support what appears to be emerging communities of practice that are growing around the CAE symposiums and other T&L activities.

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 Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, which has oversight of all student support activities, meets quarterly. Faculty level Teaching and Learning committees feed into this university committee. The arrangement ensures that the activities, while driven by policy, are embedded at all levels.

The Centre for Academic Excellence (CAE) and Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD), both of which undertake student support and development activities, are each headed by a director who reports directly to the DVC: Academic and Research. This arrangement ensures that the activities of the centres are coherently coordinated at the institutional level. The CAE coordinates Supplemental Instruction (SI), the Reading and Writing Centre and the Academic Mentorship Programme. The CSCD works in three broad areas: life and academic skills development, career and employability and personal and psycho-social needs. Each centre has its own Strategic Plan that is aligned to UL2020. The CAE has 11 staff members, and the CSCD has nine psychologists and a secretary.

The Reakgoni Disability Centre caters for students with disabilities.

THE APPROACH TAKEN TO IMPROVEMENT

The University is following a formal planning approach. In 2014 and 2015 the faculties and centres drew up their own strategic plans and annual plans. They produce quarterly reports, which serve at the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee for approval and then at Senate for noting. According to the final report (2015), "This has provided stability in the area of students' development and support. There is now a common understanding on what programmes need to be conceptualised and implemented."

IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN AND PROGRESS MADE

Mentoring

The Students Mentorship Programme (SMP) is identified by the University as a flagship programme. The panel was extremely impressed with this programme. While it has existed since 2005, the scale is now very large. In 2015 there were 168 mentors who supported 2862 students.

Towards the end of each year, senior students are interviewed as part of the application to be mentors to first year students for the following year, a job for which they receive no remuneration. Mentors receive training in early January and meet with first year students during orientation. A group of first year students is assigned to each mentor (but students can move to another group, if they wish). Mentors work three hours a week, and participate in two team building activities during the year. At the end of the year they are acknowledged with a Gala Dinner and a certificate, handed out by the DVC. Each school has Schools Academic Development Practitioners (SADPs), academics who volunteer to monitor and support the mentors in their school. SADPs also attend training and team building activities every year to ensure cohesion in the programme. This programme is exemplary, and worth sharing with the sector.

In 2015, following an in-depth reflection on the programme and a literature review, it was decided to rename the programme the Baditi Student Support Programme, and to make more explicit the philosophical links to traditional mentorship programmes found in many African societies, including the idea of various levels of mentoring. This reconceptualised programme is due for implementation in 2017.

Academic skills development

In 2014 the University established the Reading and Writing Centre (RWC), which falls under the CAE. This centre makes use of senior students (including second year students), known as Language Consultants, supervised by an academic development practitioner who is a language specialist. In 2015 there were 32 language consultants. The senior students are provided with a week-long training by CAE prior to embarking on their role in the centre. From discussions during the visit, the panel learnt that the University initially piloted this intervention and is now in the process of refining it. For example, during the pilot stage, any student could visit the centre and receive assistance with their writing, for example, grammar, technical finish, note taking or preparing assignments. In view of the large number of students visiting the centre and using these services, the University has reviewed this intervention and has restricted it to only first year students. In the first year (2014), students from second year upwards could be language consultants, but in the interviews CAE staff indicated that they plan to not use second year students in future, and to recruit more post-graduate students (although they want to have a succession plan by still having some undergraduates).

Tutoring

CAE trains tutors and laboratory assistants for all departments that request training.

Supplemental Instruction (SI) is another intervention which was introduced to improve students' performance in identified at risk modules. SI leaders are selected from students in their second year of study upwards. In 2015 nine CAE staff were trained as SI supervisors by North West University. Towards the end of the year the Director of the CAE worked with senior management to identify 27 modules where SI was needed in 2016, covering first to third year modules. In early December the CAE met with the academics responsible for those modules to explain how SI works and what their role would be. SI has been found to be a very effective student support intervention at many other universities, and the University is encouraged to evaluate its effectiveness. In future, the University might need to reflect on the selection of the SI leaders, perhaps drawing mostly on post-graduate students, or, in special cases, excellent third year students.

Summer and winter schools

In 2014 a pilot was implemented in the Faculty of Sciences and Agriculture. In 2015 summer and winter schools were extended to all faculties. The programme targets students who have failed one or two modules during the semester. They receive one week of intensive tutoring, followed by an examination. The impact of this programme is still to be determined.

Career and curriculum advising and life skills development

The Centre for Student Counselling and Development (CSCD) has a career development programme that includes graduate placement and entrepreneurship. The programme is aimed at helping prepare students for the world of work and find employment. A number of employers, both public and private, visit the university annually as part of its recruitment efforts.

There is a compulsory, one-week Orientation for first year students, organised by Marketing and Communication. During Orientation, CSCD informs students about the various services available. It also administers a survey of study skills, attitudes and habits. In 2015 the test was incorporated into the new policy on Undergraduate Students' Academic Performance Management and Exclusions. The results of these tests are conveyed to students both individually and as group feedback. It was indicated during the interviews that the results assist students with identifying support services that they can access.

The CSCD offers weekly workshops on a variety of topics, some relating to lifestyle, such as drug and alcohol abuse and sex and sexuality, academic skills, such as coping with exam stress, and employability, such as interview skills and job hunting skills. The workshops are voluntary, and during the discussions it was indicated that attendance is decreasing. From the reports and discussions, the decline in attendance is attributed to students' programmes being too full.

CSCD also offers a range of psychometric tests and career and interest tests on demand.

Counselling

Counselling services are provided by CSCD, which has developed a system consisting of its staff, peer counsellors and intern students from UL's Department of Psychology, or contracted through a Memorandum of Understanding with the University of Venda. Peer counsellors are selected from students who are progressing well academically; they may volunteer for up to two hours per day. The peer counsellors work in residences, including off campus accommodation, and provide a bridge between CSCD staff and students. The service ensures that students have access to assistance and they can be referred to appropriate support as required.

Student performance monitoring and referral

The Policy on Undergraduate Student Academic Performance Monitoring and Exclusions was approved by Senate in November 2015 and is beginning to be implemented. There are common test dates, after which marks are uploaded by the Faculty Administrative Officers onto the University's Management Information System, ITS. There is a due date for submission of marks each quarter. Institutional Planning identifies students who are struggling, on the basis of their test marks, and sends lists to each school. Although not explicitly stated, the panel assumed that all of this pertains to first year students. What happens after that varies from school to school. The referral system does not appear to be particularly strong, as students are referred to mentors, and the extent to which mentors are equipped to provide the academic and other forms of support students might need is not immediately evident. Alternatively, they might refer students for support to the appropriate place, but this was not clear to the panel.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

The University has developed several structures to address this focus area. It is clear that these activities are beginning to take form, while their effectiveness is yet to be measured. The recently approved policy on Undergraduate Student Academic Performance Monitoring and Exclusion will, no doubt, provide a more focused and holistic student support structure. The panel suggests that the University monitor the extent to which mentors provide or refer students for appropriate support if they appear to be at risk. Follow up is also needed, to see that students get the support they need. If it is not already being done, the panel recommends that the monitoring of student performance should continue beyond the first quarter.

With the piloting of this policy, the University could consider reflecting further on activities in this focus area taking into consideration, in a more deliberate manner, the student life cycle, thereby identifying activities at each point of the cycle that should be focused on. For example, at registration, CSCD currently tests students and the information obtained from this exercise could be utilised to inform and shape the support that is provided; based on

these results students could be referred to faculty level monitoring and support almost immediately.

The establishment of the Reading and Writing Centre is a good initiative. However, much more could be done in terms of developing students' academic reading and writing skills. It is important to have close links with lecturers, so that, as far as possible the development of these skills is embedded within specific subjects; in addition, all students need opportunities to adequately develop these skills. It is also useful for academics to understand the reading and writing demands of the tasks they give students, something they might not be aware of as subject specialists. Wits has a very good model of Writing Centres, which UL might wish to look at.

Summer and winter schools, especially if they are offered as an alternative to supplementary examinations only (with no additional teaching and learning opportunities), make good sense, provided the University can overcome possible logistical challenges, such as accommodation and additional costs for students. The University is encouraged to further develop and evaluate this programme. If success rates increase, then the cost to the University may be outweighed by the savings in having fewer repeaters (or dropouts).

It was mentioned several times that students are too busy to take advantage of support provided. The University could consider the development of support that is built into the modules/courses or programmes. This would ensure that students do not feel overloaded with work and would enable participation in the much needed support. The other aspect to reflect on is the curriculum, which if overloaded might mean that students cannot fully utilise all the activities provided for them, which also means that students already struggling cannot be supported.

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

The institution has a good deal of space for growth and extension on its existing campus and has already embarked on repurposing and consolidating existing physical venues to deliver more specialised facilities, as well as flexible venues or spaces.

It appears that improvements are guided by the University Strategic plan UL2020 and the Campus Master Plan, ensuring a deliberate, planned process. Progress in any University improvement is monitored and evaluated with a reporting line to Senate.

The Library plays a central role in creating an environment that is conducive to learning through the provision of resources, facilities and services. The Library presents Library Orientation, Information Literacy training and Bibliographic Instruction programmes to both

students (undergraduate and postgraduate) and staff. The aim of these programmes is to help staff and students learn to find, evaluate and use information ethically, including abiding by copyright laws and avoiding plagiarism (Turnitin software is used). Additional training on databases is provided. The Library provides physical spaces for individual and group study. Computers are available, with support from Library staff; Wi-Fi is also available for students who want to use their own devices.

Computer literacy training is mandatory for the majority of students. It is offered by Academic Computing Services, a unit within ICT.

THE APPROACH TAKEN TO IMPROVEMENT

The University appears to have approached this focus area by developing appropriate policies and putting systems in place. A campus master plan has been developed. Efforts are underway to improve the teaching spaces and the equipment in them.

Another positive initiative that emerged from the discussions was the growing approach of partnerships with external providers to deliver aspects of the learning environment. These include plans for residential development with a private partner on campus, increased engagement with private providers of accommodation near the campus, and working with Vodacom to increase access to internet connectivity to enhance teaching and learning resources by ensuring cost effective access to UL systems via an Access Point Network (APN).

IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN AND PROGRESS MADE

Teaching and learning spaces

As with most universities in South Africa, challenges relating to sufficient venues to handle large class teaching exist, but some improvements in the provision of large venues and facilities within these venues were reported. The acquisition of data projectors and large screens was seen as an improvement over this period of time, particularly in the larger venues that cater for about 250 students. However, it was pointed out by UL that growing student numbers meant that some courses now had large enrolment numbers, which were placing a burden on physical resources. Many courses with these large numbers were forced to offer lectures during the 16:00 – 18:00 time period, and had to provide several sessions, which impacts on academics and workload.

There are plans to look at recording lectures and uploading these onto YouTube, but specialised resources would then be needed.

Many older dining halls at UL that are no longer used to provide meals for students are being repurposed to serve as student teaching and learning spaces. For example, an optometry clinic has been created, and a nursing skills clinic is being developed. Consequently, some programmes and specialised courses are situated in their own small buildings, which are being redeveloped over time to cater for those disciplines' specific needs. These specialised

spaces need to be balanced with the provision of flexible or multi-purpose spaces. However, the panel was alerted to the fact that some students cook in their rooms, which is neither safe nor hygienic.

In order to create spaces for learning, the Library has redesigned its spaces, creating a reading room which is accessible 24 hours a day and seven days a week; there is a discussion room for collaborative study, spaces for individual study and a room used as a Reading and Writing Centre, run by CAE.

The panel was informed that a state of the art Language Laboratory has been built. This is a large venue, which will be used to train translators and interpreters. It will also house an e-learning centre to accommodate approximately 120 students, as well as providing individual and collaborative working spaces.

There is great demand for after-hours access to learning spaces for studying and working, and for students to have access to quiet places for study at times, and for collaborative learning and conversations at other times. UL has provided some beautiful outdoor spaces, which are being targeted as Wi-Fi hotspots to provide access to online resources. These are informal spaces for students to gather in small groups to work or relax around a sheltered table. These are a good example of using space innovatively to provide flexibility of usage.

A centralised approach to timetabling and venue allocation was highlighted as ensuring that spaces and venues are optimally utilised.

Unfortunately, no one from facilities was able to attend the interviews, so the panel could not get a sense of how the development and implementation of the campus master plan aligns to the teaching and learning strategy.

ICT infrastructure and access

UL has recently completed a full upgrade to the campus network and has just taken delivery of a new firewall, which was under configuration at the time of the panel's visit. The University is therefore confident that it has excellent infrastructure through which to deliver ICT services on campus.

The University provides students with access to computers through general computer labs with varying capacities, and through more specialised labs restricted to specific students/courses, such as the computer science labs. The number of computers is not adequate, and some of the computers are due for replacement.

There appears to be a concerted effort to provide internet access as widely as possible. Wi-Fi is being rolled out across the campus. All residences have Wi-Fi coverage, as well as the library and computer laboratories, which are open until midnight. A plan for upgrading and installing hotspots is planned to be completed at the end of 2017.

The University has in place an APN through Vodacom, which provides free access to university resources once connection to the University is established. The data costs associated with the initial connection are currently covered by the university, which has negotiated bundled rates. This APN is currently a pilot project for staff; the roll-out to students is expected to take place in the near future.

The panel was informed that many students have their own laptops and smartphones, and so the issue of lack of devices is not perceived to be widespread, although the panel did not know whether a survey has been conducted to ascertain the actual situation. During the interviews, staff further commented that investigations into device provision was focused on first time entrants and plans are being considered to potentially provide these students with devices. The panel recommended that UL discuss the matter with the University of Venda, which undertook a project to provide devices to all of its students, and therefore has valuable experience to share.

Transport and security arrangements are in place for students needing to travel between their accommodation (including private) to campus and back, particularly when attending late lectures or assessments due to venue shortages during the day. The University has opened negotiations with private providers of accommodation to ensure that they offer minimum standards of accommodation.

Technology-enabled tools and resources

UL has implemented Blackboard as its Learning Management System (LMS). Training in the use of Blackboard is conducted by the CAE. According to interviewees, currently about 50-60% of courses were thought to have some kind of presence on the LMS, although the number of modules is not monitored. User numbers, which are monitored, show that usage has increased enormously, from a handful of users in 2009 when the system was acquired to over 14,000 in August 2015.

Blackboard is used mainly for delivery of lecture materials, such as Powerpoint slides, the provision of access to course outlines and student guides, communication and class-wide announcements, posting of marks and provision of access to Turn-it-in.

The University has considered using other features on Blackboard, such as online testing and assessment, but expressed some reservations as there have been problems in the past with power outages during online computer exams. Concern was also expressed that in using Blackboard to deliver important aspects of courses the University might be disadvantaging students with limited access to the LMS.

As provision of both devices and access improves, as well as uptake by more academics, the University hopes that LMS usage will be extended. It was recommended that discussions around the LMS and its integration into the Teaching and Learning plan should happen in order to encourage and align usage.

The panel noted the concerted effort the University has put into developing students' digital literacies, with training being provided by the library and ICT.

Library facilities

The Library is to be commended for undertaking both significant planning and consultation, as well as delivering a wealth of resources to both students and academics at UL. The Library Strategic Plan, LIS 2020, was developed and approved, together with a Library Policy. A Senate Sub-committee oversees all library activities.

Physical developments at the library include a re-designed 24/7 reading room to better cater to student needs in terms of safe, appropriate study facilities. In redesigning this part of the library, provision was made for a Reading and Writing Centre facility, which includes space for collaborative student engagements as well as individual student spaces. Wi-Fi is available in the library and further work is being done on creating hotspots for students who bring their own devices. The library also offers computer facilities.

The Library has been working towards developing a learning commons for students, which will enable provision of content and other supporting materials for students. In addition, Lib guides are being developed by the library in conjunction with academics for specific courses and fields. These are always a very useful source of support for students and it is hoped that students are made aware of their existence and strongly encouraged to use them.

The Library continues to focus on enhancing its collections, and like many other libraries, is struggling with decisions around usage of e-books and the provision of textbooks for undergraduates.

The Library has a User Group comprising library staff and faculty representatives whose function is to ensure that new library developments take into consideration student and academic needs from both a teaching and learning perspective and to support research. A challenge for the library is student access to all the provided facilities, especially remote access to electronic resources. Improvements are currently underway in this regard.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

While there are many areas of improvement underway, some of them guided by the UL2020 document and its related projects, a more coordinated approach using a Campus Master Plan in conjunction with other strategic plans, such as a Teaching and Learning Strategy, might enable more efficient and positive learning outcomes. The University is encouraged to conceptualise how and where learning is taking place, and integrate this aspect into the teaching and learning strategy and the campus master plan (including, for example, where Wi-Fi hotspots are needed).

Alongside library spaces as learning spaces, most universities are moving to create new spaces to serve the evolving needs of students. With increased focus on collaborative learning, blended learning and the need to provide access to the LMS, there is a need to look

differently at spaces and requirements and to re-imagine traditional spaces in new ways. The University is encouraged to think about where additional learning spaces might be created, as part of its overall campus master plan.

During the interviews, staff referred to the need to be able to engage with students during lectures and indicated that contact between students and lecturers is vital to teaching and learning. This is difficult to do in large lecture groups. The panel therefore suggests that the University re-look at the teaching and learning strategy and the campus master plan and considers how other forms of teaching, such as small group engagement, could be utilised. In view of the existence of a Learning Management System (LMS) and the roll out of Wi-Fi, blended learning could be a real option. The panel recommended that all courses should be expected to have at least a basic Blackboard presence, particularly with regards to giving access to course content.

As the University has initiated some video recording of lectures, consideration could be given to creating more small venues for more active small group interactions, thereby moving from compulsory attendance of large lectures to compulsory attendance at the small group interactions. The panel recommends that UL hold discussions with Stellenbosch University, which is currently leading a consortium of South African universities working with Google and Grove to create a platform to allow for lecture capture and playback using affordable and available technology.

5. FOCUS AREA 4: ENHANCING COURSE AND PROGRAMME ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT (3-6 pages)

(Including admissions, selection, placement, readmission refusal, pass rates in gateway courses[3], throughput rates, management information systems)

THE INSTITUTION'S STRENGTHS

As with other aspects of the University's activities, this focus area is guided by the strategic plan, UL2020. The University adheres strictly to its enrolment plan and monitors it every year.

Faculties interrogate examination results after each set of semester examinations. There is also an examination commission, which serves an important function in monitoring the assessment process. Faculties report to Senate on performance in their programmes.

There are a number of students enrolled in extended degree programmes (770 in 2014).

THE APPROACH TAKEN TO IMPROVEMENT

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[3] "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.

An important focus has been the development and revision of policies and guidelines which will enhance managing various aspects of assessment and student support. It was noted that the following have been approved by the University Senate:

- Rules for assessment feedback and remarking/reviewing of assignments and test scripts

- Class attendance monitoring tool

- Undergraduate Student Academic Performance Management and Exclusion policy

The University also reviewed all of its programme admissions requirements and had these approved by Senate. The use of on-line and automated electronic systems is increasing.

IMPROVEMENTS UNDERTAKEN AND PROGRESS MADE

Admissions, selection and placement

The University indicated that it adheres carefully to its enrolment plan, as agreed with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET). However, this is based on growth in overall numbers and consideration of dynamics in the pool of students, such as dropouts and repeating students, is needed. Therefore, the enrolment plan is drilled down to programme level, where departments and faculties make allowance for repeating students. Overall, the University has no problem meeting its enrolment targets as the demand for places is very large, except in Science and Agriculture. However, the Science Centre on campus helps with recruitment for these faculties.

Admission requirements have recently been changed, and importantly now include TVET students requiring entry into the University. Admission is based on NSC results; NSC results also form the basis for decisions about whether to admit students to mainstream or extended degree programmes. Enrolment in extended degree programmes has increased rapidly, from about 700 students in 2014 to 1100 in 2016.

The application process is centrally managed, with provision made for both paper-based and on-line applications. The University strives to process applications quickly and is also developing a clearing process whereby students are alerted to programmes with spaces which they could apply for. Students need to apply by 30 September for the following year. If they are in Grade 12, they are notified that they are provisionally admitted, pending the NSC results. Once the results come out, faculties rank applicants and send out letters to successful students. However, students are not required to indicate whether or not they accept the offer, so the University only knows which students will accept the offer when they actually register. The panel does not know, therefore, how the University meets its targets, since not all students offered places will take them up.

The University is improving students' registration experience. During registration there is a "one-stop shop" to address all students' queries. On-line registration has been introduced,

but only on campus, where staff from faculties help students with curriculum choices. The University is planning to introduce fully online registration in 2018, probably using the University of Johannesburg system. Having to think about moving to online registration has helped the University improve its business processes.

Progression and readmission refusal

At the end of each year, the MIS is used to analyse the performance of every student and to apply progression and exclusion rules. Lists of students who are not making satisfactory progress are sent to faculties. The University uses the general rule (Rule 26) for exclusion of students. According to this rule, a student should complete their studies within no more than minimum time plus two years. Furthermore, a student may only fail a particular module twice and may not be allowed to register for the third time without satisfactory progress. During the interviews, staff indicated that many students progress too slowly.

Pass rates in gateway courses

The University has an important structure, the Examination Commission, which considers the examination process, analysis of results, and overall performance in examinations. The analysis of results is conducted at faculty level, before being tabled at the Executive Committee of Senate. The system for identifying at risk modules has been automated; it is based on a number of factors, including pass rate, headcount, and percentage pass rate over three years. Where large numbers of students fail a course, winter and/or summer schools are offered. In addition, each faculty needs to develop an improvement plan for at risk modules.

Throughput rates

The University is aware of challenges relating to throughput rates and one of the focus areas of CAE is the analysis of data to assist in understanding student progression; this includes full analysis of students' performance, both upon admission and within programmes.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

While admission requirements have recently been revised, reflection focusing specifically on the profile of students that the University admits and the programmes in place or the programmes it should offer, could be useful. This relates to the planned student monitoring and referral system (c.f. focus area 2), which the University is encouraged to implement. In addition to monitoring students during the semester, the panel suggests that the University create a tracking system that would track students' progress over their whole academic career. It seems that the annual MIS reports do this in a sense, but it would be useful to have a system where students and allocated faculty-based advisers can keep an eye on students' progress and intervene before they are at risk of exclusion. The University of KwaZulu Natal has an interesting ITS-based "robot" system, in which students' status is shown as green, amber or red throughout their programme, depending on their progression. When their status

changes from green to amber, a warning is triggered that goes to the student and the faculty counsellor.

The University has a Science Centre which is doing a good job in organising fairs at malls and in other regions, and bringing bright children and their teachers to campus to expose them to university and science careers. This could be extended to recruiting students for admission. The Science Centre could also provide links with feeder schools so that prospective students identify with the University and want to enrol at the University. The University of Pretoria, for example, targets grade 10 and 11 pupils from their feeder schools who are offered summer and winter schools to get them familiar with the University.

Curriculum advice provided to students is an area that the University could consider strengthening. While this might be especially important for students facing exclusion, it is also important that other students get advice regularly so that they can make informed decisions on modules/courses to enrol for. It was stated that staff sit with students at registration in first year; this practice could be extended to the other years and more regularly, especially for students not progressing as they should. In addition, students who are struggling might be advised to take a lighter credit load.

6. SUMMARY

The University of Limpopo is taking a coordinated and considered approach to improvements through the development of its strategic plan, UL2020, annual performance plans, and multiple levels of planning, monitoring and reporting, which includes all structures in the University. Many positive steps, projects and interventions have already been started and are gaining momentum. A number of successful initiatives have been described earlier in this document, and suggestions for further development have been made. Several specific areas are highlighted below.

With respect to enhancing academics as teachers, the panel noted that a short induction programme is in place. The panel would like to urge UL to consider extending this to a one year induction, with modules completed earning credits towards a postgraduate diploma in Higher Education. The collaboration with the Universities of Venda and the Witwatersrand in developing a PGDipHE is commendable. Furthermore, during induction academic staff could develop teaching portfolios as an initial means to reflect on their teaching, which could later be built upon for promotions and performance appraisal.

Another aspect of the quality of teaching, which could be linked to the induction period, is to introduce student and peer feedback and evaluations. These should be developmental (not judgemental) in nature. Young staff could then be encouraged to create a plan which enables participation in the performance development system, linked, as they progress, to confirmation and promotion. These development plans should include teaching evaluations

(student), teaching portfolios (and reflections) and peer reviews (including external examiners).

Further development in regard to recognising excellence and contributions to teaching could involve identifying candidates for promotion to full professor level; this would have to involve scholarly activity and active publication in the SOTL arena. Provision could be made for teaching sabbaticals, with staff having the opportunity to engage in various activities, such as producing curriculum documents, teaching innovations (including e-learning) or new insights into teaching within disciplines. The School of Education provides a good example of supporting lecturers, and this could be strengthened and broadened across UL.

Mention was made of the challenges of retaining staff. UL could consider facilitating dual career searches (in collaboration with Polokwane employers) to attract couples. This is a practice that is gaining popularity internationally. Another way to retain staff is to allow the possibility for staff to be part time but permanent for a period, such as when they have young children or need to care for elderly parents.

The University has a very strong culture of volunteerism, which is wonderful, and should be encouraged and supported. The Students Mentorship Programme is exemplary, and should be shared with the sector. The proposed further development into the Baditi Student Support Programme, with its explicit link to traditional African practices, looks set to be very interesting. While the mentors are currently recognised through gala dinners, the University could consider recording this, and other appropriate student activities, such as tutoring and involvement in student leadership, in a co-curricular transcript. The inclusion of these activities in a formal transcript adds to students' CVs and can increase their employability. NMU provides an example of how this can be done.

Initial steps have been taken to set up a monitoring and referral system to identify and support students at risk of failing. The panel encourages the University to make this system operational in all faculties as soon as possible. Care needs to be taken to ensure that at risk students are referred for appropriate support early enough in the semester that failure can be prevented, and that they are followed up. In addition, the University is encouraged to set up a system to track individual students during their whole academic programme, and intervene as soon as their progression is too slow.

The physical setting of the University is beautiful, with many open spaces. The University has been creative in turning some of these areas into learning spaces. Increasing roll-out of Wi-Fi will enable more such spaces to be created. In addition, the University is encouraged to identify indoor spaces that could possibly be utilised as learning spaces for both individual students and groups of students.

The use of Blackboard has expanded rapidly, and the panel suggests that this trend be continued, with an increase in the use of the interactive features of Blackboard. The APN that UL negotiated with Vodacom is innovative; if it can be extended to students then more

use can be made of blended learning. This may, at least in part, reduce the need for large lectures (and large lecture venues), and allow for more interactive forms of teaching and learning.

Enrolment management seems to be done in an efficient and effective way. The planned introduction of online registration will make registration processes more efficient. Steps to address pass rates in gateway courses are notable. In addition, the panel encourages the University to investigate what other reasons there may be for the reported slow progress of many students.

The impression conveyed to the panel during the visit was of a University with committed staff that cares about it students. Student participants in the interviews echoed this sentiment. There was a sense of cohesion across the institution and its various levels. The panel commends the University for its many achievements and for its commitment to bringing about improvements for the benefit of its students, and wishes it well in its future endeavours.

APPENDIX: Programme

PROGRAMME FOR INSTITUTIONAL VISIT BY CHE PEER EVALUATORS

26 OCTOBER 2016

1	Senior Management	08h30 – 09h30	Council Chambers, 4th Floor
2	Focus Area 1 **Members:** Prof R.N. Madadzhe: Executive Dean: Humanities Dr R.S. Maoto: Director: School of Education Dr K. Masha: Director: Centre for Academic Excellence	09h45 – 10h50	East Wing Boardroom 3rd Floor
3	Focus Area 2 **Members** Prof R.N. Madadzhe: Executive Dean: Humanities Dr R.S. Maoto: Director: School of Education Dr K. Masha: Director: Centre for Academic Excellence Dr M. Mogane: Director: Centre for Student Counselling and Development Ms G. Manamela: Senior Psychologist: Centre for Student Counselling and Devopment Ms L. Madileng: Psychologist: Centre for Student Counselling and Development Ms M. Thosago: Academic Development Practitioner: Centre for Academic Excellence	11h00 – 12h20	East Wing Boardroom 3rd Floor
4	Lunch	12h30 – 13h00	West Wing Boardroom 3rd Floor
5	Focus Area 3 **Members:** Prof H.J. Siweya: Executive Dean: Science and Agriculture	13h10 – 14h30	East Wing Boardroom 3rd Floor

	Prof L. Mampuru: Director: School of Molecular and Life Sciences Ms M.M. Chuene: Executive Director: Library and Information Services Dr M.A. Ngoepe: Director: Quality Assurance Dr F. Rahimi: Director: E-Learning		
6	Focus Area 4 **Members:** Prof P.F.S. Mulder: Director: Institutional Planning Dr M.A. Ngoepe: Director: Quality Assurance Prof H.J. Siweya: Executive Dean: Science and Agriculture	14h35 – 15h50	East Wing Boardroom 3rd Floor
7	Senior Management Feedback Members: Prof M.N. Mokgalong: Vice Chancellor & Principal Prof M.M. Sibara: Deputy Vice Chancellor (Teaching and Learning) Prof J. Singh: Deputy Vice Chancellor (Research, Innovation and Partnerships) Prof R.N. Madadzhe: Executive Dean: Humanities Prof H.J. Siweya: Executive Dean: Science and Agriculture Prof P.F.S Mulder: Director: Institutional Planning Dr M.A. Ngoepe: Director: Quality Assurance Prof L.J. Mampuru: Director: School of Molecular and Life Sciences Dr R.S. Maoto: Director: School of education Mrs K. Chuene: Executive Director: Library Mr G. Ledwaba: Acting Executive Director: ICT Dr K. Masha: Centre for Academic Excellence Mr M.A. Tloti: Assistant Registrar: Registrar Office	16h00	Council Chambers, 4th Floor