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**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

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4. DEPARTMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION AND TRAINING PUBLICATIONS
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<td>APS</td>
<td>Admission Points Score</td>
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<td>CHE</td>
<td>Council on Higher Education</td>
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<td>CPD</td>
<td>Continuous Professional Development</td>
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<td>DoE</td>
<td>Department of Education</td>
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<td>FYE</td>
<td>First Year Experience</td>
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<td>HDI</td>
<td>Historically Disadvantaged Institution</td>
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<td>HE</td>
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<td>HEQC</td>
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<td>Higher Education Data Analyzer</td>
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<td>ICT</td>
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<td>ITS</td>
<td>Integrated Tertiary Software</td>
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<td>LMS</td>
<td>Learner Management System</td>
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<td>NBT</td>
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<td>Open and Distance Learning</td>
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<td>Personal development plan</td>
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<td>PG Dip (HE)</td>
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<td>QEF</td>
<td>Quality Enhancement Framework</td>
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<td>RPL</td>
<td>Recognition of Prior Learning</td>
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<td>SI</td>
<td>Supplemental Instruction</td>
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<td>Service Learning</td>
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<td>SoTL</td>
<td>Scholarship of Teaching and Learning</td>
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<td>TA</td>
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<tr>
<td>VLE</td>
<td>Virtual learning environment</td>
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<td>WIL</td>
<td>Work-integrated Learning</td>
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**UNIVERSITIES**

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<td>Nelson Mandela University</td>
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<td>North-West University</td>
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In 2014 the Council on Higher Education (CHE) decided to engage in a Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) with all 23 universities in South Africa (there were 23 higher education institutions (HEIs) at the time; there are now 26). This was done against the background of a growing realisation in the public higher education sector that a range of factors potentially impeded institutions of higher learning from producing the type and quality of higher education required in South Africa in the 21st century. These factors were the massification of higher education, the influx of cohorts of students from divergent backgrounds with diverse levels of knowledge and skills, an aging population of academics, the various technological challenges and opportunities of the present era, continuing social, educational and economic inequalities, and a receding economy.

The reconfiguration and resultant transformation of higher education in South Africa since 2004 provided another rationale for the QEP. It was found necessary, a decade after the restructuring exercise, to reflect on the quality of teaching and learning that was taking place in the universities. The purpose of the exercise was for HEIs to take stock of the extent to which student access and student success are being placed at the centre of each HEI’s actual practices, functions and structures. Despite the significant transformation of the HE landscape in 2004, the effects of apartheid policies and practices still linger and are most acutely felt by the historically disadvantaged institutions (HDIs).

The focus of the CHE’S QEP was on an evaluation of what individual institutions had achieved in order to enhance the quality of student learning. This was done with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable, as formulated by the CHE in its 2014 document for the QEP, *Framework for the Institutional Quality Enhancement in the Second Period of Quality Assurance*. The purpose was to identify those institutional traits that make universities learning organisations in which a culture of continuous learning and development is established and nurtured.

Phase One of the QEP was formally launched in 2014. All 23 HEIs participated in the three-year project. Deputy vice-chancellors responsible for teaching and learning in each HEI assumed responsibility for all QEP institutional activities and processes and were the points of contact between the CHE and the universities.

The 2014 framework identified four focus areas for the QEP:

*Focus Area One:* Enhancing academics as teachers;
*Focus Area Two:* Enhancing student support and development;
*Focus Area Three:* Enhancing the learning environment;
*Focus Area Four:* Enhancing course and programme enrolment management.

Each institution was required to provide a baseline submission to the CHE in 2014 of the current state of its quality assurance in respect of teaching and learning. The CHE provided a content analysis of the 23 baseline submissions in 2015. Following extensive participation in
CHE-initiated consultative and coordinating activities, each institution then presented to the CHE a comprehensive report on how it had sought, or would seek, to enhance the quality of its teaching and learning in respect of each of the four focus areas. These reports were provided to the CHE in 2015/2016. In 2016 panels appointed by the CHE and functioning under the auspices of the CHE visited each institution to discuss with colleagues its quality-related teaching and learning activities as described in their respective reports and to engage with them on what was required – and what inhibited them - from enhancing the quality of their teaching and learning. Each HEI was then presented in 2017 with a feedback report based on the reviews conducted by each of the panels.

This Synthesis Report is a comprehensive documentation of the QEP. It analyses and captures the results of the project and, in a concluding chapter, makes 44 findings for consideration by the HE sector.

Overall, very satisfactory progress is being made throughout the sector in addressing and embedding improvements in the four focus areas at institutional level. As a result of the QEP, genuine effort has been and is being made to put in place policies, strategies and/or plans to institutionalise practices and enhance the teaching and learning environment.

The four focus areas are discussed in detail in Chapters Two-Five of this Synthesis Report.

FOCUS AREA ONE: ENHANCING ACADEMICS AS TEACHERS

This focus area interrogated a range of matters intimately linked to providing a conducive institutional environment in which academics can flourish as teachers alongside their other responsibilities (research, community engagement, institutional participation). Matters considered included the presence of an institutional commitment to teaching and learning, continuous professional development of academics, workload, performance appraisals and teaching excellence awards.

An institutional commitment to teaching and learning was apparent from institutional vision and mission statements and strategies related to teaching and learning, efforts made to raise the profile of teaching and learning (as opposed to prioritising research), the presence of senior positions and of committees dedicated to teaching and learning in faculties, schools or campuses and the level of authority they have.

Continuous professional development (CPD) of academics was found to be best conducted within dedicated (central and faculty-based) units for teaching and learning which implement systematic CPD that distinguishes between context-specific and discipline-specific professional development and creates opportunities for the development of academic leadership.

The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) was found to be an important research-based tool to promote the professionalization of teaching and learning and to embed teaching and learning as a natural component of being an academic.
Induction practices (which differ substantially between institutions) were found to be an important component of CPD, particularly those that provide for the development of teaching portfolios, for mentoring and peer support and include part-time and temporary staff.

Other important findings in respect of Focus Area One included the desirability of developing workload models for academics and of having a legitimate institutional performance appraisal system to develop academics and measure their performance.

Nine findings are made in Chapter Six in respect of Focus Area One.

FOCUS AREA TWO: ENHANCING STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

This focus area demanded reflection on a number of aspects that impact on providing students with access to higher education and with support that will ensure their eventual success. The huge increase in student numbers was not accompanied by a concomitant increase in the resources (financial, physical and human) available to HEIs. The increase in student dropouts and low graduation rates, as well as the search for means to adapt to the demand created by the huge influx of students, led to the establishment of student support and development structures and systems in HEIs, covering a wide range of student-centred activities.

The demand for social justice in higher education is most prevalent in this focus area. It is incumbent upon all HEIs to provide the means and opportunities for students from poor and disadvantaged backgrounds to be given the support they need to gain access to university and to eventually succeed in their studies. Many HEIs simply lack the requisite resources, which is a major sectoral problem.

Much attention was paid in this focus area to the support provided to identify and support students who are at risk of failure. This includes early-warning systems and the tracking and referral of such students for dedicated support. Most institutions recognise the need for blanket support to first-year students and have adopted and adapted the First Year Experience (FYE) model employed by some institutions.

Reflection also occurred in respect of both academic and non-academic support and development. It is apparent that the project has yielded many successes (from both a qualitative and quantitative perspective) across the sector in further enhancing student development and support to the benefit of all students. The improvements have not, however, been even, since many institutions lack the resources required to provide all of the services and all of the students’ needs and, in some, managerial skills and capacity is lacking. Despite some positive indicators, it is too early to determine conclusively whether the enhanced student support and development initiatives of the last number of years has had an impact on the poor graduation rates in the sector.

Eleven findings are made in Chapter Six in respect of Focus Area Two.
FOCUS AREA THREE: ENHANCING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

In the area of enhancing the learning environment, the merits of collaboration and coordination have been found to be pre-eminent. It was also found that another major contributing factor is the adoption of a teaching and learning eco-system, in which financial resources, physical and virtual spaces and an institution’s human capital are optimally combined and embedded within a versatile planning document such as a campus master plan.

Attention was focussed on the optimal and creative use of teaching and learning spaces, in the absence of resources for new build (and for proper maintenance) and in order to adapt to the demands of blended learning. Blended learning, an important means to improve the nature and amount of learning that takes place in a massified student setting, demands the creation of virtual spaces (including wi-fi ‘hot-spots’) for teaching and learning, best implemented through the constructive use of learner management systems (LMSs), on the back of wide-ranging broadband and wireless connectivity on campus and beyond, and access to personal mobile devices. Here, too, scarcity of resources and deep-seated systemic inequalities has led to uneven implementation among HEIs, which negatively impacts on learning capabilities at many institutions. It was also widely recognised that the library is no longer a mere repository of research-related information, but is a vital teaching and learning space to complement formal teaching and learning.

Fifteen findings are made in Chapter Six in respect of Focus Area Three.

FOCUS AREA FOUR: ENHANCING COURSE AND PROGRAMME ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT

Focus area four required reporting and reflection on institutional strategies, policies and praxis in respect of the recruitment, selection, placement, admission and registration of students and on the processes involved in academic exclusions and re-admission appeals.

It was found that central to enrolment management is a system that manages information in such a way that institutions are able to plan for student enrolments within the context of available resources. DHET sets enrolment targets for each institution with reference to its size and shape by study level and main field of study. These targets need to be unbundled by each institution into targets for each qualification offered by the institution and students need to be effectively channelled into fit-for-purpose programmes. This process demands a level of managerial, strategic and systemic expertise that is lacking in many HEIs. As this unbundling exercise goes to the heart of the recruitment, selection, placement and admission processes, it is the quality of the academic enterprise itself which is at risk if these structural deficiencies in most institutions are not adequately addressed at sectoral level.

Nine findings are made in Chapter Six in respect of Focus Area Four.
CHAPTER ONE

GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND INSTITUTIONAL ENGAGEMENT WITH THE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT (QEP)

1. THE INSTITUTIONAL LANDSCAPE

Prior to 1994, race, language and conceptions about the nature of knowledge were the major determinants of the division of HEIs in South Africa. This had two major consequences: firstly, the South African higher education system was divided into two mutually exclusive types of institutions: universities and technikons; and secondly, eight different government departments controlled the institutions in these categories. There were thus White Afrikaans-medium universities, White English medium universities, African universities for the various ethnic groups, an Indian university and a university for Coloureds. The same pattern was followed to categorise the technikons.

The roles and cultures of universities in contemporary South Africa relate quite directly to the history of White political, economic and cultural domination. Higher education still reflects to a high degree the history of unequal relations of power perpetuated throughout the colonial and apartheid era.

In December 2002, the Ministry of Education published its proposals for the transformation and restructuring of the country’s higher education institutional landscape (DoE, 2002). Subsequent legislation mandated the mergers and incorporations of the public HEIs. This resulted in the consolidation of universities and technikons into 11 traditional universities, six ‘comprehensive’ universities and six universities of technology. Two new universities have since been established, one in the Northern Cape Province (Sol Plaatjie University) and one in Mpumalanga Province (University of Mpumalanga). The demerger of the University of Limpopo at the end of 2013 gave birth to a new reconfigured institution for allied health sciences called Sefako Makgato Health Sciences University, located on the erstwhile Medical University of Southern Africa premises. The end result is that, whereas prior to December 2002, higher education comprised 36 institutions of higher learning (21 universities and 15 technikons), there are now 26 HEIs.

The mergers and incorporations were to be implemented in parallel with the other four policy goals and objectives outlined in the National Plan for Higher Education published in 2001: increasing access, promoting equity, ensuring institutional diversity through mission and programme differentiation and building high-level research capacity. The mergers and incorporations resulted in radical organisational changes to South Africa’s higher education landscape and system. The scope was significant – involving by far the majority of HEIs, many separate educational ‘cultures’ (universities, technikons, historically advantaged, Black, English, etc), thousands of employees, hundreds of programmes and qualifications and multiple information and communication systems.

It has been 14 years since the first mergers and incorporations took place in January 2004. As such, there is now sufficient data that would enable a comprehensive assessment of progress made towards the major goals of the mergers and incorporations.
The achievement of the national goals for all these mergers and incorporations is a national imperative. Except for the University of Limpopo merger, which was dissolved at the end of 2013, all the other mergers and incorporations have survived the teething challenges and are now on course to fulfilling the national objectives set out in the founding documents for mergers and incorporations.

2. THE QEP PROCESS

2.1 Introduction

Higher education systems are intrinsically complex. Many interlinking factors influence the size and shape of the system as well as the intended outcomes. The HE landscape in South Africa and elsewhere has been undergoing rapid changes for some time.

Even apart from the merger and incorporation complexities referred to above, the current massification of higher education, the influx of cohorts of students from divergent backgrounds with diverse levels of knowledge and skills, an aging population of academics, the various technological challenges and opportunities of the present era, continuing social, educational and economic inequalities, and a receding economy, have all placed great demands on universities with respect to the delivery of quality higher education. In the 2013 White Paper: Building an expanded, effective and integrated post-school education, DHET highlighted the present and future expectations of the higher education sector as follows:

*Participation rates in universities are expected to increase from the current 17.3 per cent to 25 per cent, that is, from just over 937 000 students in 2011 to about 1.6 million enrolments in 2030. As participation increases, universities must simultaneously focus their attention on improving student performance.*

In light of this, many HEIs have come to realise that they might not be optimally equipped to respond appropriately to current challenges and to those still to come.

Traditionally, and to a considerable extent, higher education tended to centre around the construction and transfer of discipline-based knowledge. Consequently, the pedagogical aspects of teaching and learning did not have a primary place in the thinking, planning and functioning of HEIs. However, the changes in the HE sector in this country since 2004 have compelled the DHET and universities to reflect on their aims, structure, functions and practices, such that both student access and student success are placed at the centre of the HE sector’s thinking and functioning.

This has resulted in universities crafting for themselves identities characterised by the greater or lesser extent to which teaching and learning enjoys primacy in their academic ethos. Some predominantly focus on teaching and learning; others elect to adopt an academic identity characterised by a focus on teaching and learning complemented by a focus on discipline-based research. Only a few institutions identify themselves as primarily research-intensive universities. The rationale for these choices can largely be ascribed to the history and context of individual universities.
Regardless of these choices in identity, all HEIs have the mandate to provide undergraduate programmes, and thus, given the current challenges in the sector, this calls for all HEIs to consider and, where needed, (re)conceptualise the way they offer educational programmes. This is a developmental and continuous process that requires universities to re-appraise their higher order functions, their vision and mission statements, their strategic direction, and their institutional structures and policies, to support the continued enhancement of the quality of their offerings. For quite some time, the HE sector has been grappling with these issues, which has led to many commendable initiatives in the field of teaching and learning.

2.2 Conceptualisation and implementation of the QEP

In the first period of quality assurance in South Africa, from 2004 to 2011, the CHE conducted individual institutional audits with all public and selected private higher education institutions (HEIs). This first quality assurance period began as institutional mergers were taking place. It was very important for the CHE to work with institutions individually to ensure that mechanisms for quality assurance were in place and operational.

Towards the end of this period, an external evaluation of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and discussions with the higher education sector led to a decision to focus on improving teaching and learning in the second period of quality assurance. The need for this was highlighted in the National Development Plan (NDP) and statistics that showed that only about half of entering students were completing their qualifications. After an extended period of consultation, the CHE formulated the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) as a five-year project to work with all HEIs simultaneously to improve student success.

The CHE launched the QEP in 2014. The focus in the first phase of the QEP was on the enhancement of student learning with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable (CHE QEP Framework, 2014). To this end, four focus areas were identified in the QEP Framework for extensive analysis and information-sharing:

*Focus Area One:* Enhancing academics as teachers;
*Focus Area Two:* Enhancing student support and development;
*Focus Area Three:* Enhancing the learning environment;
*Focus Area Four:* Enhancing course and programme enrolment management.

Phase One of the QEP formally commenced in 2014, following a year of preparation which involved all 23 public HEIs in South Africa then in existence. Each institution was required to provide a baseline submission to the CHE in 2014 on the current state of its quality assurance in respect of teaching and learning. The CHE provided a content analysis of the 23 baseline submissions in 2015. Following extensive participation in CHE-initiated consultative and coordinating activities, each institution then presented to the CHE a comprehensive report on how it had sought, or would seek, to enhance the quality of its teaching and learning in respect of each of the four focus areas. These reports were provided to the CHE in 2015/2016. In 2016 panels appointed by the CHE and functioning under the auspices of the CHE visited each institution to discuss with colleagues its quality-related teaching and learning activities as described in their respective reports and to engage with them on what was required – and
what inhibited them - from enhancing the quality of their teaching and learning. Each HEI was then presented in 2017 with a feedback report based on the reviews conducted by each of the panels.

A number of role-players were involved in the processes which unfolded in the period 2014-2016. At institutional level, the deputy vice-chancellors responsible for teaching and learning assumed responsibility for all QEP institutional activities and processes and were the points of contact between the CHE and the universities. For the QEP processes to yield the desired outcomes, there had to be commitment from the various stakeholders in the institutions and in the sector. The 2017 peer review panels reported that ‘the impression conveyed to the various panels during the visits was of universities with committed staff that care about their students. Student participants in the interviews echoed this sentiment. There was a sense of cohesion across the institutions and their various divisions’. The various panels further commended the universities for their many achievements and for their commitment to bringing about improvements for the benefit of their students.

It is important to note that all 23 HEIs were fully engaged with the QEP from the start in 2014, and participated actively until Phase One was concluded in 2016. Institutions participated in all the activities related to the QEP and coordinated by the CHE during this period. These included numerous supporting workshops and symposia (QEP Inkundla, March 2014; QEP Institutional Workshop, March 2015; Assessing Pedagogical Competence Workshop, June 2015), numerous DVC (Academic) Forum meetings with the CHE, and a CHE organised study visit to Scotland in September-October 2015, to observe the Scottish Quality Enhancement Programmes in action. These activities played a critical role in this three-year QEP journey as they created opportunities for South African HEIs to dialogue and exchange ideas on how best to create conducive environments for teaching and learning activities to thrive at diverse institutions.

Also, the QEP processes created opportunities for institutions to approach quality assurance/enhancement activities in a more nuanced, holistic manner which involved many diverse key stakeholders throughout university campuses. A ‘whole team’ approach was adopted throughout the system, to ensure that all relevant individuals and/or offices (faculties, registry, student affairs, financial services, staff development and academic development structures, institutional planning, etc) were involved in the collation of relevant data related to teaching and learning activities in their respective divisions. This intimate involvement with the QEP processes ensured that everyone in the teaching and learning domain was exposed to the critical roles each played in the daily academic life of every student enrolled at their respective institutions.

As mentioned earlier, each institution consulted widely throughout the QEP process. It is noteworthy that this ‘team work’ approach included many senior members of management. During the CHE peer review visits to institutions, vice-chancellors and principals formed part of the university delegation at 15 of the 22 institutions visited. Deputy vice-chancellors (academic) were intimately involved in the QEP processes as key drivers of the project at all the institutions.

It is important to note that student participation in the QEP processes varied widely from one institution to another. An examination of the 2014 and 2015 institutional submissions and reports and of the 2017 peer review reports reveals that, except for some institutions, formal
student participation in the QEP processes was inconsistent and in some cases totally lacking. Although 10 institutions reported active student participation in 2014 and in 2015, these institutions were not necessarily the same in both instances. Seven institutions reported no active student participation in 2014 and 2015. Students were, however, well represented in the institutional delegations that met with the peer review groups in late 2015 and during the course of the 2016 academic year.

The inclusive nature of the QEP processes and the ‘teamwork’ approach adopted by all institutions in dealing with quality issues was noted earlier. It is thus disappointing to find that student participation at some institutions was not valued as such. Less than a quarter of the 23 institutions involved in the QEP made sure that students were represented at every step of the way during this QEP journey. At UP and at UKZN, active student participation in the QEP processes was ubiquitous across campuses and throughout committee structures and in the final review process.

All the institutions indicated that they place a high premium on attaining and maintaining quality teaching and learning in order to ensure success of their students in the various academic programmes. This institutional imperative is often reflected as one of the goals in the institutions’ strategic plans.

Overall, it appears that very satisfactory progress is being made throughout the sector in addressing and embedding improvements in the four focus areas at institutional level. Indeed, following the peer review group visits there was consensus that the QEP has significantly raised the profile of teaching and learning throughout the sector. Genuine effort has been made and is being made to put in place policies, strategies and/or plans to institutionalise practices and enhance the teaching and learning environment.

3 CONTEXTUAL CONSTRAINTS TO THE ENHANCEMENT OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Context in the case of HEIs matters, as it plays a critical role in defining the profile and character of the institution. The history, geographical location, as well as the availability of human and financial resources, affect the institution’s ability to deliver on its mandate of teaching and learning, research and community engagement, in areas such as staff retention, housing and a decent salary. Leadership and administrative and governance processes, too, matter. Regular changes in leadership at some institutions result in differing strategic visions, organisational restructuring and financial outlays.

In the 2014 QEP institutional submissions, all 23 HEIs gave a brief description of the features of the institutional context that were seen as most salient to the success or failure of their students. The 2015 QEP institutional reports indicated that some institutions have been able to deal with some of the contextual institutional constraints which may have been occasioned by mergers, institutional culture and geographical location.

There were five main categories of contextual features that were raised by the various institutions (2015 CHE report).

3.1 Multiple campuses
Sixteen universities were created by means of institutional mergers in 2004 and 2005, which brought together many campuses spread across cities and provinces. Some of these campuses are separated by relatively long distances geographically, and at the time of the mergers had significantly different student populations, programme profiles and campus cultures. Following the mergers, a number of institutions raised the multi-campus structures as a feature that impacts student success (2015 CHE report). Equitable distribution of infrastructure, facilities and resources throughout the various campuses will still take some time to achieve.

3.2 Institutional cultures

Culture is a dynamic concept, in which the past and the present, and the individual and the collective, interact. Culture refers to more than just norms and values, because it is embedded within everyday actions, much of which are sub-conscious. Although HEIs have been undergoing rapid change in the past decade or so, the pace of transforming institutional cultures has been slow. HEIs need to develop strategic or holistic approaches to institutional culture transformation issues to implement strategies that move widening participation away from marginal projects, to being integrated throughout the institution’s activities.

Institutional culture also impacts staff-student relations, in particular those related to teaching, learning and assessment. The culture of the institution does much to shape these interactions, as do those of the individuals involved. The QEP institutional submissions and reports show that some institutions still battle with old traditions and practices which militate against steps that need to be taken in order to improve students’ performance.

3.3 Socio-economic considerations

South Africa is a relatively rich African country with a highly skewed wealth distribution and a highly impoverished African population. Education is an important vector of smart growth, sustainable development, and economic competitiveness. Higher education plays an important catalytic role in human capital development, and ensures a better life for all. Economic factors are important in understanding sub-standard student performance and non-completion of studies. In addition, family circumstances place heavy demands on those who have been able to enter HEIs; such demands have the potential to impact negatively on students’ performance.

The 2014 and 2015 QEP institutional submissions and reports commented on how different institutions deal with the numerous socio-economic factors which affect student performance, retention and completion of studies, from poverty alleviation projects to low fee structures.

3.4 Institutional facilities and capacity

The massive reconfigurations of HEIs in the last 15 years has involved expansion in the number of facilities and infrastructure to accommodate previously excluded and disadvantaged student populations. The university expansion has been driven by national development plans which seek to urgently provide high quality education to large, previously underprivileged
communities. One of the biggest challenges facing the transformation of HEIs is the need for capacity building in many areas. This includes an urgent need for both new campus developments and the maintenance of existing ones. Given that most of the institutions are resident universities, there is high demand for board and lodging facilities throughout the sector. Educationally, it requires producing a new generation of staff and students equipped to deal with the unique challenges of the 21st century.

3.5 Location

Although the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and various HE policy documents state that all students should have access to the same quality of learning and teaching, similar facilities and equal educational opportunities, the legacy of the past means this is not yet the case. Many HDIs, particularly those located in the former homelands and in rural areas, struggle with real difficulties, such as the lack of adequate lecture halls, lack of student accommodation, poor access to services such as water and electricity, and, until recently, erratic internet connectivity. Many of these challenges are linked to socio-economic factors, such as poverty and unemployment, and they also have a direct influence on the quality of higher education available to the students. These institutions also struggle to attract, recruit and retain properly qualified individuals, be they managers or academics or technical staff.

4 CROSS-CUTTING GOVERNANCE FINDINGS OF THE QEP

4.1 HEIs as learning organisations

In order to engage meaningfully with the ongoing developmental process stimulated by the QEP, universities need to refocus their being and see themselves as learning organisations ready for transformation. This will greatly assist individual universities and the HE sector in its entirety, to meet the current challenges of higher education. This entails that individual universities, and the HE sector as a whole, need to establish a culture of continuous learning and development, which is made explicit in its vision, mission and values; which is conceptualised in its academic identity and shared by the university’s community as a whole; which is explicitly worked out in its strategies, including those for teaching and learning, and is supported and guided by its policies and structures; which promotes both individual and group learning; and which is operationalised, testing its assumptions and transforming new knowledge into actions based on its evaluations.

From the QEP institutional submissions/reports, it is clear that some HEIs (e.g., DUT and SU) are on their way to integrating the idea of being a learning organisation in their strategic direction. They recognise that the enhancement of the role and practice of teaching is facilitated not only through structural dimensions such as strategy, policy and management, but, as importantly, through the development of an embedded culture that accords real value to the enhancement of academics as teachers.

4.2 Tension between centralised and devolved decision-making

Perusing the various reports pertaining to Phase One of the QEP, it is clear that in some institutions, tension exists between centralised direction-giving and autonomous decision-
making by, for instance, faculties/schools/campuses. Currently about one third of HEIs employs a devolved model of governance, or is in the process of developing such a model, where faculties/schools/campuses are expected - or are left - to make their own decisions regarding the implementation of institutional policies. Such a decentralised management model allows for a wide variation in practices among the entities that make up the university.

A devolution of authority may make it difficult to drive change from the centre in a coherent, deliberate and consistent manner; in some instances, this may lead to disjuncture between the university’s initiatives for change and the actual implementation and outcomes. At the same time, however, devolved governance models empower the leadership at faculty/school/campus level to implement strategies and frameworks that are appropriate for the different contexts and, as such, create real ownership at faculty level.

The QEP peer review reports suggest that in universities employing a devolved governance model, it is essential that key principles are mapped out in terms of the institution’s values and strategic goals, which can then be taken into faculties and departments. The explicit aim is to ensure clarity and coherence across the institution, and so to create an institutional culture across faculties/schools/campuses. A condition for this to happen is that an effective communication strategy is put in place between the central functions of the institution, ‘the hub’, and those functions situated in ‘the spokes’.

Even though there is a need for contextualisation in the different faculty/school/campus environments, generally, universities would benefit from consistency and coherence in the application of institutional policies and initiatives across faculties/schools/campuses. In addition, it will assist the institution if mandates are clear as to which processes and initiatives are centralised and which are devolved. Thus, if a devolved management model is implemented, such that the central, institutional position is clear and allowance is made for variation in faculties/schools/campuses, while adhering to institutional principles, values and policies, this generally creates buy-in and ownership at faculty/school/campus level. UWC presents as an example of such a management model.

4.3 Policies, strategies and frameworks to enhance teaching and learning

A close examination of the 2014 and 2015 QEP institutional submissions and reports detailing QEP activities in the four focus areas throughout the sector, reveals that these are undergirded, to a large extent, by prudent policies and practices in pursuit of the goals and objectives enshrined in the vision and mission statements of individual institutions. In a number of cases, these lofty goals are sometimes difficult to achieve because of a lack of sufficient resources (financial resources, physical infrastructure and the requisite human capital) – this is so in many if not all the HDIs.

It was also obvious from the various QEP institutional submissions and reports that a precondition for institutionalising a quality enhancement culture and activities in the teaching and learning environment throughout the sector, is undoubtedly the availability of institutional-level policies and strategies, appropriately qualified professionals and enabling frameworks.
4.4 Academic leadership of the enhancement of teaching and learning

Faculties are the main loci of engagement between the leadership of the institution and the leadership of the academic discipline. It follows that leadership at faculty level fulfils a crucial role in the university as a learning organisation. Such leadership demands competence in both governance and management.

Leaders should have the confidence to explore new opportunities while being assured that they are not going in a direction that will not be supported by the institution. Such a form of leadership is well suited to complex, changing and interdependent environments such as the HE sector.

Leaders at faculty (and school and department) level act as interpreters of the institution’s vision and strategy for the faculty, and as the driver of the implementation of the faculty’s plans in respect of the enhancement of teaching and learning. In the context of the increased emphasis on the enhancement of teaching and learning, faculty leadership is well-served by a dedicated driver of these processes to create coherence and sustainability, such as an assistant/deputy dean for teaching and learning, who has the academic stature and authority to provide faculty-specific leadership in teaching and learning.

4.5 Student participation in the enhancement of teaching and learning

The less than optimal active student participation in the QEP processes was disappointing for various reasons: How often is it said that students are generally not aware of the support facilities available to them at HEIs; who is best placed to monitor the impact of institutional efforts aimed at creating a conducive environment for teaching and learning; and who is most often least familiar with prevailing institutional cultures?

The DVC (Academic) Forum visit to Scotland in 2015 exposed the forum to what can be achieved in the area of teaching and learning, given appropriate collaborative working relationships between university staff, agencies such as the CHE and student leadership. The Scottish Quality Enhancement Framework (QEF) processes are predicated on the pivotal role played by students through their elected representatives. In the Scottish QEF, student leadership plays a central role in the promotion of quality throughout the Scottish higher education system, which comprises 19 HEIs. Consistent with the notion of students as a national partner in quality enhancement promotion activities, has been the encouragement ‘to move from an emphasis on an effective student engagement paradigm to one of engaging students as partners in their learning.’

The question is why a similar national approach has not been adopted for South African HEIs, with the CHE playing the leading role in this endeavour. The sector faces challenges with regard to student leadership participation in the teaching and learning discourse. The seemingly adversarial relationship which exists between student leadership and the management of HEIs needs to be transformed. This can only contribute to meaningful student learning experiences in institutions and will provide the very best student experience possible throughout the sector.
CHAPTER TWO
FOCUS AREA ONE: ENHANCING ACADEMICS AS TEACHERS

1. INTRODUCTION

The status and role of academics as university teachers are critical for quality higher education. After all, core to the quality of education is the quality of its teachers. Enhancing academics as teachers is a multifaceted endeavour which involves higher order, conceptual changes at the institutional level as well as structural changes and actual implementation ‘at the coal face’. Learning to teach is underpinned by social justice principles, thus not only to teach ‘better’, but to teach in the particular conditions and contexts in which higher education operates. A strong system of support is required to learn to teach, at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. This is best provided in an integrated manner, in the sense that it is informed by and informs the roles of research and community engagement.

Teaching is a scholarly activity, inquiry-focused and underpinned by relevant scholarly and disciplinary theory and knowledge. It involves elements of repetitive, practical activity, skills, management and reflection on emotions, as well as more cognitive and intellectual reasoning. Support for academics to ‘learn to teach’ includes all these domains and is best embedded within department- or discipline-based communities of practice. Apart from individualised learning to teach, an academic also develops expertise in teaching within a particular profession and in teaching as a profession in its own right.

In analysing the 2015/16 institutional reports, it is clear that the HE sector has made considerable shifts in its recognition of and dealing with the present changes and challenges in higher education, massification being one of these. Massification challenged the HE sector’s ability to accommodate the diversity of needs, skills and expectations of huge numbers of students.

In support of the HE sector’s growing need to engage with these challenges and, as a crucial part of this, with the professionalisation and professional development of academics in their role as university teachers, one of the four focus areas of Phase One of the QEP is ‘enhancing academics as teachers’. This focus is in line with the DHET White Paper Building an expanded, effective and integrated post-school system (2013), in which a call was made for a ‘focused renewal and expansion of the academic profession’, to ensure the long-term sustainability of HE in South Africa (DHET, 2013: 36).

Focus Area One includes such matters as professional development, reward and recognition, workload, conditions of service, and performance appraisal. To effect successful, sustainable change in these matters they need to be embedded in the structures, policies and practices
of the institution. Crucially, they need to be grounded in an institutional philosophy and identity, best articulated in vision and mission statements and in strategic plans, that embraces the centrality of teaching and learning and informs the structure, policies and practices of the institution.

2. INSTITUTIONAL COMMITMENT TO TEACHING AND LEARNING

It is important to develop an institution-wide framework for teaching and learning that reflects the mission, values and specialities of the institution and defines the objectives of teaching and the expected learning outcomes for students. All specific teaching and learning frameworks at department, school or programme level must be consistent with the institution-wide framework. In the development of such frameworks, the entire university community (full-time and part-time academics, researchers, teaching staff and students) should be involved, to create a sense of shared ownership.

2.1. Vision and mission statements

In the 2014 submissions 15 of the 23 universities made explicit mention of the need for the professionalisation and/or professional development (also called ‘academic development’) of their university teachers. The remaining eight universities also made reference to this issue, but in an implicit, more general manner.

The QEP Content Analysis document (CHE, 2015: 16) pointed out that ‘the conceptualisation of university teaching as a profession is not evident in most of the submissions’; also that policies and practices do not explicitly facilitate the enhancement of the teaching skills and attributes of academics (CHE, 2015: 16, 69, 97). For professional development to become part of an HEI’s ‘being’, the importance of teaching and learning, and consequently the need for enhancement of its university teachers, must be publicly espoused.

Clear evidence exists that this does in fact now happen. Of the current vision and mission statements of the 23 institutions, 19 have a vision and/or mission statement that publicly embraces the importance of teaching and learning in their institutions. Of the 19 institutions, six make an explicit statement in their vision and/or mission about the significance of staff development in the area of teaching and learning, and this is implied in the mission statements of the 13 other institutions.

2.2. Teaching and learning strategy

The generally-accepted notion of a teaching and learning strategy is that it sets out the university-wide priorities, plans and aspirations in learning and teaching to ensure the quality
and enhancement of the student learning experience. Such a strategy has to be aligned with the overall institutional strategy. From the 2015/16 and 2017 reports it is apparent that 21 HEIs have a teaching and learning strategy/plan/framework that is meant to operationalise objectives formulated in the institutional strategic plan. UCT additionally has a teaching charter which outlines the responsibilities of staff and students. Compared to the 2014 baseline submissions, in which only seven institutions explicitly mention having formulated a teaching and learning strategy, this is a remarkable shift.

2.3. Raising the profile of teaching and learning

Eleven HEIs explicitly mentioned in their 2014 submissions that a supportive culture or a conducive environment is critical to achieve excellence in teaching and learning, although only four provide detail on what this means in terms of the enhancement of academics as university teachers. In the 2014 baseline submissions only five institutions indicated the need to raise the status of teaching and learning in their institutions, an indication of good progress, therefore.

An analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that over the past few years there has been a growing realisation of the need to raise the status of teaching and learning, and, as a corollary, the professionalisation of academics as teachers. Many institutions have established an executive portfolio dedicated to teaching and learning. From a comparison of the 2014 submissions with the 2015/16 institutional reports, it appears that, whereas in 2014 eight universities had appointed a deputy vice-chancellor (vice-rector/deputy vice-principal) for teaching and learning, or equivalent, in 2016 this number had increased to 15 institutions. Furthermore, of the eight universities who maintain the post of DVC: Academic (and Research) responsible for the teaching and learning portfolio, this post was generally supported by a head - often a director - of a centre for teaching and learning in their prioritisation of the teaching and learning portfolio.

For a teaching and learning portfolio to lead to sustained and sustainable practices, it needs to be carried, promoted and supported by the management of the HEI in all tiers of the organisation.

2.4. Deputy deans for teaching and learning

In the context of the enhancement of teaching and learning, including professionalisation of university teachers, faculties need a dedicated driver of the processes associated with this. Such a function could be fulfilled by deputy (assistant/vice) deans for teaching and learning, who would, within the various tiers of the institution, have the academic stature and authority to provide faculty-specific leadership in teaching and learning.
In the 2014 submissions, six HEIs made mention of faculties/colleges/schools having established a dedicated position for an assistant/deputy dean of teaching and learning. One university with a college structure distinguished the functions of college deans of teaching and learning from school-based academic leaders of teaching and learning. Another HEI with multiple campuses had campus vice-rectors of teaching and learning responsible for this portfolio across the faculties making up the individual campuses.

By comparison, the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggest that 12 institutions have established positions for deputy (assistant/vice) deans of teaching and learning, although in some universities this seems to be implemented in only one faculty or in some, faculties. One institution has college deans of teaching and learning.

It seems axiomatic that in these portfolios excellence in teaching and learning, general and discipline-specific educational research, and enhancement of the teaching practice of university teachers, as well as student access and success, should be foregrounded.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports also indicate that in some universities, faculties have academic coordinators or faculty teaching and learning managers. It is not clear, however, whether these functions carry authority similar to the function of deputy deans.

The conclusion can be drawn that the institutional emphasis on the status of teaching and learning has increased inter alia through the appointment of drivers of teaching and learning at faculty level. This is not across the board, however. From the 2015/16 and 2017 reports it appears that currently only one UoT has established the position of a deputy dean of teaching and learning, that only two of the historically disadvantaged comprehensive universities have established this position, and that only one of the historically disadvantaged traditional universities has such a position in place.

Deputy deans for teaching and learning play a crucial role in raising the status of teaching in a faculty.

2.5. Committees of teaching and learning

According to the 2014 submissions, 16 HEIs had established Senate Teaching and Learning Committees (or equivalent); according to the 2015/16 and 2017 reports, this has now increased to 17 institutions. From these reports it is clear, however, that currently only two UoTs have a senate teaching and learning committee.
Senate teaching and learning committees carry the responsibility for the development and implementation of an institutional teaching and learning strategy, for facilitating faculty coherence in respect of teaching and learning and for interrogating institutional data and related learning analytics. In the light of the critical role senate teaching and learning committees play in setting and monitoring the institution’s teaching and learning agenda, all universities should have such a high-level, centrally-located teaching and learning committee.

Faculty teaching and learning committees reinforce alignment of the faculty’s plans and activities with the strategic direction of the institution and promote buy-in from academics ‘at the coal face’. The 2014 submissions indicate that eight HEIs had instituted faculty teaching and learning committees. Universities with a college/school- or school/faculty-based organisational structure mostly have teaching and learning committees for both. Such committees play an important role in the promotion of teaching and learning, by interrogating academics’ teaching performance, dealing with gateway courses and through implementation of ever-improved teaching methodologies.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports make mention of 10 universities having now instituted faculty teaching and learning committees (or equivalent) or formal teaching and learning forums (UCT has a unit in the Faculty of Commerce that supports professional learning and curriculum development). As far as could be ascertained from the 2014 submissions, none of the UoTs had established a faculty teaching and learning committee in 2014. Also in the later reports of 2015/16 and 2017 such committees were not evident.

These committees play an important role in contextualising the institution’s teaching and learning strategies for a faculty. They also have a complementary role in promoting the professionalisation of university teaching. Such roles are best fulfilled if there is central coordination of their activities.

3. PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

3.1 Introduction

DHET stated in its 2013 White Paper that ‘[a] focused renewal and expansion of the academic profession is vital for the long-term sustainability of high-quality public higher education in South Africa’ (2013: 36). The measures proposed a focus on, inter alia:

(i) improving the pipeline of academic staff;
(ii) ensuring that the qualifications of current academic staff are improved;
(iii) improving conditions of employment for academics in various ways, including addressing workloads and over-large class sizes where possible;
(iv) developing appropriate systems to better support and reward teaching in universities;
and
(v) supporting the development of lecturers’ teaching skills, within disciplines and
outside, requiring mentoring and co-teaching, and examining and developing teaching
practice on an ongoing basis.

These measures proposed by the DHET are well-aligned with Focus Area One of the QEP,
namely, the enhancement of academics as teachers, and its sub-foci, professional
development, reward and recognition, workload, conditions of service and performance
appraisal (CHE, 2014: 7).

As mentioned in the CHE’s 2015 report, one way of categorising the activities that make up
professional development of academics as teachers, is to use the experience of academic staff
as a criterion, resulting in the following categories:

1. Induction on entering the profession with a focus on the teaching aspects of the
   profession;
2. continued professional development (CPD) activities that support the increased
   responsibilities as a teacher; and
3. scholarly engagement with teaching and learning.
   (CHE, 2015: 72)

Another way of looking at professional development is through the lens of incentives leading
to a career path that recognises and rewards excellence in teaching in combination with
scholarly approaches to and research in teaching and learning. This would then consider such
issues as:

1. Conditions of service;
2. criteria for performance appraisal and promotion;
3. recognition of excellence in teaching; and
4. criteria for the allocation of workload.

This is not a dichotomous division: institutionalised ‘incentives’ signal the institution’s
commitment to professional development and, thus, have the power to reinforce
professional development activities and initiatives.

Context is important in ascertaining the professional development needs of the university, a
faculty, a discipline and an individual. Professional development initiatives can be formal or
informal in nature and may comprise activities such as induction programmes, workshops,
scholarship of teaching and learning, seminars, symposia, short learning programmes, formal
programmes leading to a qualification, mentorships and peer support arrangements, and communities of practice.

3.2 Continuous professional development (CPD): system enhancement

An integrated system is needed to provide structure and support for CPD. CPD commences with the induction of an academic into the institution and continues throughout the individual’s institutional career. The importance of structured and supportive CPD within an institution is well captured in the 2015 CHE report:

*University teaching is a profession. As with any profession, university teachers need specific knowledge and skills in order to function effectively. And as with any profession, competence develops over time through a combination of formal and informal study, experience, participation in communities of practice and continuous professional development. In addition, professionals reflect on and in practice. All of these activities require time and therefore need to be catered for in determining workloads for academics. Performance appraisals need to hold academics accountable for the quality of their teaching, as well as providing opportunities for development. And academics need to be rewarded and recognised for their achievements as university teachers. Enhancing academics as teachers therefore requires alignment among policies and practices involving human resource departments, academics, heads of departments, deans and teaching and learning division staff.*

(CHE, 2015: 43)

The need for an integrated system is recognised by the HE sector. As stated earlier, in 2014 several HEIs expressed the need for an institutional strategy for professional development. Through such an integrated system both the institutional as well as individual needs of academic staff are taken care of.

Although the need for a CPD framework was recognised in 2014, it seems that none of the HEIs has implemented such a structure. An analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that, currently, the majority of HEIs are still in the process of developing an institutional framework that guides CPD, or have such a structure in place and have begun implementation. It must be noted that the exact number of HEIs that have such a framework in place could not be ascertained from a perusal of the reports submitted.

Providing opportunities for professional development of university teachers is no simple matter. For it to be sustainable, relevant and effective for the institution and the individual academics, it needs a multipronged, collaborative approach that considers the context, culture, discipline requirements and the individual needs of academics, developed over time and in an atmosphere of motivation and openness. Thus, it can be expected that a well-
designed professional development strategy or framework that integrates development activities with human resource development policies, and which includes appropriate incentives, encourages the continued participation of early career and mid-career academics as well as senior academics in activities aimed at the increased professionalisation of university teaching.

It must be noted here that often institutions have a suite of policies ‘doing the work’. These policies, however, are applied in the absence of an overarching CPD framework, one that integrates the institutional vision and values with strategic direction, the necessary human resource development policies, and the roles of central support units and faculties in professional development. On the strength of an overarching CPD framework, desired outcomes can be formulated, operational decisions can be taken, and the impact of the professional development activities can be evaluated.

A CPD framework contributes greatly to the professionalization of teaching and learning at a HEI.

3.3 Central units of teaching and learning

In many instances, CPD activities are located wholly or partly within central units of teaching and learning. The 2015 CHE report provides a useful summary of findings in respect of such centralised units:

While all, or nearly all, of the universities have a central structure for teaching and learning, there is great diversity in the extent to which there are discipline-specific teaching and learning-related structures. In addition, the roles and resourcing of central teaching and learning divisions differ greatly among institutions. The structure and resourcing of both central and discipline-based education development reflect an institution’s philosophy of the place, function and modus operandi of support for teaching and learning, even if it is not explicitly stated. At some universities the staff of the division of teaching and learning are on academic conditions of service and are expected to teach and do research, while at other universities they are categorised as support staff and work as education development consultants to academics in areas such as curriculum development, assessment, pedagogy and the use of educational technology. ... The existence and location of discipline-specific education development staff also varies. In one model an education consultant from the division of teaching and learning is assigned to work with a particular faculty, while remaining housed in the central division. In another model, faculties have their own education development units and staff. A third model involves releasing discipline-based staff on a part-time basis to work with both the central teaching and learning division and their academic departments. A fourth model involves appointing people to departments who have
both discipline and discipline-specific educational expertise and who are also linked to the division of teaching and learning.  
(CHE, 2015: 17)

A comparison of the findings of the 2015 CHE report with those of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports, indicates that the above summary remains valid. There continues to be a variety of support units tasked or assisting with professional development. An analysis of the latter reports suggests that in 10 institutions these units are part of an overarching academic development or teaching and learning structure comprising several specialised units working collaboratively. Additionally, 10 HEIs seem to have established units that combine professional development with student support. In respect of three institutions the structure and mandate of these support units could not be ascertained from the reports. The notion of regional structures to support teaching and learning has not yet been developed.

An important component of professional development is the design of learning material. A number of HEIs have instructional designers who are either centrally- or faculty-based. UFS has both an instructional designer and a technical developer in each faculty.

In universities with multiple central or faculty-based support units, the danger exists that the cohesion between the initiatives gets lost. Hence, the suggestion is made in the 2017 institutional feedback reports that, given the range of role players involved in providing professional academic staff development opportunities, much effort and commitment will be needed to create synergy between initiatives offered by the various support units and the faculties. Such a coordination could also involve the recording of and reporting on professional development activities. Also, as suggested in the 2017 institutional feedback reports, to boost professional development in HEIs with a devolved organisational structure, successful initiatives by faculty, college or campus-based support units/forums could be shared amongst faculties, colleges or campuses and, in so doing, may be introduced more systematically.

An analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that currently nine universities assign curriculum officers or teaching and learning experts to faculties. In some institutions they have been assigned to all faculties, while in others only to some faculties. CPUT has employed 80 department-based curriculum officers, who meet regularly as a community of practice. As was reported in the 2014 submissions, also at present, teaching and learning experts/curriculum officers may be involved in both teaching and curriculum development in some of the institutions.

The 2015/2016 and 2017 indicate that in many institutions staff in teaching and learning support units are employed on short-term contracts. As reported by several institutions, this
means that the turnover of such staff is potentially high. It is also apparent that in some institutions they enjoy academic conditions of service, whereas in most they are classified as support staff.

It is also apparent that some central units for teaching and learning, despite having a very small staff complement, have an extended mandate. It was reported that as there are too few discipline-based academics who can help lead teaching and learning activities in faculties, staff from the central units are in danger of becoming overstretched.

Considering the importance of these central units and the beneficial impact they have on professional development, and conceivably on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning (SoTL) output, it might be useful for the HE sector to consider establishing a third category of staff, in addition to academic and support staff, with bespoke conditions of service and career paths that signal their importance to the teaching and learning core of an institution. Given their crucial role in CPD, ideally they should be appointed into a professional staffing category and have permanent contracts or three-year contracts as a minimum. Again, the lack of promotion opportunities, career paths and staff development for professionals, who in most HEIs are classified as support staff, is a matter of sectoral concern.

3.4 Induction of newly-appointed academics

Systematic and appropriate induction of newly-appointed academics into teaching and learning in the current context of massified higher education is essential. However, as mentioned in the 2015 CHE report, in South Africa very few university teachers receive training in university teaching prior to being appointed as a lecturer, even though they are expected to be effective in the teaching-learning process in their disciplines. In fact, in many cases academics are merely appointed on the strength of their discipline-based knowledge.

An analysis of the 2014 submissions found that 21 universities had some form of induction or orientation programme for newly-appointed academics. Of these, eight institutions indicated that attendance was mandatory or part of the criteria for confirmation of appointment. Some HEIs stated that although participation was not compulsory, the programme was generally well-attended. Most institutions did not provide much detail, but generally induction programmes seemed to comprise two-five days’ block sessions and often a once-off activity. Eight universities indicated in their 2014 submissions that they had longer programmes, comprising any one or more of the following: a series of workshops or weekly meetings following upon the initial programme; a series of seminars and engagements; one or more class visit(s) followed by a discussion; a reflection session after six months; short learning programmes that were spread over a semester or year (and, in one case, over three years).
Five institutions mentioned the development of a teaching portfolio as part of the induction process. Some institutions mentioned the need for an induction programme to be aligned with the institution’s teaching and learning strategy and, thus, for it to be part of CPD.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports show that now all 23 institutions offer some form of induction programme to newly-appointed academics. Although some institutions continue to offer short once-off induction programmes, currently 16 universities have more extended orientation programmes. It was also found that nine institutions require a teaching portfolio to be completed during the induction period.

Mandatory participation in induction programmes and activities can be introduced by including this in the employment contract or conditions of service and linking this closely to probation. From a perusal of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports, it seems that currently 16 HEIs have made participation in an induction programme compulsory for newly-appointed academics or enforce it as part of the probation criteria. Of these, nine universities have explicitly linked compulsory participation in induction programmes to probation (in the 2014 submissions, only three HEIs explicitly linked induction to probation).

The 2015/16 reports indicate that in some institutions where the induction programme is not mandatory, the decision whether induction takes place and how, is left to the faculty/school/college. In other instances, heads of departments decide whether new staff will attend the programme.

Upon reading the 2015/16 institutional reports, it is not always clear whether the category ‘newly-appointed academic staff’ also includes experienced academics who are new to the institution. One institution makes participation in the induction programme mandatory for all academics appointed at lecturer level and below, while another exempts experienced lecturers from attending the induction programme. Yet another institution exempts senior lecturers and above on the strength of their teaching portfolio. Most institutions, however, do not elaborate on the category ‘newly-appointed academic staff’.

Exempting certain groups of lecturing staff, or not making participation in induction programmes compulsory, may well deprive new appointees of the necessary orientation into the institution’s culture and characteristics, its teaching and learning philosophy, and the practice of teaching and learning in the context of a specific discipline. It also deprives an institution of an opportunity for a learning exchange between the new appointee and the appointee’s department.
3.4.1 Generic and discipline-specific induction

The 2014 submissions showed that, generally, the induction programmes were offered by centres for teaching and learning (or equivalent), and, mostly, the induction programmes focused on institution-specific issues, and generic pedagogical approaches in higher education. Very few institutions mentioned discipline-specific induction activities, including mentoring. In 2014 some induction programmes were provided by and in faculties, which meant that discipline-specific and contextual aspects were integrated in the activities.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that the more extended induction programmes offered by 16 HEIs mostly comprised both general and discipline-related components. Eighteen institutions make particular mention of discipline-specific induction activities, such as mentoring and/or peer support, although, in HEIs with a more devolved management model, it is often the prerogative of individual faculties/schools/departments whether and how to offer induction (e.g., at Wits). This results in quite some variation between the faculties. In some instances, this could mean that no discipline-based induction takes place. Among the remainder of the universities, some offer generic programmes only, while in other cases it is not clear from the reports whether orientation is offered in the context of the discipline.

An obvious advantage of discipline-based induction is that discipline specialists are well able to identify with and relate to other newly-appointed discipline specialists, thus making professional and social integration into a discipline-based community of practice easier.

3.4.2 A structured format for induction

As stated, recently a considerable number of HEIs have been moving from induction programmes consisting of ad hoc short courses and workshops to the design and implementation of induction programmes that have a well-defined structure, often including both generic and discipline-specific activities. This allows for familiarisation with teaching and learning policies (institutional and national), introduction to current theories and concepts about teaching, opportunities to begin engaging in reflection on own practice and to engage in sharing and discussion with academics from other disciplines.

The induction programme at SU, for example, has changed from a four-day programme to a year-long activity. The resulting Professional Educational Development for Academics (PREDAC) programme is a good example of combining general and discipline-specific aspects into the induction programme with interspersed centralised and faculty-based activities, culminating in a mini-conference in November. Other HEIs, most notably UKZN, offer induction programmes that comprise-credit bearing modules which may count towards a
formal qualification. UKZN has had a year-long formal, mandatory induction in place for several years, with four credit-bearing modules that may count towards a Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PG Dip (HE)). RU’s induction programme also contributes credits towards its PG Dip (HE).

These are examples of definite moves towards a more systematic way of inducting early-career academics into the profession and providing more experienced academics with an opportunity to update their expertise.

Upon analysis of the 2015/2016 and 2017 reports, it was found that some universities offer or are intending to offer the induction programme in a blended mode, with part of the programme offered online. This development allows for innovation.

3.4.3 Mentoring and peer support during induction

Mentoring and ongoing peer support are important for new appointees, to foster a ‘learning community’ approach to quality teaching.

In the 2014 baseline submissions seven universities explicitly stated that they offer mentorship activities or that there was a growing interest in mentoring in the institution. In nearly all cases this was done by faculties, colleges or departments and in some cases it involved staff in a centre for teaching and learning. Some acknowledged the difficulty of finding appropriate mentors and others indicated a need for the programme to benefit the mentee as well as the mentor. Two universities reported the use of peer reviews and discussions as part of their induction programme. Ten institutions mentioned mentorship or peer reviews as part of induction.

In examining the 2015/16 and 2017 reports, it was found that currently 18 universities appear to offer mentoring as part of the induction programme and/or other forms of peer reviews and appraisals during the induction period, albeit in some universities this depends on whether a faculty decides to put this into effect. One, CUT, has a mentorship programme for new academic staff, which is trans-disciplinary in nature and based on clusters which are research-based and developmental in nature. Five institutions did not mention either mentoring or any other peer involvement for newly-appointed academics.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that about a quarter of the HEIs employ peer reviews for both developmental and, in some instances, probation purposes. It is not always clear, though, whether the emphasis is on formal progression, or on enhancement of teaching, nor
is it always clear whether the peer review process is aligned with HR-related policies, either centralised or decentralised in faculties, colleges or schools.

Peer reviews, and their various purposes and concomitant procedures, deserve the dedicated attention of the HE sector.

Some institutions recognise that well-designed and implemented mentorships are not merely beneficial to the new appointee. The learning exchange between mentor and mentee also challenges the mentor to consider the innovative ideas, methods and technologies that the newcomer wishes to experiment with. In this way both the mentee and mentor, and the department, benefit. Consequently, mentorships contribute to organisational learning.

Given the importance of mentorships as part of the induction process, their function and format warrant the attention of the HE sector.

3.4.4 Development of teaching portfolios during induction

In recent times, attention has been devoted to the development of teaching portfolios during an orientation/induction programme. The development of a teaching portfolio invites new staff members to reflect on their teaching and introduces them inter alia to student feedback and peer reviews.

In the 2014 submissions, five institutions mentioned the development of teaching portfolios as part of the induction process. The analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that nine out of 23 HEIs expect new appointees to develop a teaching portfolio during the induction period, some of which are, as for example, at one campus of NWU, extensive. Six of these require the completion and approval of the teaching portfolio during the probation period as a pre-requisite for confirmation of appointment.

Not all institutions have institutional criteria for teaching portfolios. In some institutions this is left to the discretion of faculties. Developing institutional criteria for teaching portfolios prompts the institution to develop a common understanding of what teaching excellence means. Also, if portfolios are a requirement for permanent appointment, they should be aligned to institutional policies regarding appointment and the talent management of staff.

The introduction of teaching portfolios during the induction phase, as part of CPD, could be continued after the formal appointment of the new staff member, as a beneficial practice that enhances the quality of teaching. A short course on the professionalization of teaching and learning at UWC serves as an example of such a beneficial practice.
3.4.5 Challenges regarding induction

One of the challenges facing universities is time pressure. Often early career academics are assigned large undergraduate classes. Moreover, the attendant preparation and academic administration activities take up much of academics’ time. This can result in a constraint on the time available for the appointees to take part in induction activities. Also, the department/discipline may find itself under undue pressure to release its staff to take part in discipline-based induction activities, so much so that one institution reduced the time set aside for generic induction. UFS tries to solve this problem through a policy on induction that structures induction activities within a prescribed time-frame. In other institutions it is left to the discretion of HoDs whether a new appointee will participate in induction activities.

These concerns are valid; however, the long-term positive effect on the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning of the new appointees’ induction is indisputable. Institutions would do well to find solutions to these challenges so that meaningful orientation can be offered to the new staff members. Longer-term induction/orientation that includes both generic and discipline-based induction activities are most effective. Blended learning offers one solution for the time constraints involved in induction programme, that is, combining contact sessions with on-line elements. Some HEIs are currently engaged in designing such a programme.

Another challenge is making induction programmes available to part-time and temporary lecturers. Reading the 2014 and 2015/16 and 2017 reports, it seems that, currently, a sizeable proportion of lecturing staff is on part-time or contract appointments. Yet, an analysis of the reports seems to indicate that few universities expect their part-time and temporary staff to take part in induction programmes.

Given the aim of enhancing the quality of the teaching and learning process, it is necessary to find ways of extending the induction programmes to benefit part-time and temporary staff members as well as the institution.

3.4.6 Summary

Data collected from the QEP suggests that an effective induction programme has the following characteristics:

(i) It resonates with the institutional strategic direction and is part of an institutional framework that connects CPD with policies related to appointment and human resource development;
(ii) it is compulsory for all newly appointed full-time, part-time or contract staff;
(iii) it is conducted over a length of time;
(iv) it is mandatory to complete the induction during the probation period;
(v) it has a systematic approach;
(vi) it has a combination of generic and discipline-based content, including a focus on pedagogical content knowledge and, where possible, research;
(vii) it is based on the developmental needs of the appointee;
(viii) it includes mentorship, self-reflection and peer review within a discipline-based context;
(ix) it involves the construction of a teaching portfolio by the appointee; and
(x) it involves membership of a community of practice by the appointee.

An induction programme that is aligned with the educational philosophy of the institution, and that is part of the institution’s inherent strategic drive to enhance teaching and learning and that is, thus, part of an institutional set of policies, signals the seriousness with which the institution regards the induction of its new academic appointees. It also emphasises the fact that induction is the first phase of CPD. Such an alignment allows the institution to develop a coherent approach to induction and to guarantee the quality of the induction activities, both generic and discipline-specific. A balance needs to be found between the generic, institutional input, which is often the responsibility of central support units, and initiatives that are based more within the context of a discipline and are, generally, organised by faculties and departments.

Comparing the 2014 submissions with the 2015/16 and 2017 reports, the evidence suggests that there is an increased emphasis on the orientation of new appointees into the institution and the discipline. By and large, induction programmes have become more extended and more structured and frequently include discipline-based induction. In addition, an analysis of the reports also suggests that instances of induction being linked to probation procedures are increasing. Moreover, several induction programmes have recently been re-designed or are in the process of being reviewed. These positive changes signal a growing institutional awareness of the need for newly-appointed academics to have the know-how to effectively teach in their discipline, have a sense of belonging in their department and the institution, and have a general understanding of the complex demands of higher education in South Africa.

3.5 Sustained professional development

A well-structured and extended programme of induction of new appointees, be they early-career academics or mid-career academics, into the university, faculty and discipline is one
way of gradually building pedagogical expertise residing in the university and its constituent parts, as well as in individual staff. This multi-layered enhancement of capabilities is imperative in the drive towards the delivery of quality teaching and learning. The provision and take-up of formalised induction programmes is not, however, sufficient in itself for the professionalisation of university teaching.

A concern is that many, if not most, universities have a considerable number of academic staff who are specialists in their discipline, but have not had expert training in teaching and learning. Hence, there is a great demand for academics who not only master their discipline but also possess the necessary pedagogical expertise to teach their discipline well in a changing educational context. This means that CPD for all academics, be they at the onset of their careers or at a later phase, remains crucial.

Pivotal to this is an institutional commitment to professional development and the actual, consistent implementation of frameworks and strategies to achieve this. The 2015 CHE report discussed the influence the institutional environment of academics has on enhancing their role as university teachers. The report stated the following:

>[S]everal, inter-related elements at institutional level ... may conspire to limit, or even undermine, the development of academics as teachers, which, in turn, affects the quality of university teaching that they are able to undertake. These elements include workload frameworks, performance management systems and reward structures.

(CHE, 2015: 19)

Thus, the successful implementation of CPD activities is not a simple or straightforward matter. In addition to institutional commitment to the enhancement of teaching and learning, it also requires a conducive institutional culture and structure, and the academics’ buy-in to the idea of professionalism and professional development. A well-designed CPD framework that integrates development activities with HR development policies, and includes appropriate incentives, may encourage the continued participation of younger, mid-career and senior academics in teaching development. As yet, an evaluation of the impact of CPD has not been undertaken (SU undertook a study of this nature in 2010).

### 3.5.1 Professional development challenges

Post-induction CPD may be once-off, part of a series or recurrent (DHET, 2013). It may range from minor pedagogical and practical training that is related to an academic’s daily practice of teaching, up to providing opportunities for academics to develop expert pedagogical knowledge and/or become scholars leading in teaching and learning research, be it in general or in their own discipline. Even though this range of interventions varies in intensity, scope,
and duration, the uptake of these by academics is often erratic, due primarily to teaching and research workload pressure, and challenges to their sustainability.

HEIs also mentioned that in addition to work pressure, and the perceived competition between teaching and research, low participation rates in professional development activities were related to interest in and relevance of these to the academics’ disciplines, as well as to the fact that participation in CPD activities is not mandatory.

A critical challenge is to change systems, perceptions and behaviours towards professional development activities, from being considered an additional burden (a ‘nice to have’) that clashes with other academic interests - one that is not rewarded or held in high esteem - to simply being a norm for professionalism, an integrated component of an academic career.

On an individual level, perceptions and conceptualisations regarding the professionalisation of university teaching, as well as a perceived opposition between teaching and research, play a role in how professional development is viewed. In addition, the manner in which the institution views professional development and whether this is part of its structures and systems, influences the esteem in which professional development is held by academics. Reiterating what was mentioned before, to attain professionalisation for university teachers, professional development must be embedded in a CPD framework that links professional development activities with matters such as recognition and reward, conditions of service, workload allocations, and career paths.

The realisation that professional development is fundamental to academic work and that it need not constitute a clash between teaching and research, is crucial. This requires a mind-shift at the level of the institution as well as at the level of individual academics. In this respect, it is important to realise that professional development does not aim to fix or change an individual academic staff member. Rather, it focuses on the changing roles staff have with respect to a growing understanding of teaching and learning processes and the changing nature of these.

An analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that, in many HEIs, institutional awareness has grown about the need to change the institutional culture to create a context for professional development. Some have adopted a more systemic approach to professional development. Others attempt to incorporate professional development by means of the introduction of a workload model (on which, see below) that includes time for professional development. However, most institutions’ academics battle to make the time available - or struggle to see the need for - for professional development.
Upon analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports, it was found that universities are very much aware of the constraints hampering professional development, but also that institutions are in the process of addressing these constraints, albeit the institutional foci may differ.

3.5.2 CPD activities

As mentioned, professional development of university teachers can take many forms. Amundsen and Wilson (2012:92) identify six categories of professional development based on the nature of the goals pursued: a skills focus, a method focus, a reflection focus, a disciplinary focus, an institutional focus, and an action research focus, some of which emphasise outcomes and some of which emphasise process.

While it is not possible to gain a complete overview of the activities that were reported on in the 2014 baseline submissions, the impression is that many institutions tended to focus on generic skills and method enhancement, such as stand-alone workshops and seminars. In addition to once-off activities, some also mentioned longer-term, structured activities. CPUT, for example, reported on staff participation in the Cape Higher Education Consortium (CHEC) courses and their spin-offs.

Some institutions reported that a number of their staff register for courses (on, e.g., assessment and learning facilitation) and programmes (e.g., the PG Dip/Cert (HE)), and such participation is viewed as beneficial. Overall, however, the number of academics who register for postgraduate qualifications in HE is small.

According to the 2014 submissions, some universities (the exact number could not be determined) offer their own PG Dip/Cert (HE), but echo the prevailing sentiment, namely that academics do not have the time to fruitfully engage with the programme, whatever its merits.

An analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that the focus has shifted somewhat from generic, once-off interventions towards an increased inclusion of structured and discipline-based professional development activities. It suggests that 12 universities now have their own PG Dip/Cert (HE) programme in place. An additional three universities share a regional PG Dip (HE) programme, and one university is in the process of developing its own programme (RU has a PG Dip (HE) for academic developers). At UFH, participation in selected courses of its postgraduate programme is compulsory for promotion purposes. Six universities collaborate with institutions that offer a PG Dip/Cert (HE). A master’s programme in teaching and learning in higher education is offered by UFS. Two institutions that offer targeted PhD programmes in higher education, including teaching and learning, with a cohort approach, are Rhodes and UKZN.
These numbers indicate that currently HEIs have a heightened awareness of the need for structured programmes focusing on the enhancement of teaching and learning in higher education. It can be expected that providing mid-career and senior academics with access to such postgraduate programmes resulting in a postgraduate qualification, will motivate many academics to take part, despite time pressure.

3.5.2.1 Discipline-specific professional development

Of the 18 universities that make mention of discipline-specific induction activities, seven of them offer discipline-specific activities. It is the prerogative of individual faculties/schools/departments whether and how to offer induction, which results in some variation between the faculties. These discipline-specific induction activities generally consist of mentoring and providing peer support to newly-appointed staff, in most cases early career academics.

Other forms of discipline-based professional development exist: the pursuit of higher degrees in the discipline, the development of research and supervisory skills, communities of practice and forums, continued mentoring and peer support, and academic leadership development.

As far as could be ascertained from the 2014, 2015/16 and 2017 submissions and reports, all HEIs make provision for staff to pursue higher degrees in their discipline. In most cases the provision is of a financial nature, but in a number of institutions time is also made available. In some instances, this is part of the workload allocated by means of a formal workload model.

Other discipline-based professional development is related to the development of supervisory and research skills within formal structures such as postgraduate centres. UJ has developed a PG Dip (HE- Postgraduate Study) and RU, too, provides dedicated training in postgraduate supervision.

Mentorship and peer support, generally, continue to be seen as activities more appropriate for new academic staff. In addition to mentoring offered as part of induction, which is fairly widespread, some HEIs also now offer mentorship and peer support as part of CPD. The 2015 CHE report stated:

*Several universities provided examples of peer learning and mentoring through discipline-based education development activities. One of the advantages of this form of professional development is that discipline specialists tend to have a strong sense of identity coupled with a passion for their discipline, making it easier to form communities of practice – powerful vehicles for learning and development – than with, for example, people from other disciplines who attend centrally organised development activities.*

(CHE, 2015: 17, 18)
An analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that, in a considerable number of universities, there is clear move towards discipline-based, or specific group-based, professional development. The institutional reports and institutional feedback reports give examples of discipline-specific mentoring and discipline or group-specific communities of practice. Twelve universities mention initiatives such as fora for foundation programme staff, for HoDs and curriculum officers, faculty-based teaching and learning fora, hubs or platforms, special interest groups, and regular faculty or departmental retreats and symposia.

At CUT every new staff member is assigned to a mentor, a relationship focusing on all the roles of the academic. An example of a scheme for middle management is at CPUT, where in 2016 seventeen academics participated in such a scheme. Mentoring is provided by internal, as well as external coaches. UJ described in its institutional report a special example of staff development, the Accelerated Academic Mentoring Programme. This initiative is aimed at addressing race and gender imbalances at professorial level, and in doing so purports to create a new cohort of academic leaders and role models. Some HEIs allow selected academics time off (or grant fellowships) to focus on the enhancement of their teaching.

Some institutions have consolidated support for the enhancement of teaching around curriculum revision (e.g., the curriculum design and curriculum renewal initiatives at CPUT and DUT and the ‘module makeover’ initiative at UFS). This involves academic support staff working closely with academics and imparting skills such as instructional and curriculum design. This form of discipline-based professional development has the advantage of promoting teamwork and of reaching large numbers of students; it does, however, presuppose a high degree of consensus and coordination.

3.5.2.2 Context-specific professional development

In addition to the need and desire for generic and/or discipline–based professional development, the specific nature of an HEI also influences the content and format of professional development. Instances of this are institutions focusing on career-based qualifications, at comprehensive universities and universities of technology, and institutions with a specific teaching and learning methodology, such as Open Distance Learning (ODL) at UNISA.

Comprehensive universities, established through the merger of a traditional university with a technikon, offer both general academic programmes and more career-focused programmes. This mandate necessitates context-specific professional development interventions.

The reports highlight the need for professional development of UoT staff through industry exposure as well as challenges specific to UoTs with respect to the enhancing of teaching and
learning, caused by conflicting with the demand to provide industry-relevant curricula and teaching methods.

ODL, with its close links to innovation in information and communication technologies (ICT), to the identification of new learning needs and innovative ideas about how information may be accessed and applied in the information society, impacts decisively on the professional development of staff engaged in ODL. UNISA described in its 2015 institutional report the changing focus of professional development as prompted by the ODL context.

With regard to blended learning, the 2015 CHE report stated the following:

*There is an increased pressure on universities, both here and abroad, to move towards blended learning, which comprises a combination of face-to-face and online learning. Blended learning is often seen as a way to increase student enrolments without having to substantially increase physical infrastructure. In addition, there are potential pedagogical advantages... the development of good blended learning materials is a time-intensive activity, requiring the involvement of highly skilled learning designers working in collaboration with discipline specialists... which has implications for staffing (hiring enough learning designers) and academics’ workload (allocating time for online materials and curriculum development and training).*  
(CHE, 2015: 37, 44)

Blended learning (the deliberate fusion of online and face-to-face contact time between teaching staff and students and/or between students in a course) has been promoted and encouraged in an increasing number of HEIs. Because of its potential, HEIs have recognised the need for professional development in this area. Such development would focus not only on technical proficiency in the use of learning management systems (LMSs), but also on the design and development of blended learning material.

More and more institutions are considering offering programmes using the modes of blended learning and/or ODL. These modes have much to offer in terms of the efficient use of resources, innovative practices and providing access to students.

The implementation of programmes based on blended learning and/or ODL requires bespoke interventions in the realm of pedagogical development and ICT, and how these need to be integrated. Considering the further massification of education and, at the same time, the shrinking of available resources, this is an issue that deserves the urgent attention of the HE sector.
3.5.2.3 Academic leadership development

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that a considerable number of institutions engage with capacitating the current, and building a new generation of, academics at various levels. At least seven universities mention capacity building and academic leadership programmes for HoDs and middle managers.

Furthermore, in the reports at least half of the universities mention that they are engaged in ‘growing the institution’s own timber’. Some have appointed young academics under the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGap), but it is unclear from the reports how many institutions make use of this opportunity. In some HEIs, young academics are given a reduced workload to enable them to focus on the development of their qualifications while being mentored. Other initiatives focus on the empowerment of black female academics and on developing capacity through the appointment of postgraduate students as tutors and mentors.

3.5.3 Participation of part-time and temporary staff in professional development

Most HEIs are heavily reliant on part-time and temporary lecturing staff. In some universities more than half of the lecturing staff is part-time or on temporary appointments. In one university the ratio of permanent to temporary staff is 1:5. Generally, HEIs see this as a problem. The 2015/26 and 2017 reports suggest that less than one third of the universities provide CPD to their part-time and temporary staff.

Yet, these reports indicate that, despite this heavy reliance on part-time and temporary staff, few universities expect this staff to take part in professional development programmes, nor do they provide them with the same development opportunities as for full-time permanent staff. The 2014, 2015/16 and 2017 submissions and reports suggest that in many institutions this is a pervasive concern.

Constraints mentioned by institutions relate to non-availability of part-time staff for staff development initiatives, due to time pressure and lack of monetary incentives.

Some institutions offer either a bespoke programme to non-permanent staff (e.g., the seaTEACH programme at UCT), or have found alternative, suitable times to offer their induction programmes to part-time new staff, or offer the programme through blended learning.

In light of the considerable role these academics play in the teaching and learning process, it is crucial that they are given full access to staff development opportunities. The 2017
institutional reports suggest offering some professional development activities outside of teaching periods, such as during recess or during the periods before commencement and after the conclusion of classes. An additional avenue to encourage participation in development activities might be by including this in performance appraisals and as part of the workload allocation (on which, see below).

Staff development for part-time and contract staff to upgrade their teaching competence is critical to enhance the quality of the teaching and learning process.

4. THE SCHOLARSHIP OF TEACHING AND LEARNING

Institutional support for the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL) is evidence of institutional commitment and contribution to the quality of teaching and learning, and of support for it as a form of professional learning. In this regard, the 2015 CHE report stated the following:

*Over half of the universities indicated that they use National Research Foundation funding or Teaching Development Grant (TDG) funds to support and develop academics’ capacity and opportunities to carry out and publish research related to their teaching. In some institutions, individuals can apply for teaching and learning innovation or research grants.*

(CHE, 2015: 92)

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports reflect a growing commitment to SoTL. Twenty-one out of 23 HEIs make explicit mention of SoTL in the 2015/16 institutional reports. It would appear that HEIs are promoting SoTL in a variety of ways, from mentoring, writing and financial support for publications to the provision of a framework within which SoTL is implemented. Commonly, universities use external funding (NRF, TDG, Teaching Development and Innovation Fund) in their SoTL efforts (at UJ, e.g., the funding is deposited in a Teaching Innovation Fund). About a quarter of the institutions indicate that university funding (over and above external funding) is made available to promote and support SoTL initiatives. Funding for SoTL activities at HEIs vary from around R500 000 to R1 500 000 annually.

The 2015 CHE report also stated that several universities are involved in inter-institutional teaching-related research projects (CHE, 2015: 92). The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that in addition to universities having developed research collaborations with other HEIs in South Africa, some institutions have initiated collaboration with institutions abroad, in Asia, Africa and elsewhere.
From the 2015/2016 and 2017 reports it is also apparent that more than half of the HEIs organise an annual teaching and learning conference, albeit varying in status from in-house colloquia and seminar series to national and international conferences (the annual SoTL conference at SU attracted 250 delegates in 2017).

Frequently, SoTL research activities result in conference papers and (accredited) journal publications. Several universities have in-house publications, ranging from magazines to journals, in which academics can publish their work. The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that some of the in-house journals (e.g., at UWC) are now being submitted for formal accreditation.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports also make clear that at the majority of HEIs, activities take place that are aimed at the development of research skills (e.g., writing retreats and workshops), portfolio development workshops and interest groups. At some universities (e.g., CPUT), these activities form part of a structured approach to SoTL research capacity development. At others (e.g., UNISA), SoTL is a requirement of CPD. CUT has established a unit for SoTL, which has promoted an interested in the pursuit of formal HE qualifications. UJ has a Chair: Teaching and Learning in Post-Secondary Education and Training, a key task of which is to promote SoTL. At yet others (e.g., NWU), SoTL is part of the induction programme for new staff, although it was reported that staff finds it difficult to accept SoTL as a serious research focus. A concern was also voiced that there is no policy framework linked to performance appraisal to support the development, recognition and reward of SoTL in the institution.

As mentioned earlier, virtually all HEIs offer or provide for postgraduate qualifications in HE, either in-house, or as part of a collaboration with other institutions, or by making provision for staff to enrol in external programmes. Such qualifications cultivate an enhanced scholarly interest and engagement amongst academics in SoTL, and its application to their respective disciplines.

Despite the many and varied SoTL and SoTL-related activities across the sector, for many academics SoTL remains a vague and even alien concept. This means that there is still some uncertainty in the sector as to its status and its contribution to the creation of a learning environment that supports student success optimally. A particular challenge is that often in UoTs academic staff is still in the process of developing a strong research culture in the field of teaching and learning. Active participation in SoTL by academic leaders and the establishment of high-level drivers (such as the project, Towards a socially just pedagogy, at UJ, the scholarship of educational leadership at SU and a seminar series, curriculum conversations on decolonisation, at RU) can further enhance its status and value in an institution.
In sum, making resources available for staff to engage in SoTL and to disseminate the results, the inclusion of SoTL in a CPD framework, and the modelling of engagement with SoTL at a high institutional level, are all evidence of institutional commitment to SoTL. This will assist in the establishment of an institutional culture where the contribution of SoTL to enhancing the quality of teaching and learning is valued.

5. WORKLOAD

Most, if not all, academics experience many demands on their time. They have to find a balance between their roles as an individual – teaching, research, academic administration, community engagement, professional development - and the needs and expectations of the institution. In addition, alternative pedagogical models, such as workplace integrated learning and blended learning, need to be implemented, re-curriculuation of existing programmes to meet the demands of professional and government bodies has to be attended to, and curriculum renewal must be undertaken to respond to the changing needs of society. These roles and demands often assume the nature of a juggling act.

The 2015 CHE report stated that in the 2014 submissions only nine institutions made reference to a workload framework under the heading ‘successful practices’, although the level and extent of implementation differed widely.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports make it apparent that 10 HEIs have developed a workload model that is operational or the implementation of which is imminent. In addition, seven institutions have a system in place where workload allocation is devolved to faculties. Of these, one HEI is considering the possibility of developing an institutional approach; one university has formally adopted a workload policy but it has not yet been implemented; one university is currently developing a workload model based on that of another HEI; and one university is in the process of revising its workload policy. Meanwhile, three universities seem not yet to have developed a workload model.

Only nine universities made mention of a workload model in their 2014 submissions, whereas now 20 universities have either developed and implemented a workload model or are in the process of revising/developing one. This is a remarkable shift.

Institutional workload frameworks can assist in creating a more equitable division of loads amongst individuals in a department, while considering their relative interests and situations, such as the need for research for senior academics and the higher need for professional development for early career academics.
Generally, HEIs that have developed workload models have done so in close consultation with the academic staff. In many of the current workload models allowance is made for academics pursuing higher degree studies. Only a few institutions have incorporated professional development in their workload model, for instance, for early career academics or for academics wanting to participate in a PG Dip/Cert (HE) or to pursue a discipline-based higher degree. Also, postgraduate supervision is rarely included.

Some institutions have developed sophisticated workload models. At CPUT, for example, a workload model is based on a set of 13 principles that govern all of an academic’s activities. At UFS, a workload model for individuals is adopted in tandem with a viability model for departments and is closely linked to a performance management system. At UNISA, a work allocation plan is integrated with individual performance agreements and with the institutional performance management system. UKZN has a Teaching Workload Framework, developed over a number of years, and which is completed online.

Challenges remain. At some HDIs the unfavourable student-staff ratios make it very difficult to implement a workload framework. Some universities reference the pervasive tension between the completion of postgraduate studies and large undergraduate teaching loads, and between research-focussed senior staff and teaching-focussed junior staff. HEIs with a more devolved management model, where faculties and departments adopt their own approach to workload distribution, are faced with the challenge to design a workload model that is consistent across faculties and departments, and makes allowance for variation in faculties and departments, and for the specific needs of early-career, mid-career and more senior staff.

It can be concluded that, although serious challenges linger, particularly regarding buy-in, institutional commitment, and - for some institutions - unfavourable staff-student ratios, the number of institutions that have seriously engaged with the development and implementation of workload frameworks since the inception of the QEP, has grown dramatically.

6. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

6.1 General

Regarding performance appraisal, the 2015 CHE report asserted:

Performance appraisal needs to be built into the overall strategy of professional development, so that on the one hand conversations on planning, execution and evaluation of teaching, and on the other hand recognition and reward of perceived excellent teaching, are aligned.
Commonly, performance appraisal serves two basic purposes: firstly, it is evaluative (as implied by the term ‘appraisal’), and, secondly, it is developmental. Thus, it looks backwards when past performance is reviewed in the light of the results achieved, and it also looks forwards when it is directed towards increasing the capacity of employees (CHE, 2015: 43).

A well-designed performance appraisal system is critical for the success of institutional endeavours towards professional development. Yet, such a system is not commonly in place in the HE sector. At those institutions that have such a system in place, teaching is deemed a key performance area and is evaluated through a variety of measures. The periods of assessment and the consequences of assessment vary.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggest that those HEIs that have rolled out a performance appraisal system for academic staff, or are in the process of doing so, have included teaching as a key criterion. The analysis also indicates that, presently, the status of introducing and implementing performance appraisal systems for academics in the HE sector is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Current status of introduction/implementation of performance appraisal system in HEIs</th>
<th>Number of HEIs</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Formal performance appraisal implemented for all academics</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal performance appraisal implemented for top management</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal performance appraisal in design/development phase (no complete roll out)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal performance appraisal only in requests for promotion</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Only performance appraisal for developmental purposes</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No performance appraisal</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In many HEIs, performance appraisal is based on a centralised model. In some, however, a (largely) decentralised model is used, that is, the interpretation and implementation of performance appraisal, though centrally constructed, is left to the individual faculties making up the institution. Although this has the advantage that faculties are able to bring in contextual features, the disadvantage is that performance criteria are not necessarily interpreted consistently across the institution.

Although the number of HEIs that have rolled out performance management to the entire academic staff has grown to 11, some institutions that have developed a performance management system battle to implement this.
The development and implementation of performance appraisal systems seems to be a controversial matter in some universities. It would seem that this may have to do with a lingering inability to implement a widely-acceptable workload model or with the predominance of a particular organisational culture in an institution. This latter presents as a core of shared assumptions and beliefs, which impacts on management practices, such as whether performance appraisal should be implemented, the purposes for which it is used, and its success at the institution.

Various institutional feedback reports (CHE, 2017) suggest that in order to remove some of the resistance, it may be possible to use the term performance development rather than performance management or appraisal. A concern is that this shifts the focus away from academics being held accountable for the quality of their teaching, which creates a dilemma for HEIs.

Even though HEIs may have different cultures which reside in their history and play out in their present, in the face of the changes taking place in the HE sector, with their concomitant challenges, institutions are encouraged to find ways that can assure that their academic staff can fulfil their changed and changing roles. Hence, the need is for an appraisal system that has a focus on both development and accountability, which is rolled out adequately and fairly in all faculties and departments, is guided by an institutional policy, has periodic recurrence and which teaching (and the criteria against which good teaching are measured) as one of the key performance areas. Such an appraisal system can be adapted to an institution’s culture without losing its central tenet and purpose, which is the continuous professional development of a crucial asset in higher education, namely, university teachers.

6.2 Personal development plans and performance agreements

Worldwide, many universities use performance agreements between HoDs and individual staff members as well as personal development plans (PDPs) as the basis for performance appraisal. The 2015 CHE report commented on the use of PDPs in South African HEIs as follows:

*In only a few cases was reference made to the inclusion of personal development plans as part of the appraisal process. Greater attention to the appraisal and development of academics as teachers is one means of improving the quality of university teaching.*

(CHE, 2015: 22)

From the 2015/16 and 2017 reports it is apparent that 12 institutions make mention of a PDP as a tool for professional development, and in some instances link this to probation and/or
performance reviews or to individual performance agreements. In two instances, PDPs particularly relate to the development of research capacity. Even though the performance appraisal system may be in place, some universities cautioned that this may not guarantee the desired outcomes or be a useful and valid tool for development. This was mainly due to the lack of a clear link between PDPs, performance agreements and appraisals and the enhancement of teaching and learning processes.

The reports further indicate that PDPs work well in assisting staff to complete their formal studies and to serve to motivate staff. They can also be very useful if reflective practice, that is, the development of insights into personal strengths and weaknesses in identifying learning needs, is included within PDPs.

Furthermore, performance contracts/agreements can be valuable management tools in the hands of HoDs. Generally, they are time-bound and linked to work allocation, and indicate specific professional development activities. It is important, however, that the purpose of such contracts is clear to the institution’s staff members, and that the performance agreements are developed collaboratively between the academic staff member and the HoD. No mention is made in the 2015 CHE report of HEIs using such agreements. The 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggest that seven HEIs have now instituted performance agreements (tasks, plans, targets, contracts) for their academic staff. Moreover, four universities seem to have the intention to develop and implement such for its academic staff. Sometimes performance agreements are not concluded as a university-wide practice but reside with faculties.

Currently, under nGAP, performance contracts are in place between every appointed nGAP academic and the appointing university, which clearly spells out obligations, expectations, roles and responsibilities (DHET, 2015). It may well be that the implementation of nGAP performance contracts will stimulate discussions around performance agreements for all academic staff.

6.3 Teaching portfolios

Teaching portfolios are typically used for two purposes, which sometimes overlap: as a developmental process for reflecting on and improving one’s teaching; and as an evaluative product for personnel decisions regarding issues such as tenure, promotion, or a teaching award.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports reveal that nine out of the 23 HEIs employ teaching portfolios - also called ‘teaching and learning portfolios’ or ‘portfolios of evidence’ - to assess whether newly-appointed staff will receive a permanent appointment. These portfolios are developed as part of the induction programme during the probation period. They can be extended
through the length of a staff member’s career as part of a coherent continuous development system and used for further performance appraisal, applications for personal promotion and applications for awards.

Eight HEIs use teaching portfolios as a tool in performance appraisal. Seventeen HEIs have adopted teaching portfolios as a requirement for applications for promotion and awards. Two institutions did not make any mention of the use of portfolios in their reports.

The development and submission of teaching portfolios is part of the larger drive towards assuring the quality of the teaching and learning experiences universities offer to students. This entails that teaching portfolios are important as input into and evidence of professional development processes, as well as summative tools for the rewarding of excellent teaching.

6.4 Student evaluations

In its report (CHE, 2015: 79) the CHE stated that in cases where performance appraisal includes teaching as one of the criteria, this is often based on the evaluation reports of students. The report proposed that such evaluations provide a limited basis for improvement with any lasting pedagogical enhancement, but that, in spite of this, these evaluations seem to form a substantial part of any teacher’s teaching portfolio that is submitted.

The 2015/16 institutional reports and the 2017 institutional feedback reports indicate that 19 HEIs use student evaluations as part of performance appraisal and/or as a tool for further professional development. In several cases the evaluation is administered by the quality unit, in other instances by the unit responsible for teaching and learning development. At WSU and SU there are policies that govern student feedback. Increasingly, the evaluations are done on-line, through the local LMS. Student evaluations are used to evaluate individual courses, lecturers or even whole programmes.

Some institutions have a well-conceived institutional approach that takes into account variation among departments, ongoing professional development at personal and departmental level and the usefulness of including student evaluations in promotion criteria. At other HEIs, inconsistency and irregularity in the administration of student evaluations is a serious challenge. There is even resistance in some against inclusion of student evaluations in promotion criteria.

Student evaluation of teaching is a common phenomenon in higher education. Yet, although it is necessary to heed students’ opinions about a university’s functioning and education programmes, there is a growing body of critics that caution institutions not to draw simple
conclusions on the strength of student evaluations, particularly where this concerns promotion, monetary incentives and conferring of awards. These critics are of the opinion that high evaluation ratings cannot simply be equated with teacher efficiency or achievement of student learning, or low ratings with bad teaching or lack of learning.

Together with the more general issue of performance appraisal, the format, content, frequency, administration, purpose and, indeed, validity of student evaluations warrant deliberation by the HE sector.

7. CONDITIONS OF SERVICE AND PROMOTION

In 2015 the CHE reported the following:

Very little mention was made [in the baseline submissions] of conditions of service under the heading of successful practices. A few institutions indicated that there are opportunities for academics to take sabbatical leave or study leave in order to complete a qualification. Some departments have an internal arrangement whereby academics do no teaching for one term per year and can therefore spend that time on other aspects of their work, such as research or curriculum development. (CHE, 2015: 96)

Conditions of service, including provisions related to probation, professional development (during sabbaticals and special leave), workloads, performance appraisal, promotions and awards, should provide an environment that supports staff in their efforts to pursue postgraduate qualifications and to do research, be it in their discipline or in teaching and learning, and ought to provide opportunities to participate in professional development activities relating to teaching and learning.

As discussed earlier in this chapter, the 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that universities, generally, employ a probation period to decide on the suitability of new staff before making permanent appointments. As mentioned, probation periods vary from a few months to three years and come with a variety of conditions. Some of these may be the compulsory attendance of an induction programme, and submission of a teaching portfolio for assessment.

Perusal of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that most institutions have formal arrangements in place for staff to undertake further studies. In many cases these studies are funded by the institution, wholly or partly, sometimes with assistance from the NRF and/or the TDG. Most universities have sabbatical leave in place for staff, although the conditions for granting this differ, as well as the actual leave periods. Some HEIs use accrual of
study/research leave at a rate of two months per completed year of full-time service for full-time and three-year contract staff up to a maximum period, while at other institutions no such accrual takes place, and full-time staff apply for sabbatical or study leave in order to complete a higher degree or a research project. Generally, staff members on sabbatical leave continue to receive their total reward packages, inclusive of monetary and non-monetary benefits. Some institutions issue a financial reward to staff upon completion of a higher qualification, and in some institutions staff are promoted to a higher academic rank upon completion of the higher degree. Many institutions grant special leave for the specific purpose of completing a research project.

Despite the fact that workload can be a constraining or an enabling factor in the professional development of academics, the 2015/16 and 2017 institutional feedback reports suggest that, aside from a few institutions, workload, with its underpinning norms, is commonly not part of an academic's conditions of service. Generally, this merely takes the form of ‘according to instructions by the line manager’. Performance appraisal is also not part of such conditions of service.

The 2015 CHE report stated the following:

*The main reward for an academic is promotion. There is wide variation among institutions in the extent to which teaching quality is considered in applications for promotion, with only a few universities allowing for progression up the academic ranks on the strength primarily of teaching. Even fewer allow progression all the way up to full professor level.*

(CHE, 2015: 21)

The report also stated (CHE, 2015: 68) that reward and promotion criteria often act as disincentives for academics to put time and energy into developing teaching skills, since ordinarily research output is the dominant criterion.

Generally, promotion systems for academic staff can be based on a three-track (teaching, research, teaching-and-research), two-track (teaching, research) or a single-track system. In several HEIs the promotion criteria still weight research more heavily than teaching. One of the problems, as mentioned by some institutions, is that it is more complex to identify indicators for quality teaching than it is for research. Hence, it is a challenge to define, assess and quantify indicators for teaching competence that make it possible to create parity of esteem with research.

The CHE reported in 2105 (2015: 94) that at nine universities teaching quality is one criterion used to decide whether an academic is promoted, although the weighting and method of assessment differ. Also, more than half of the universities mentioned that assessment of teaching is done by peers in faculties using various forms of evidence, sometimes
supplemented by an external reviewer’s evaluation, particularly when applying for promotion to senior levels.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that 20 universities have adopted teaching quality as one of the criteria for promotion, albeit the weightings allocated may differ per institution. In addition, one institution has reviewed its promotions policy and is about to implement it, while another is engaged in such a review. Although concerns exist as to consistency of teaching evaluation and to equality between teaching and research competence, the large-scale adoption of teaching quality as a criterion for promotion represents a considerable change from the findings in the 2015 CHE report.

The 2015 CHE report (2015:102) noted that in some institutions there is a limit to how high a person can proceed up the academic ladder primarily on the strength of teaching competence only; others indicated that the minimum requirements for promotion to the higher levels are biased towards research at the expense of teaching.

Although it is not possible to give a quantified analysis based on the 2015/16 and 2017 reports regarding the promotion possibilities on the strength of teaching, the reports did indicate that this is a topic of debate in many institutions. In some HEIs, for example UKZN and UJ, it is possible to reach the rank of full professor on the strength of teaching excellence, even if the candidate’s research is not deemed ‘excellent’.

As mentioned, many institutions are, or have recently been, engaged in a review of promotion policies. Practices around conditions of service, and particularly those related to promotion (e.g., the composition of selection/promotion committees), are sensitive issues that can enhance or hamper institutional transformation.

Based on the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggest that one of the changes taking place is that it is becoming more common to include SoTL in the criteria for ad hominem promotions.

As promotion is a critical incentive for academics to engage with professional development and follow career paths that give prominence to teaching and to research in teaching and learning, the HE sector would be well served in continuing to debate the importance of promotion, and its associated criteria, as part of creating a conducive environment for professional development.

A recurring suggestion in the institutional feedback reports is that institutions with a devolved management structure should consider initiating a process to establish criteria and possibly evaluation methods to ensure consistency in the application of promotion criteria across faculties.
According to the 2015 CHE report (2015: 92) 17 universities indicated in their baseline submissions that they conferred institutional awards for excellence and/or innovation in teaching and learning. The report stated that some institutions have faculty-level awards, although this is not always an institution-wide practice.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that currently 21 HEIs have annual institutional teaching excellence awards in place, mostly with a substantial monetary component. In addition, 13 institutions have faculty awards in place, sometimes with and sometimes without a purse. One institution seems to have departmental awards as well. Generally, awards are viewed as prestigious, even though in some institutions the awarded amount is less for the teaching excellence award than it is for the research excellence award.

Naturally, universities have different assessment procedures and categories of awards. Whereas nearly all HEIs annually confer only a few awards, one (UniVen) allocates awards for each post level from junior lecturer to professor, and two (UniVen and NWU) make criterion-based awards, therefore not limited in number. The 2015 CHE report (2015: 21) states that in most universities, teaching excellence awards only affect a small number of applicants and award winners, and that mechanisms are needed to give recognition to any excellent university teacher, with no limit to the number that may be recognised. Thus, the awarding practices at these universities are commendable.

A relatively recent development is the inclusion of the category ‘emerging lecturer’ (or ‘new lecturer’ or ‘promising young teacher’) into the institutional award categories by at least four HEIs. UP also confers awards for postgraduate supervision, which is considered to be a form of teaching.

Some institutions use the award as input towards teaching development, in the sense that awardees are expected to present seminars to their peers regarding their practice in and insights into teaching and learning processes. These are excellent initiatives and in line with the aims of the national awards for excellence in teaching and learning (HELTASA & CHE, 2017). These are:

(i) To show support at a national level for excellence in teaching and learning in higher education;
(ii) to generate a cadre of academics who are identifiable and able to provide inspiration and leadership in teaching in their disciplines, institutions and regions; and
(iii) to generate debate and public awareness about what constitutes teaching excellence.
Institutions would do well, if they have not already done so, to evaluate the current influence of teaching awards on teaching development in their institutions, such that the best practices and insights, on the grounds of which the awards are conferred, are disseminated amongst peers at the institution and possibly further afield.

Several HEIs are currently amending the criteria for teaching excellence awards, as well as their categories of awards, to bring these closer to the HELTASA/CHE awards criteria and categories. These are commendable initiatives, since this reinforces the influence of the awards at faculty, institutional and national levels on creating public awareness. Also, very importantly, the national awards criteria can then serve as benchmarks for excellence in teaching to which academic staff may aspire.

As far as could be ascertained from the various reports, the nominations/applications processes for the awards vary considerably. All institutions seem to use an assessment panel; some include internal and external moderation; some are composed of faculty staff with a track record in teaching and learning; some are composed of HoDs and deans; some include members of centres for teaching and learning. It also seems that the nomination procedures range from peer nominations to peer and/or student nominations. In terms of evidence to be submitted, teaching portfolios were standard, frequently student evaluation was asked for, and in some instances peer evaluation and benchmarking. As was also recorded in the 2015 CHE report, some institutions indicated that the centres for teaching and learning are actively involved in helping applicants develop teaching portfolios. From the various reports, the expected content of the portfolios was not clear.

9. SUMMARY

To enhance academics as university teachers, matters such as professional development, reward and recognition, workload allocation, conditions of service and performance appraisal are critical. However, implementation of these matters is complex. They must be grounded in an institutional philosophy and identity that embraces teaching and learning as critically important in an institution and which need to be embedded in its structures, policies and practices. By far the majority of HEIs now have a vision and/or mission that explicitly espouses the importance of teaching and learning. One third makes explicit mention in their mission statements of the significance of staff development in the field of teaching and learning. Moreover, nearly all indicate that they have a teaching and learning strategy (or equivalent) in place. This is a significant shift, compared to the situation in 2014.

The HE sector’s increased emphasis on teaching and learning also found expression in the establishment of senior leadership posts. Just under two-thirds of universities now have a
A post of deputy vice-chancellor for teaching and learning (or equivalent). Furthermore, just over half of universities now have a dedicated position of assistant dean for teaching and learning (or equivalent) in faculties/colleges (although in some universities this has been implemented in one or more faculties only and not as an institution-wide practice). Even though the sector’s emphasis on the status of teaching and learning has increased, inter alia through the appointment of drivers of teaching and learning at faculty, school and/or campus level, at the historically disadvantaged or comprehensive universities and UoTs, only four have such a position in place.

Seventeen HEIs have established a Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (or equivalent) and ten universities have instituted Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees (or equivalent) or formal teaching and learning forums. Only two UoTs have a Senate Teaching and Learning Committee in place and none has Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees. Such committees play a critical role in setting and monitoring the institution’s teaching and learning agenda.

The majority of HEIs are developing an institutional framework that guides CPD, or already have such a structure in place and have commenced implementation, a significant improvement over the situation in 2014.

Teaching and learning units play a crucial role in professional development. In many institutions, staff in teaching and learning support units are employed on short-term contracts only, which means that staff turnover is potentially high. This is cause for concern.

There is an increased emphasis on the induction of new appointees into an institution and a discipline, compared to the position in 2014. By and large, induction programmes have become more extended and more structured and frequently include discipline-based induction. Several induction programmes have recently been re-designed or are in the process of being reviewed and, increasingly, are being linked to probation. These changes signal a growing institutional awareness of the need for newly appointed academics to teach effectively in their discipline; to have a sense of belonging in their department and the institution; and to have a general understanding of the complex demands of higher education in South Africa.

Universities have many academic staff who are specialists in their discipline but do not have pedagogical expertise to teach their discipline well in a changing educational context. A well-designed CPD framework that integrates development activities with human resource development policies and includes appropriate incentives, may encourage the continued participation of younger, mid-career and senior academics in teaching development. A
considerable number of universities have moved away from a focus on generic skills and method development towards including discipline-based, or specific group-based, professional development, such as discipline-specific mentoring and discipline and group-specific communities of practice, special interest groups, and regular faculty or departmental retreats and symposia. Universities continue to make it possible for staff to attend postgraduate programmes on teaching and learning in higher education, either offered in-house or elsewhere. Other initiatives exist that aim to build a new generation of academics, to capacitate leaders and to empower academics.

An institutional commitment to SoTL assists in the establishment of an institutional culture where the contribution of SoTL to the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning is valued. Currently, a quarter of the universities make available internal funding to promote and support SoTL, in addition to external funding. Many of the SoTL activities are aimed at the development of research skills in SoTL. More than half of the HEIs organise an annual teaching and learning conference, albeit varying in status from in-house colloquia to international conferences. Several universities continue to have in-house publications, in which academics can publish their work; some of these are now being submitted for formal accreditation.

In a considerable number of universities, more than half of the lecturing staff is part-time or on a temporary contract appointment. The quality of the teaching and learning process will be enhanced if professional development programmes can benefit part-time and temporary staff members. A few institutions offer a bespoke programme to non-permanent staff, or have found alternative, suitable times and means to offer their induction programmes to non-permanent new staff.

Institutional workload models assist in creating a more equitable division of workload among individuals in a department while considering their interests and situations, such as the need for research, or a higher degree study, and the need for professional development for early career academics. Ideally, the workload model makes allowances for the development of teaching competence, and for specific departmental and individual needs, and is linked to the performance management system. Generally, HEIs that have developed workload models have done so in close consultation with academic staff. A few institutions have incorporated professional development in their workload model, but postgraduate supervision is rarely included. With only a few exceptions, all universities have either developed and implemented a workload model or are in the process of revising/developing such, although the unfavourable student-staff ratio and general staff shortage at many HDIs make it very difficult for them to do so optimally.
Commonly, performance appraisal serves two basic purposes, namely to evaluate performance and to enhance performance through the development of staff capacity. A well-designed performance appraisal system for all academics is not commonly in place in the HE sector. Many are either developing such a system or only use performance appraisal in the case of requests for promotion or merely for developmental purposes.

Those who have such a system, battle to implement it for academics, largely due to a prevailing institutional culture antithetic to performance appraisal. There is a definite need for the implementation of an institutional performance appraisal system for academics, to contribute to the continuous professional development of university teachers. Such a system has both a developmental focus and a focus on accountability, has periodical recurrence and has teaching as one of the key criteria.

Just under half of the HEIs now conclude performance agreements (or equivalent) with their academic staff or are in the process of developing such a tool. In some HEIs performance agreements are not implemented as a university-wide practice but reside within faculties. Performance contracts are in place between every appointed nGAP academic and the appointing university. Another recent development is the use of a PDP as a tool for professional development, which, in some instances, are linked to probation and/or performance reviews.

Teaching portfolios are typically used as a developmental process for reflecting on and improving teaching; and as an evaluative product for personnel decisions regarding permanent appointment, promotion, or a teaching award. The development and submission of teaching portfolios is part of the larger drive towards assuring the quality of the teaching and learning experiences that universities offer to students. Currently, teaching portfolios are used by nine universities to assess whether newly appointed staff will receive permanent appointment; eight use teaching portfolios as a tool in performance appraisal; 17 HEIs have adopted teaching portfolios as a requirement for applications for promotion and awards.

Nineteen HEIs use student evaluations as part of performance appraisal and/or as a tool for further professional development. Although it is important to heed students’ opinions about a university’s functioning and its education programmes, it is important not to draw simple conclusions on the strength of student evaluations, particularly where this concerns promotion, monetary incentives and conferring of awards.

Generally, promotion systems for academic staff are based on a three-track, two-track or a single-track system. In several HEIs the promotion criteria continue to weight research more heavily than teaching. For some institutions it is a challenge to define indicators that make it
possible to create parity of esteem of teaching with research. Currently, 21 universities have adopted teaching quality as one of the criteria for promotion, albeit the weighting may differ per institution, a considerable change compared to the 2014 submissions. The promotion possibilities on the strength of teaching is being debated in many institutions. Promotion is a critical incentive for academics to engage with professional development and follow career paths that give prominence to teaching and research in teaching and learning.

Almost all institutions confer annual institutional teaching excellence awards. In addition, 13 institutions have faculty awards in place, sometimes with and sometimes without a purse. Generally, awards are viewed as prestigious, though in some institutions the awarded amount is less for the teaching excellence award than it is for the research excellence award. The award procedures vary considerably from being criterion-referenced in two universities, (therefore numerous awards can be conferred), to awards based on nomination, comparison and competition (therefore there only a small number of applicants and awardees). A relatively recent development is the inclusion of the category ‘emerging lecturers’ into the institutional award categories by at least four HEIs. Several HEIs are currently amending the criteria for teaching excellence awards as well as their categories of awards, to bring these closer to the HELTASA/CHE awards criteria and categories.

It is desirable to change perceptions and behaviours towards professional development activities, from it being considered an additional demand that clashes with other academic interests, to it being an uncontested norm for professionalism. Institutional structures and culture that emphasise that teaching and learning is central to the university’s identity, will greatly assist in this. Institutions with a devolved management structure often do not have institution-wide policies and frameworks to implement an institutional approach to professional development (including induction), the interpretation and implementation of performance appraisal, criteria for promotion, and workload allocation.
CHAPTER THREE

FOCUS AREA TWO: ENHANCING STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

The emergence of student support and development as a major concern for HEIs, nationally and internationally, is undoubtedly the result of the massive increase in first-time entering students and the increasing rate of student dropouts and withdrawal from university education. These students need additional institutional support to assist in their educational and personal development.

The massification of higher education has resulted in exponential growth in enrolments at all 26 HEIs. University enrolments have grown from about half a million in 1994 to about one million in 2016 (Webbstock, 2016). Although the enrolment numbers have increased dramatically, the graduation rates have remained very low, an average of about 17% in 2015 (Statistics on Post School Education and Training in South Africa – 2015) and dropout rates are unacceptably high. The associated costs of students who drop out of university without completing their degrees and diplomas are prohibitive.

Despite the many advances and achievements made by higher education, the issue of non-completion and/or dropouts remains a perennial problem. This problem needs dedicated and serious attention. The National Development Plan (NDP) calls for an increase in the participation rate at universities of at least 70%; an increase in the throughput rate for degree programmes to more than 75% and the provision of extra support for underprepared learners by means of support programmes at all institutions to help learners cope with the demands of higher education.

How does the sector deal with this seemingly intractable challenge? It is beyond question that HEIs are duty-bound to create conducive study environments that cater for the emotional, social and academic needs of all their students.

Student support and development is a catch-phrase for student support activities outside the formal academic programme. The precise nature and area of responsibility of these activities are interpreted differently at almost every HEI. Globally, two types of student support services exist, namely academic and non-academic support services.

While the line between these two kinds of support services is somewhat blurred in the South African university environment, for the sake of clarity the distinction adopted in the 2015 CHE report will be followed here. The CHE 2015 report made the following distinction:

Academic support and development involves helping students successfully execute the tasks required to succeed in their academic programme. This includes providing
training in study skills, activities to develop academic literacies and additional support related to specific courses, such as tutoring.

Non-academic support and development involves helping students successfully navigate the challenges associated with being a university student and with life in general. This includes providing training in life skills, such as time and stress management, peer mentoring, lifestyle and psychological counselling and special services needed by students with disabilities.

In order to provide students with high quality support, it is imperative for universities to consciously institute mechanisms that ensure interaction between academic and non-academic university student support systems. Such systems ideally are embedded in strategic and operational plans and policies, address adequate resource mobilisation and allocation, identify responsible persons or teams, and provide for monitoring and evaluation. Most HEIs, with differing degrees of intensity and success, treat student support as a strategic imperative.

There is often a limited liaison in the HE sector between the activities of a central student services division and those in the formal curriculum domain. This is so despite a wealth of literature that clearly demonstrates that students’ physical, financial and emotional wellbeing and a positive and supportive environment are key to student success.

This chapter documents what has been learnt and achieved in the HE sector in this country about improving student success, in relation to Focus Area Two. Furthermore, this study considers the status of the student support and development environs throughout the sector over the period starting in 2014, as well as how the structures, practices and policies in the sector related to this focus area changed in this period, and why. Institutions were also asked to document the kinds of activities they initiated in this period, designed to enhance student support and development, but that did not live up to their expectations and the reasons for the unsatisfactory outcomes.

2. IMPACT OF STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

Since the mandate for student support and development is to contribute effectively to student and institutional success through the support and development agenda (CHE, 2013; DHET, 2010; DoE, 1997), HEIs are well-served by treating the relevant support services as a necessary and wholly integrated part of the HEI environment. Hence, student support services should be proactive, rather than reactive, and completely responsive to diverse student needs. Moreover, institutions must appreciate the fact that the skills and expertise of the staff within student support and development services contribute directly to the total learning and personal development experience of students.

It is important to recognise that, apart from the increased demand for tutors to concentrate on academic matters, HEIs are expected to establish additional support infrastructure, such
as ‘learning spaces’ or ‘learning commons’, to cater for the academic and non-academic extra-curricular needs of both students and staff. Consequently, many HEIs now employ additional professionals in the student support and development arena to deal with these new demands. UWC’s recent decision to create the position of DVC for student support and development is an example of high-level strategic intent in this regard.

As such, student support and development services systems need to be integrated into all parts of the institution, to enable the system to be proactive and respond timeously to student needs. It is abundantly clear from the many studies conducted all over the world and from reports submitted at different points in the QEP process that student support and development cannot be divorced from the academic function. The two are intertwined, they are, in fact, inseparable elements of the student experience.

3. DISJUNCTURES

In the past twenty years or so, the South African higher education sector experienced significant massification, as students (mostly Black) enrolled at these institutions in their thousands. As a result, higher education has had to be fundamentally restructured from its fractured and inequitable apartheid legacy, in order to meet the human resource needs and the national goals of the new democratic state. The sector has experienced tremendous growth in student numbers, but it is common cause that this has not been accompanied by the requisite increase in government funding, nor has staff numbers increased sufficiently to meet the demand created by the increase in student numbers - and until 2006 there were hardly any improvements in the status of physical infrastructure at most institutions (mostly HDIs).

As a consequence of the massive increase in student numbers, including the so-called ‘non-traditional students’ (first generation students, mature students and students from disadvantaged communities), Webbstock (2016) points outs that

> the last few decades have seen the introduction on a large scale of bridging and foundational programmes, student support programmes, more sophisticated admission and placement processes, more career guidance and counselling, different pedagogies, more explicit and transparent expectations and criteria for assessment and a much wider range of modes of delivery facilitated by developments in information and communication technology.

These complex developments have significantly complicated matters for those HEIs with a meagre resource base. At some of these institutions, the requisite policies and management infrastructure to regularise practices are lacking, which results in a situation where fragmented and ad hoc solutions are sought, with failure a common result.
4. SOCIAL JUSTICE AND ENGAGEMENT

The White Paper on Higher Education of 1997 specifies that higher education has a particular role to play in the restructuring of an unequal society (DoE, 1997 - White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education). Teaching and learning in post-apartheid South Africa must therefore contribute to social justice.

Every HEI, therefore, has an obligation to provide the best undergraduate experience possible for its students and to prepare them for the next stage of their lives. A big part of the preparation is the growth that students achieve through their involvement in activities outside, such as leadership training, mentoring and membership of various student organisations. SU offers a good example of how the development and growth of students can be accomplished through work done at their Frederik van Zyl Slabbert Institute for Student Leadership Development, which is a component of its HOPE project.

5. EVIDENCE-BASED DECISION-MAKING

Student support and development scholarship and research need to generate reliable evidence which enables evidence-based decision-making on what hinders or promotes student success at HEIs. Without this hard evidence, it will be difficult for academic development practitioners to convince university management to make resources available for student support and development activities. This is especially so at historically disadvantaged institutions, with their limited resources to service multitudes of students from very poor backgrounds.

6. EFFORTS AT IMPROVEMENT

Available literature and research reveal that quality teaching and learning is by its nature a complex phenomenon which lacks a clear definition. However, relevant literature also stresses:

> Quality teaching is necessarily student-centred; its aim is most and for all student learning. Thus, attention should be given not simply to the teacher’s pedagogical skills, but also to the learning environment that must address the student’s personal needs: students should know why they have to work hard, should be able to relate to other students and to receive help if needed. Adequate support to staff and students (financial support, social and academic support, support to minority students, counselling services, etc) also improves learning outcomes. Learning communities – groups of students and/or teachers who learn collaboratively and build knowledge through intellectual interaction – are judged to enhance student learning by increasing students’ and teachers’ satisfaction.
However, the stark reality is that, given the above necessary conditions for quality teaching and learning, the South African HE environment presents serious challenges to quality teaching and learning: most of the students come from very poor backgrounds; some of them cannot even afford three meals a day; many do not have access to decent accommodation and live in squalid conditions. The list goes on and on. No wonder some HEIs (mostly HDIs) still cannot come to terms with the demands of quality teaching and learning as much as they try to create conducive learning environments.

Institutions have to build the necessary capacity (financial resources, requisite physical spaces, human resources) to mount highly integrated student support and development systems custom-made for individual institutions.

7. STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT STRUCTURES

Central to an institution having high-quality student support and development systems and services, is the existence of functional, efficient and effective delivery structures. It is thus incumbent upon university executive managers and senior managers to ensure that quality effective delivery structures are available throughout university campuses.

Functional, efficient student support and development structures ensure that there is no unnecessary overlap between the work of the various complementary structures. This can be achieved through an institution-level coordinating and oversight committee (e.g. the Directorate of Student Development and Support at TUT).

The QEP institutional submissions and reports and the peer review feedback reports confirm that all HEIs in South Africa have one or more functional units that offer a multiplicity of services to students. Most of these services are centralised and coordinated through a centre and/or unit, although the precise designation of such centres/units differs from one institution to another. All institutions also have additional student support and development structures which reside in faculties, schools, departments, as well as residences.

Much as these developments are important and desirable to spread student support and development activities widely throughout campuses, they have the potential to derail/frustrate the central coordinating role needed to manage student support and development activities, as well as to duplicate efforts in the face of scarce resources. UJ is a good example of an institution that seeks to adopt an institution-wide, rather than a piecemeal, approach to student support and development.

The 2015/2016 institutional reports further indicate that there have been both quantitative and qualitative improvements in the size and form of the various structures meant to service the student support and development divisions at HEIs. Additional resources have been made available; new initiatives and structures have been established; and in some instances new
positions were created and appointments made to ensure that these structures function optimally. The establishment of the South African National Resource Centre (SANRC) for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition at UJ and the Student Success Unit (SSU) at UNISA are examples of these recent developments at South African HEIs.

8. INSTITUTION-WIDE EFFORTS TO IDENTIFY STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT NEEDS

In the domain of student support and development, increased attention has in recent times been paid to the high school-university transition, to retention and student success, and to work preparedness. In order to collect relevant information in this regard, universities have had to conduct institution-wide student surveys which looked into various aspects of student experiences during and after university life, such as student academic preparedness, the impact of student support and development services on student retention and success, as well as work readiness.

The submissions and reports indicate that universities regard the measurement of and reporting on all of these issues to be an important academic imperative which warrants the establishment of a proper institutional policy framework.

A number of institutions have developed ‘home-brewed’ student profile diagnostic initiatives to identify students’ needs for remedial considerations.

It is important that HEIs utilise the information gained from them to identify students’ various academic support needs (as was done by, e.g., UFS and SU). When properly analysed, they reveal interesting information about student experiences and their behaviour. UFS used several surveys to monitor student engagement and to compare itself to other universities.

9. IDENTIFICATION AND SUPPORT OF AT-RISK STUDENTS

9.1 Early warning systems

While many universities indicated in their 2014 institutional submissions that they had data-based systems in place to identify students who are at risk, early enough in the year to be assisted and so avoid failure (or dropping out), some HDIs had just started to work on the relevant policies and procedures for implementation in 2016 and 2017.

An effective early warning system involves assessment and feedback as early as possible in the academic year. Its essence is that all role-players have access to real-time data that they can use to adjust their actions and behaviours to improve retention and success by means of intervention and support programmes rendered at an appropriate time.
9.2 Tracking and referral of students

From the 2014 institutional submissions it is apparent that more than half of the universities have various instruments in place to identify students whose academic performance may lead to failure and/or dropping out of university. Almost all institutions indicated that they monitor students’ performance from as early as when the first formative assessment tests are written. The 2015/2016 reports also show this is now the case throughout the sector. This is achievable, given the quality of student information available to the sector through the management information system (MIS), as well as the Higher Education Data Analyser (HEDA) system.

It is important to note that all institutions, including those whose early warning systems are not yet fully developed and implemented, have functional tracking and referral systems in place. UJ is piloting the use of predictive analytics software to help identify students who are in need of support.

A more nuanced comprehensive approach to tracking and referral practices has been adopted by more than half of the universities since the start of the QEP in 2014. Some institutions, more so those that have multiple campuses, have developed sophisticated multi-layered supporting systems (e.g., the Academic Monitoring and Support System at UKZN, the Business Intelligent Services portal at Wits and the Analytics for Learn at UP) to track ‘at-risk’ students and to refer them to appropriate support and development centres or units.

Finally, whereas in 2014 just over half of the HEIs indicated that they had systems in place to track students’ performance in 2014, 22 institutions reported in 2015 that they now have mechanisms in place to monitor student performance early in the first semester and to identify those who need remedial actions and that referral systems are also available to assist students ‘at risk.’ There are also those institutions, very few, who are still struggling to put rigorous systems in place to track individual students’ performance. These institutions would be best advised to seek assistance from the many universities who have perfected their systems rather than continuing to invest scarce resources in new and untested systems.

10. INSTITUTION-WIDE INITIATIVES TO SUPPORT FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

Until relatively recently, an institution-wide orientation programme was the only initiative universities used to introduce and support first-entering students. Now, a number of universities have embraced the First Year Experience (FYE) initiative aimed at assisting institutions to more effectively ‘teach the students they have’. Currently, these two initiatives or programmes are used extensively to introduce new students to the HE environment and to support them throughout the first year as they navigate this somewhat ‘hostile’ terrain.

The shape and form of orientation programmes vary significantly in duration and intensity from one institution to another. In some instances, these programmes last for one day, when
new students are introduced to the registration procedures and processes and to their faculties and departments; at others, they last for a week; at yet others, they continue for weeks and months, during which period new-entering students are exposed to the entire university environment. At UJ the orientation programme dovetails into the FYE initiative, which involves scheduling activities from the initial orientation throughout the first semester, and in some cases this extended orientation includes strands of academic development which get integrated into the core first-year curricula.

The form and shape of the orientation programme usually determine the number and type of the personnel assigned to run these programmes – these may include senior students (appropriately trained peers), academic development practitioners and/or lecturers and professors. Some universities (e.g., CPUT) have even developed online materials for first-entering students which can be accessed at any time.

The 2014 CHE submissions showed that six institutions ran successful FYE initiatives. In the 2015/2016 reports, eight institutions indicated that their FYE programmes were running well and were integrated into institutional academic structures, whereas four institutions were at varying stages of development, having only established the programmes in 2014. UJ adopted the FYE initiative as early as 2010 and has developed rigorous systems and processes over the past few years in order to enhance the initiative.

One of the most exciting developments in the HE sector is the recent establishment of the South African National Resource Centre for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition (SANRAC) at UJ. This will be a valuable resource centre for every HEI in the country. Those institutions planning on adopting the FYE initiative are advised to seek relevant information from the centre in advance.

An interesting and much needed trend towards evaluating the impact of some of the interventions described, is developing among a number of institutions. A number of institutions, among them UJ, NMU, CPUT and UKZN, indicated in their 2014 submissions that independent national and international experts were requested to review the interventions and assess their impact on student performance as well as making recommendations and suggestions on the way forward.

11. ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

Academic support is a developmental teaching and learning process that starts before a student registers with an institution and continues through a study programme up to, but not limited to, graduation and absorption into the labour market. It allows students to become fully integrated within a university community, engage meaningfully with both academic and non-academic activities, and prepare adequately for the world of work.
11.1 Academic literacy and language development

The majority of students enrolled at HEIs are Black and mostly African, with diverse home languages. It is well-documented that most students entering institutions of higher learning in this country lack proficiency in the so-called academic literacies required to succeed in higher education, such as academic writing and reading, computer literacy, quantitative literacies and information literacy.

As a result, some institutions have established multilingual projects. NMU, for example, has established innovative and well-resourced multilingual projects to explore the use of English, isiXhosa and Afrikaans as media of instruction during tutorial sessions, especially at first-year level. Other institutions are in the process of piloting multilingualism to facilitate learning across faculties and disciplines.

Every HEI has programmes to support students who have varying degrees of proficiency in the academic literacies mentioned above. These may include compulsory credit-bearing modules such as ICT literacy, English for Academic Purposes and English for Specific Purposes. In their submissions, institutions have also indicated that there are some student support and development programmes which may be compulsory to certain groups of students and voluntary to others, by design, such as supplemental instruction (SI), while others are embedded in the formal curriculum.

Whereas the 2014 submissions showed that 13 HEIs had functional writing centres, the 2015/2016 and 2017 reports indicated that there have been qualitative and quantitative improvements throughout the sector. Twenty-one institutions now have established reading and writing centres or units, and two institutions are in the process of establishing these structures. The shape and form and the designation of these entities vary from one institution to another. Some approaches to supporting students’ literacy development is more comprehensive than others.

An examination of the 2014 submissions and the 2015/2016 and 2017 reports reveals that every HEI is continuously investigating ways to improve academic support to all students in need of the various types of academic literacies.

11.2 Subject-specific academic support and development

The 2014 submissions and the 2015/2016 and 2017 reports indicate that all HEIs provide various kinds of subject-specific academic support and development programmes to both first-entering students and senior students.

These usually take the form of additional tutorial sessions, offered by departments over and above the tutorial sessions provided for in the normal class time-table, as well as SI conducted by academic development units. A number of institutions have developed tutor training and support programmes; some have discipline-specific centres to conduct extra tutorials (e.g., the Mathematics Centre at VUT); some also conduct the tutorials in a number of languages (four, in the case of CPUT). Tutorials are best conducted by trained tutors (on their own or with the module lecturer) who facilitate student-centred interactive engagement with the knowledge, skills and values pertaining to the course or discipline. Some institutions conduct
tutorials (partially) online and others have residence-based tutorials. UNISA has specific course-related ‘e-tutors’ that facilitate online discussions and explain course-related material. These are important and significant developments in the HE sector, given the current ‘decolonisation’ discourse and the role that the language of instruction plays in the mastery of academic literacies in this country.

Although the majority of institutions provide SI to first-entering students, some are only now establishing these programmes.

12. NON-ACADEMIC SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

Successful completion of studies can rarely be achieved if other areas of student life are unbalanced or facing challenges. In this case, the ‘study context’ is very important given the many challenges students have to face daily. Given the history of higher education, and the ravages of the apartheid system, students at HDIs often find themselves faced with serious challenges of accommodation, finances, as well as food, to mention but a few. Any one of these challenges has the potential to cause disruption to the student’s studies.

Since the majority of students will need support of one kind or another throughout their academic life, it is imperative that student support services should be proactive, rather than reactive, and wholly responsive to developing students’ needs. HEIs should ensure that adequate capacity (adequately qualified professionals, physical facilities and funding) is available to underpin and sustain student support and development services.

12.1 Mentoring and peer support

From the 2014 submissions and the 2015/2016 and 2017 reports, it is apparent that mentoring and peer support programmes of one form or another are available at all universities to all students, although most service primarily first-entering students.

Both mentoring and peer support as well as extra tutorials and one-on-one consultations are contingent on voluntary and committed support of senior students and academics throughout the sector. Many HEIs make use of teaching assistants (TAs) to assist lecturers during class and tutorial sessions. These senior students (B Tech, Honours and postgraduates) are role models to undergraduate students. Mentoring encompasses both academic and psycho-social support (e.g., the BeWell mentorship programme at SU).

12.2 Life skills development, advising and counselling

These student support services are often located in the student services division of the institution and students and staff make use of these services voluntarily. The designation of these units or centres varies from one institution to another. Their main focus is to provide counselling and developmental services to students and staff. This is done in pursuit of the optimal well-being and happiness of students and staff during their stay at HEIs. At all the HEIs, student support services at these centres are provided by appropriately qualified
professionals who include trained counsellors, academic development practitioners and clinical psychologists.

The 2014 submissions and 2015/2016 and 2017 reports reflect the provision at HEIs of a large range of life skills development and counselling activities. These cover study skills (e.g., time management, study skills and reading skills), life skills (e.g., conflict and stress management, and interpersonal relations), counselling (e.g., educational, personal and financial problems) and career development (e.g., career choices, course selection and job applications).

Indeed, according to the submissions and reports, there have been significant qualitative and quantitative institutional and sector-wide improvements in the number and volume of activities in the student counselling and advising arena over the past three years. Some institutions have recently developed online platforms dedicated to career advising.

All institutions reported that they conduct annual career fairs of one type or another. The duration of these tend to vary from one institution to another: from a day-long event to staggered year-long events. UNISA holds these fairs centrally as well as regionally at different times and offer several student support services.

12.3 Support for students in university residences

Fifteen institutions made reference to the provision of student support services in university residences in their 2014 submissions and 2015/2016 and 2017 reports. These indicate no changes at all during this period. These services are provided by senior students in residences, mentors and peers, as well as dedicated residence staff. At some institutions there are formal structures in place to facilitate these programmes.

These institutions provide academic and non-academic support services in residences. These services give students in residences additional, much needed support over and above formal university student support programmes. Improvements in creating an environment in university residences that is conducive to learning through the provision of physical spaces and resources, as well as mentors and advisors, can only be commended. The 2017 peer review panel reports also noted the availability of wi-fi connectivity in university residences throughout the sector, allowing most students access to the internet all the time.

12.4 Support for students with disabilities

It is common cause that the support offered to students with disabilities in HEIs is diverse and varied – from well-established disability support services to some that are still trying to establish such support. In the 2014 submissions, seven universities reported having functional disability units which provided academic and non-academic support services for students with disabilities. In the 2015/2016 institutional reports, two additional institutions indicated that plans were afoot to establish centres for students with disabilities.

It is clear from the 2014 submissions and the 2015/2016 and 2017 reports that over the past three years there has been minimal or no meaningful increase in the number of institutions which offer support to students with disabilities.
There are a number of challenges in this area: accessibility of facilities (including accommodation for carers); lack of space to house disability equipment; an increase in the number of students with disabilities (e.g., from 8 to 33 at CPUT); and the nature and spread of services at multi-campuses.

According to the Higher and Further Education Disabilities Services Association (HEDSA), ‘inclusive tertiary education is a right for people with disabilities, particularly in South Africa because this country signed and ratified the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2007. And yet the number of students with disabilities in tertiary institutions in this country is just about one percent’ (HEDSA 2012 Biennial Symposium). It is thus imperative that HEIs in South Africa begin to attend to the question of inclusivity, together with the attendant multidimensional support (financial, social, infrastructure, etc.) needed to create a conducive environment for proper teaching and learning. It is common knowledge that access to post-secondary education is an integral component of attaining an improved livelihood and achieving income security, yet people with disabilities are less likely to attend and complete post-secondary education in this country than those without disabilities. Students with disabilities have the potential to be successful and the support they receive from their institutions can play a significant role in this success.

As stated, not all HEIs have facilities that provide or coordinate services and support for students with disabilities. Also, at those institutions where disability facilities are available, service delivery models and standards are variable as no specific governmental standards exist.

13. CAREER GUIDANCE AND WORKPLACE-RELATED SUPPORT

Most institutions indicated that they provide for their students to enhance their workplace-related skills during academic and career-advising activities. Such provision includes career development, graduate placement (career fairs) and entrepreneurship. UCT has developed an online platform – MyCareer portal - for potential employers to advertise, recruit and offer advice to students. Some of these are integrated into formal course modules. However, very few institutions made reference to work integrated learning (WIL).

Those who did, do so in the context of student employment preparation and placement (e.g., TUT) and as integral parts – along with Service Learning (SL) – of student support and development activities to make them work-ready (e.g., UJ). They also make good use of ICTs.

It is important to acknowledge that WIL is an essential element of the training and development of students to become skilled and knowledgeable, ethical and confident graduates ready for the workplace.
14. **SECTOR-WIDE CHALLENGES FACED BY HEIs IN RELATION TO FOCUS AREA TWO**

This section looks at those changes institutions initiated during the past three years which proved to be unsuccessful, as well as the major challenges currently facing HEIs. Invariably, these challenges vary from one institutional context to another, but it is hoped that the sector will gain insight into and appreciate the extent of the problems which continue to beset the HE system. These range from a persistent lack of resources, an inability to offer equitable support systems to every campus in multi-campus universities, issues of change management dynamics occasioned by changes in institutional cultures, and the macro-political dynamics of the country.

A significant number of institutions have mentioned the lack of resources (financial, human capital, infrastructure) as the major stumbling block to attaining the lofty goals enshrined in their vision and mission statements. Concerns raised in the context of resource-strapped student support services are: persistent staff shortages, an inability to appoint more than only a few trained student psychologists and inadequate physical infrastructure. A typical student support and development team requires staff members with the experience and knowledge to be able to participate and influence decisions at strategic level; trained professionals to develop, coordinate, implement and evaluate programmes and activities; and assistants to ensure that all students can access the services. A staffing strategy is needed that makes use of a combination of contracts (fixed term), permanent positions, short-term contracts, work-study positions and voluntary services.

In some cases, institutions reported that students who were identified as being most in need of support (additional tutorials, SI, etc.) often do not respond to invitations and appear to shun the proposed intervention as if there was some stigma attached to the whole exercise. This is unfortunate indeed, as it defeats the purpose of establishing support systems for students who require additional remedial tuition. This phenomenon has been mentioned by a number of institutions, including the so-called advantaged universities. The lack of adequate resources has led to many institutions abandoning some of their most important student support and development projects, which would have contributed greatly towards students’ learning experience.

The 2014 submissions and the 2015/2016 reports indicated that a significant number of universities reported that many students and staff, including academics, were unaware of the nature and range of student support and development services available at their institutions - more so amongst first-entering students.

At some institutions the student leadership is cognisant of this lack of awareness among many students of the availability of student support and development services at their disposal. Yet somehow the leadership does not appropriately disseminate this very important information to the students, first-entering students in particular. This often is the result of the term-based nature of student representation and the concomitant lack of a system-based, rather than person-based, transfer of information.
Some institutions stated that transforming old practices and cultures seems to take longer than anticipated and this presents institutions with many challenges. HEIs have undergone tremendous changes in the past two decades or so and those institutions which fail to embrace this new reality and transform accordingly, often find themselves in an invidious position.

A few institutions complained about the late registration of first-entering students – the so-called ‘walk-in’ phenomenon, which is experienced by almost all institutions in late January and almost all of February of each academic year. This phenomenon has prompted senior managers at the affected institutions to canvass for a late start to the academic year in order to accommodate these ‘walk-ins’.

Two institutions made nuanced reference to the differential performance gap between White and Black students as a major challenge facing the institutions. One institution (UJ) reported statistically on the remarkable progress made to improve Black students’ success rate in the past couple of years. Another (UCT) reported on the frustrating lack of progress in significantly closing the gap in completion rates between White and Black students.

Given this country’s history, it is important that all institutions, especially the so-called historically White institutions, attend closely to Black students’ performance and progression. The sector has responded positively to the call for greater access for historically disadvantaged and marginalised individuals since the dawn of democracy in South Africa in 1994. However, the figures mentioned above relating to drop-out rates and completion (graduation) rates of Black students show that there is still a lot of work to be done to level the playing field for Black students at historically White institutions.

15. SUMMARY

Sustained student retention and student success at HEIs depend to a large extent on the availability of high-quality student support and development services. This calls for institutions to set up structures capable of managing complex multifaceted/multi-layered service delivery organs to service a centralised student service system. In addition, individuals appointed to manage student support and development divisions need to have appropriate management skills, such as advocacy and negotiation skills, motivational and team-building skills and human resources management skills.

The question that runs like a thread through this section of the 2014 submissions and the 2015/206 and 2017 reports, is whether the journey travelled over the past three years has yielded the desired outcomes of improving the student support and development terrain throughout the HE sector. The overwhelming response must be yes; there have been both qualitative and quantitative improvements to student support and development throughout the sector. Understandably, the improvements have not been even, since some of the institutions started the journey long before 2014. In this instance, the QEP processes consolidated efforts institutionally and also opened up opportunities for sectoral
collaboration and information sharing. In light of all this, a logical question is: To what extent have these significant improvements effected improved student success and better graduation rates? Although no conclusive answer is yet possible, some institutions have already achieved remarkable results and much improved student performance, especially with first-entering students.

Various issues in this review of the QEP institutional submissions and reports have given rise to a number of policy choices having to be made by HEIs. For example, HEIs should seriously consider making some first-entering elective modules/activities compulsory and credit-bearing. Why not provide incentives for mentors and lecturers who provide student support services voluntarily? Many institutions have also pointed to major institutional/sectoral challenges and pressure points in the system that will require urgent and thoughtful reflection. Some of these include accommodation and food provision for many disadvantaged and poor students, and physical infrastructure for various student support and development activities such as learning spaces and/or learning commons.

Lastly, this review suggests that the central coordination and integration of institutional student support and development services would make available to the institution a powerful management tool to monitor developments throughout the university. More especially, such an integrated student support and development service would mean that a student needs to refer to one point only within the institution for appropriate support, rather than a confusing multitude of access points.
CHAPTER FOUR

FOCUS AREA THREE: ENHANCING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Focus Area Three, *Enhancing the learning environment*, covers teaching and learning spaces, ICT infrastructure and access, technology-enabled tools and resources, and library facilities. The 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 148) emphasised that one important criterion to judge the suitability of built forms is whether they are conducive to the teaching and learning process that takes place in them. A term used in this context is ‘built pedagogy’. Thus, when new buildings are designed, or existing building are renovated or re-developed, the current and emerging curriculum and the students’ use of the institution’s facilities are critical factors.

The global advent of IT applications as mainstream teaching and learning tools in higher education has prompted a reconceptualization of pedagogical approaches. In South Africa, too, the increased intake of students into HEIs with a limited physical infrastructure, as well as the recent student protests, play a significant role in the current rethinking of the way academic programmes are offered, and the facilities that are needed to do so. This reappraisal of the functions and formats of teaching and learning spaces, as well as the concomitant role of student access to information, has led HEIs to engage in a reconceptualisation of teaching and learning spaces. This reconceptualisation is best done in concert with an overarching institutional vision for teaching and learning and how the teaching and learning spaces (now considerably widened with the advent of ubiquitous ICT) are designed to align with the curriculum. New developments in hardware, and information and communication and social software technologies are affecting knowledge production, while at the same time changing approaches to learning and teaching. New e-learning technologies provide a wide range of resources and support for teaching and learning with the emphasis on collaboration, interactivity and connectedness.

‘E-learning’ has a number of characteristics: it involves a move from mere knowledge-focused higher education to a skills and values focus; it makes teaching and learning more flexible, context-dependent and virtual; and it requires a sophisticated digital infrastructure for students and lecturers.

In engaging with a reconceptualisation, a number of issues arise, namely, (i) the need for the university’s strategic direction and involvement of academics in the design of the physical and virtual learning environment; (ii) the need for an alignment of the intended curriculum with physical and virtual learning spaces; and (iii) the need for an extension of the learning environment from the classroom to the campus, to student accommodation on and off campus, and the location of a particular university.
2. STRATEGIC DIRECTION INFORMING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

An analysis of the 2014 baseline submissions suggests that in response to the question, “Which aspects of your institution’s Strategic Plan relate to this focus area?”, 11 HEIs explicitly stated the need for a well-resourced, or enhanced, conducive learning and living environment for students; several institutions stated their general strategic intention to provide high quality learning; and some mentioned the need for student-centred methodologies and facilities. Most institutions focused in their responses on the provision of an innovative and appropriate infrastructure (including ICT) on their campuses or sites of delivery, sometimes extended into the residences. Some included the wider environment as part of the learning environment and mentioned the need for ongoing innovation through advanced learning technologies.

In 2014, none of the 23 participating HEIs explicitly mentioned in its response to this question the need to align infrastructure with teaching and learning aspects of the strategic plan and/or academic programmes or curricula. One institution mentioned the need to align quality enhancement with infrastructural development.

An analysis of the 2015/16 and the 2017 reports suggests that 14 universities have developed a campus (infrastructure) master plan dealing with infrastructural development, while two institutions are in the process of developing such a plan. At one institution with multiple campuses, each campus has its own infrastructure plan (which, incidentally, this institution deems to be a challenge). Four universities seem to have institutional plans dealing with infrastructure, albeit under different names – such as a ‘space utilisation model’, an institutional ‘development plan’ or a ‘long-term infrastructure plan’. Two institutions do not make mention of any medium- or long-term comprehensive, overall infrastructure development plan. The 2015/16 and 2017 reports also indicate that the campus master plans (or similar) are often based on an infrastructure audit and sometimes include a maintenance plan.

Furthermore, most institutions have a teaching and learning strategy (or similar) in place plus attendant policies, which reflect the university’s commitment to the enhancement of teaching and learning in the institution. Frequently, however, campus master plans are developed with a primary focus on student numbers. This, in itself, is a valid institutional concern, but in order to enhance the learning environment it is vital that a campus master plan (or similar) is well integrated with and supportive of the institution’s teaching and learning strategy (philosophy).

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggest that amongst HEIs there is, indeed, a growing awareness of the need to align the provision of facilities with the institutional strategy (philosophy) on teaching and learning. Only a few universities expressly indicated that a
campus master plan is developed in conjunction with other strategic plans, particularly the teaching and learning strategy (or similar). However, the majority of HEIs are in some way incorporating requirements for teaching and learning in their infrastructural development plans, although this is not necessarily based on a systematic approach that takes the teaching and learning strategy as a starting point.

The reports also suggest that in some institutions there is a disjuncture between the ‘official stance’ of the university, such as the introduction of blended learning as per the teaching and learning strategy, and the actual infrastructure development taking place, such as the continued need for very large lecture theatres.

The 2017 institutional feedback reports repeatedly emphasise that the provision of physical spaces, equipment and ICT for teaching and learning must be planned and resourced at institutional level, and that decisions about what is provided, when, where and why, need to be guided by the institution’s teaching and learning strategy. At most HEIs, in practice a strategy-based link between academic needs and support provision does not exist, or is tenuous.

In several universities there is a somewhat ‘delegated’ link between the institution’s formal focus on teaching and learning and the drive towards enhancement of the learning environment, namely through centres for teaching and learning (or equivalent). Together with IT divisions, these centres often function as drivers of academic innovation, particularly regarding the application of IT in higher education. Some HEIs noted the appointment of a (executive) director to drive the process of linking infrastructural development with the enhancement of teaching and learning, or to drive the development of infrastructure conducive to learning, including e-learning.

Multi-campus institutions face the challenge to create equitable, enhanced learning environments across their campuses. To address these challenges requires consultation, integrated planning and collaboration (between academic and support staff, between staff and students, between campuses), clarity on project ownership and regular and consistent communication to all stakeholders.

Several HEIs mentioned that there is a critical need for a more integrated approach to the design and re-design of the learning environment, one that involves multiple stakeholders and, where needed, research and benchmarking. Virtual learning environments blur traditional boundaries and their implementation and therefore require close coordination and integration.

As was also emphasised in the 2017 institutional feedback reports, to facilitate a more seamless integration of the various institutional plans and strategies related to the enhancement of the learning environment, it may be worth establishing a working group or task team to ensure alignment between the institution’s educational philosophy and the design of teaching and learning spaces. Such a task team should, preferably, be representative of all stakeholders and include university teachers, teaching and learning specialists, technical staff, facilities staff and students. There is a need for explicit inclusion of the student voice in the decisions around enhancing the learning environment.
An integrated and representative task team would help ensure that physical spaces are designed and renovated around supporting a sound pedagogy, and that specific needs of academic staff (in terms of teaching) and students (in terms of learning) are accommodated. In sum, a campus master plan must be directly informed by the pedagogical and curriculum transformation needs of the institution. The institutional premise should be that the entire university and all its spaces are considered to be (potential) learning spaces.

3. **ALIGNMENT OF THE INTENDED CURRICULUM WITH TEACHING AND LEARNING SPACES**

From an analysis of the 2015/2016 institutional reports and the 2017 institutional feedback reports it appears that the overarching issues affecting decisions about enhancing the learning environment are: (1) how to assure the quality of education through supportive pedagogical approaches in the face of an increased intake of students; (2) how to move institutions into 21st century higher education that is characterised by rapid change; and (3) how to provide a conducive learning environment for teaching and learning, including an appropriate ICT environment and teaching and learning spaces that are fit for purpose in the light of dwindling resources. These three challenges form an interactive relationship with each other: the availability of ICT has created the opportunity for innovative pedagogical approaches; these, in turn, affect the functions and use of formal and informal learning spaces; they also require the institutional flexibility to engage in a re-appraisal and re-conceptualisation of its spatial and ICT infrastructural development and to acquire the resources to implement this.

Higher education’s increased reliance on ICT infrastructure also requires a balance between the demand to stay current, promote new technologies, protect systems through regular security audits, comply with legislation and international codes, maintain business continuity and provide quality teaching and learning experiences. There is a need for institutions to apply and implement the best governance strategy that suits the institution, including the use of steering/advisory bodies and regional/national forums.

In response to the need for supportive pedagogical approaches to provide quality education to increased numbers of students with the assistance of ICT, the implementation of a blended learning approach has found favour with many HEIs all over the world over the past number of years, and also in South Africa the use of blended learning is on the increase.

3.1. **Blended learning**

The 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 121) mentioned that, based on an analysis of the 2014 baseline submissions, some universities used blended learning to provide a combination of online resources and activities and face-to-face interaction. Blended learning is the deliberate fusion of the on-line (asynchronous and synchronous) and face-to-face contact time between lecturers and students and/or between students in a module.
A separate analysis of the 2014 submissions, however, indicates that 13 out of the 23 participating HEIs referred to the introduction of blended learning in their institutions. Most of these also indicated that the implementation was in a developmental phase.

An analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that 10 HEIs are in an advanced phase of implementing blended learning in their institutions. This is built on a teaching and learning or e-learning strategy, with staff development programmes, supporting structures and an appropriate technology in place. Six institutions seem to be in a developmental phase of introducing blended learning, while six HEIs are in an early planning phase. One institution does not mention blended learning in its submission.

It must be noted here that the institutions which are in an early planning phase, generally belong to the group of HDIs which are strongly dependent on supportive resources from outside the institution, since they have little financial reserves that can be used for technological advancement. The lack of financial resources is a structural challenge for many universities.

Generally, HEIs have identified blended learning as a strategic response to the demands for an increased student intake, since this enables HEIs to admit more students without requiring more buildings, thus alleviating the pressure on financial resources. It must be noted here that, in addition to being a response to massification in higher education, blended learning fosters the development of key 21st century competencies, such as creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, digital literacy and citizenship. Most campus-based classrooms cater for large classes and do not provide students with an environment conducive for reflection. Asynchronous, online learning experiences provide students with opportunities for meaningful reflection at a time and place chosen by them. When learning is provided in the two modes, that is, synchronous in the classroom and/or online, as well as asynchronous, the full potential of the learning experience is realised. The importance of this pedagogy is stressed in the 2013 White Paper, *Building an expanded, effective and integrated post-school system*:

*Teaching and learning interventions using ICT must be carefully planned and implemented. The success of an educational programme will be determined by its pedagogical strength and not by the integration of ICT, which can sometimes be used poorly or as a gimmick.*

(DHET, 2013: 53)

The principle was stated earlier that designing and constructing physical infrastructure, including technology, should be informed by the institution’s teaching and learning strategy (philosophy). This should not be the other way around. Thus, blended learning must first be about learning, and only second about enhancing learning through technology.

Blended learning should be a core component of an institution’s teaching and learning strategy, reflecting a fusion of complementary teaching and learning approaches and technologies based on pedagogical merit. Some (e.g., UP) have had it as part of their strategy for some time. They report that the nature of the ‘blend’ changes over time and with
experience, and is much dependent on student needs and expectations, the aptitude and motivation of lecturing staff and course content.

In relation to this, the 2015/16 and 2017 reports also indicated factors constraining optimal decision-making to implement blended learning and technology-assisted learning. These include: existing physical infrastructure (including ICT); limited financial resources; the socio-economic background of students; the socio-economic environment of the HEI; the need for support and development of both staff and students in terms of technology-assisted learning; and the need for student access to devices.

There are many models of blended learning, but all share certain commonalities. These include flexibility and the students’ choice regarding learning in terms of time, place or path, as well as the need for quality of learning and for particular pedagogical approaches focusing on the ratio and manner of online versus face-to-face delivery. The introduction of blended learning has, to a considerable extent, changed the time and location of learning from institution-imposed to student-chosen. This shift from a more traditional teaching and learning process to a more flexible and complex one has also prompted a re-appraisal of pedagogical approaches. At UFS, for example, a project on the scholarship of blended learning has been underway in its Centre for Teaching and Learning since 2012, and at NMU a proposal was developed to form a blended learning academy.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggest that much emphasis is placed on creating structures that provide staff development and support, in terms of blended learning pedagogies and their underpinning technology. There is a focus (e.g., at UP, UWC and SU) on the provision of an enabling environment, on curriculum design and development and on academic and student development from conceptualisation to delivery. This is achieved through teamwork between academic developers, lecturers and librarians to create effective, well-designed learning material for both online and face-to-face purposes.

3.2. The learning environment: an ecosystem

The ecosystem (or networked learning landscape) that is a learning environment includes (i) formal teaching spaces and resources (physical and virtual) and (ii) learning spaces and resources (formal and informal), on campus and in residences (private or university-provided), at the university or in the workplace or community, which can be physical and virtual (UP, 2015: 12).

The 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 152, 153) stated that, based on an analysis of the 2014 baseline submissions, it seems that, generally, much construction has taken place at universities. The report noted the building and refurbishment of large lecture venues, with some HEIs installing appropriate teaching technology. In some instances, the report stated, these large venues have been designed such that they can be subdivided into smaller ones, making them more multifunctional.
Reiterating the premise that the teaching and learning strategy and philosophy, as well as actual learning goals and needs, should underpin the nature of an HEI’s infrastructure, it follows that academic programmes and pedagogical approaches will have implications for a university’s infrastructure, such as its formal and informal learning spaces, its IT systems, residences, and its timetabling.

3.3. Formal teaching and learning spaces: physical spaces

As previously emphasised, decisions about the learning environment, including physical spaces, must be underpinned by strategic intent, explicitly focusing on the enhancement of teaching and learning. From the 2015/2016 and 2017 reports it is apparent that for HEIs to create adequate, appropriate and quality teaching and learning spaces is a challenge. This is because of the increase in student enrolment and because of the inherent difficulty of reconfiguring existing learning spaces (such as small and large lecture venues).

Based on the 2015 CHE report, despite much building and refurbishment activity, overcrowding seems to be a universal concern. In many cases (particularly – but not only - at HDIs), this was because the student numbers grew too fast relative to the available infrastructure. In other cases, the concern was to address the need for a reconceptualization of physical learning spaces in light of the large student numbers and the demand for modes of delivery alternative to the traditional classroom lecture.

The reports suggest that the challenge is significant. To implement a teaching and learning strategy (philosophy) that calls for student-centred pedagogical approaches requires venues that are suitable for interactive teaching and learning, whereas high student numbers and staff shortages call for large, traditional-teaching venues which accommodate many students at one time.

Institutions have adopted different strategies to address this challenge: some have undertaken audits to identify opportunities for space optimisation, and some use the opportunity afforded by ongoing renovations and new build to create spaces that allow for a variety of pedagogical approaches. As is evident from the 2015/2016 and 2017 reports, this has led to a trend of creating multifunctional and flexible teaching and learning spaces (classrooms and study centres/libraries).

The 2015 CHE report stated that it was evident that some disciplines require specialised teaching spaces, such as health sciences, engineering, architecture, performing arts, textile design and sports science. Such spaces may be costly to build and equip. Several universities are getting added value from their investment by making the facilities available to others in the university, using them to serve members of the local community or allowing industry to use them (CHE, 2015: 33). Analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicates that, evidently, disciplines continue to require specialised venues. Some HEIs repurpose existing space (e.g., disused residence dining halls) to suit specialist needs, others utilise DHET funding, while yet others manage to get external funding assistance.
According to the 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 166), about one quarter of the universities indicated that there was a need for maintenance, for renovations of buildings and infrastructure. Many of the challenges relate to a lack of finances to deal with a backlog in maintenance of the physical infrastructure. The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that at 11 of the HEIs there was a serious need for maintenance, renovation and re-development of physical infrastructure, but that this was difficult because of a lack of financial resources.

As stated in the 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 34), additional space is needed at many, if not most, universities. Universities should think carefully about how their teaching and learning spaces, including new spaces they may wish to create, align with their educational philosophy. The 2015/16 and 2017 reports make it clear that, despite the need for new development of adequate infrastructure that is fit for purpose, often a lack of funds hamper the planning and implementation of this.

Ongoing maintenance and refurbishment/redevelopment is a key infrastructural activity. If this is hindered by insufficient funding, it jeopardises the basic sustainability of the university. In a resource-constrained environment, the use a variety of approaches to support teaching and learning is key (including, e.g., the use of solar energy for mobile charging stations). The 2017 institutional feedback reports suggest, therefore, that the design and use of multipurpose, flexible venues should be considered in future infrastructure planning, as these will be important in order to maximise venue use and allow for a variety of teaching and learning approaches, such as the use of dining halls as learning spaces outside of mealtimes. Also, in terms of plans for renewal or repurposing of existing buildings (including the residences), or in any new construction, universities are urged to pay attention to the inclusion of flexible teaching and learning spaces.

3.3.1. Allocation of formal teaching and learning spaces

The availability of adequate teaching and learning venues is critical for the quality of learning to take place. As already stated, a serious problem facing HEIs is that the increase in student numbers over the past 20 years has outstripped the increase in the provision of new physical facilities (see too CHE, 2015: 34).

This makes the efficient allocation of teaching venues a crucial matter. As the 2015 CHE report stated, in a number of cases, pressure on venues, especially for formally-timetabled activities, is aggravated by not having a central office that does both timetabling and venue allocation, or by not having an accurate, centralised record of available venues, or allocating too many teaching periods in the mornings and too few in the afternoons. The report also stated (CHE, 2015: 167) that for some institutions the lack of accurate data on available spaces posed a major challenge in the provision of adequate teaching and learning spaces. This makes it
difficult to allocate and utilise existing spaces optimally and to plan appropriately for new spaces that may be needed. An additional concern is that, where lectures are repeated due to large class sizes, students often do not adhere to the timetabled lecture venues allocated to them, causing overcrowding in some and under-use in other venues. This also leads to situations where venues are over-full in the mornings and empty in the afternoons.

Another issue mentioned in the 2015/16 and 2017 reports is the need to include tutorials and formal small-group activities in the timetable, since these, too, need venues, and for it to make allowance for inter- and intra-campus student movement.

A perusal of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that, generally, universities continue to struggle with a lack of formal teaching and learning venues that are fit for purpose, as well as with the actual allocation of venues. At the same time, the reports suggest that in the face of growing student numbers and the limited availability of resources, there is also a growing awareness of the need for enhanced efficiency in the use of existing teaching and learning venues. In some universities this has resulted in the implementation of timetabling software to optimise venue allocation through more effective timetabling scheduling.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports show that in a number of institutions timetabling and venue allocation remain in the hands of departments and faculties (or equivalent), even if the venues may not be discipline-specific and could be used by others. Another issue is that staff may request venues, but then not always make use of them, or not during the allocated periods. In some HEIs, timetabling and allocation of shared venues are done centrally and electronically, while, for example, laboratory scheduling is done by faculties and departments.

A change in mind-set may be needed, to the extent that individual faculties or departments no longer regard certain spaces as ‘theirs’. Since this is an institutional management issue, HEIs are encouraged to make all venues usable to all students, by scheduling them when not in use by the home department.

For all HEIs timetabling is urged that is centralised, and preferably automated, that is linked to student enrolment needs, so as to accurately match teaching requirements to spaces needed, and which may include the use of teaching and learning spaces outside traditionally preferred periods.

3.3.2. Guidelines for formal teaching and learning spaces

As mentioned earlier, the campus as a whole should be regarded as an environment that supports student learning. This means that teaching and learning venues should be fit for purpose. The 2015 CHE report mentioned (CHE, 2015: 34) that many teaching venues are not adequately equipped, particularly in terms of educational technology. Around one quarter of the universities indicated that the audio-visual and educational technology in lecture theatres is inadequate (CHE, 2015: 164). It also reported (CHE, 2015: 152) that in some of the 2014 submissions a need was expressed for guidelines to be set for basic standards and equipment
for teaching venues. It furthermore identified a need for more student learning spaces that allow for small group interaction, as opposed to formally-timetabled classes (CHE, 2015: 33).

As reflected in the 2017 feedback reports, many of the more tradition-minded role-players do not yet recognise the importance of learning-space design. Hence, there is a need for guidelines for learning spaces, which are then consistently applied. Some institutions are planning to embark on a needs analysis in order to establish standard requirements, although this may focus on safety and security rather than on pedagogical requirements.

Some HEIs (e.g., UCT and SU), when engaged in new build or in a revamp of existing classrooms, have adopted optimal standards for formal teaching venues, which include the provision of multi-purpose audio-visual facilities, sometimes based on international benchmarks, and the design of adaptable and flexible venues.

In some universities, the design of lecture venues and providing them with teaching and learning equipment is handled collectively by faculties, institutional operations and the university’s teaching and learning centre. Such an approach acknowledges the need for good integration, particularly since there should be a university-wide and standardised view of the type of audio-visual and IT facilities needed to support the teaching and learning strategy. In other institutions, the equipping of all the main lecture facilities with computers, internet access and audio-visual equipment is a function of the development of a campus development plan.

Providing equitable facilities that are fit for purpose is a challenge for multi-campus HEIs and for institutions that have multiple delivery sites. This is primarily because different campuses and sites of delivery have different contexts and starting points, and therefore different needs. The further challenges faced by institutions with multiple sites of delivery (as opposed to formal campuses) is that their funding levels are different and they are therefore significantly under-resourced.

Some universities, because of a dearth of resources, battle with the provision of basic teaching and learning amenities and with their effective maintenance. They have therefore not yet reached the stage of setting minimum standards.

It is clear that the provision of formal teaching and learning spaces that are equipped to create a more or less standardised, conducive environment for teaching and learning, is unequal across the HE sector. This is clearly not conducive to enhanced student success.

### 3.3.3. Facilities for students with disabilities

According to the 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 128) seven universities indicated in their 2014 submissions that they have dedicated support for students with disabilities, which includes technical assistance for visually and hearing impaired students, physical support such as wheel-chair friendly access to buildings and academic support such as test and examination facilitation.
An analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicates that all universities now have improved the learning environment for disabled students. Some have done so after having conducted a comprehensive and inclusive needs-based analysis, prior to the design of and planning for disability-friendly infrastructure that is also supportive of students with disabilities and other special-needs students. However, based on the information contained in the reports, the improvements seem to vary in extent and focus. They vary from such matters as making available Zoomtext magnifiers and screen-reading programmes, to the installation of ramps, lifts and stair-lifts, accessible rooms in residences, accessible computer labs and seats for students with dwarfism. In the case of some HEIs, the environment itself supplies a specific focus (e.g., the prevalence of albinism in the region where UniVen is located).

In the majority of institutions, the promotion of universal access to physical, academic and social spaces is driven by the institution’s disability unit. VUT offers a bachelor’s programme in disability studies in the education faculty.

SU, in its 2015 institutional report, provided an example of how the institutional facilities management team together with the workgroup around teaching and learning spaces, set guidelines for the universal design of classrooms, which includes disability-friendly provisions. Providing a disability-friendly infrastructure to support students (and staff) with disabilities should be part and parcel of the strategic intent of the institution, and incorporated in its teaching and learning strategy (philosophy). It can, therefore, not simply be delegated to the institution’s disability unit. Ideally, the input from the disability unit and from students living with disabilities is integrated into the campus master plan together with that of other role-players.

3.4. Formal teaching and learning spaces: the library

The explosive growth in technology that impacted on teaching and learning in higher education fundamentally changed how academics and students search for and use information. Hence, these advances in technology also prompted university libraries to adapt to and, in some cases, to lead these changes. Thus, from an environment that was daunting to many students, the university library has changed to one that is vibrant and invites individual and collaborative learning. Naturally, this has implications for the physical and virtual space of the library.

More and more, the library is regarded as an essential and active partner in the learning enterprise. Hence, in some institutions, librarians have been included in faculty and senate teaching and learning committees, and at others a library forum exists to align policy and ensure the equitable spread of resources. Another structural change reported in the 2015/16 and 2017 reports is the development of library strategic plans and policies, in which matters such as the development of flexible digital and physical spaces are included.

Based on an analysis of the 2014 submissions, the 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 160) stated that substantial efforts have been made by a number of institutions to provide library facilities
at all sites of delivery, campuses and regional centres. The report also mentioned that library opening hours are being extended to include evenings and weekends; in some cases, 24-hour access is available to certain areas of the library; and that after-hours library access and support typically depended on the availability of student assistants. The 2015/16 and 2017 reports reflect a continuing trend to provide appropriate library facilities at all sites (the CPUT library, e.g., has a presence at 11 campuses and delivery sites). Lack of funding is the major drawback to providing the same level of facilities on all sites.

A number of collaborative initiatives are in place to allow for the sharing of library resources. The South East Academic Library System (SEALS), for example, is a consortium of Eastern Cape university libraries that allows for sharing of resources. It is hosted by the IT division of RU. Another inter-institutional collaborative initiative embarked on by UFH, WSU and UNISA is the establishment of a shared library in the Eastern Cape.

To increase access to library resources, a number of institutions have developed mobile applications to enable students to gain access to library databases off-campus. UNISA currently operates two mobile libraries and plans to acquire another five. It has also enlisted the assistance of public and community libraries to increase access to information for its students.

In the 2015/16 and 2017 reports five institutions explicitly mention extended library opening times of the main library, often up to midnight on weekdays and including part of weekends. Where institutions indicated 24/7 opening times, this mostly pertained to computer laboratories in the library, and to reading rooms and study areas.

The 2015 CHE report stated (CHE, 2015: 161) that there has been a major reconfiguration of the library at more than half of the HEIs. This amounts to a reconceptualization of both its role and its modus operandi, with libraries increasingly functioning as learning spaces, not only for quiet, individual study but also for peer learning and group study. The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that currently all 23 HEIs have reconfigured their libraries or are in the process of doing so, in order to provide extended access to study rooms and computer laboratories for both private and collaborative study. Such reconfigurations include (e.g., at UCT) off-site storing of low-use publications and the establishment of satellite facilities in other campus buildings. At some (e.g., MUT) severe space constraints inhibit the drive to provide learning spaces to students in the library.

According to the 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 162), nearly all of the universities indicated that their libraries are equipped with computers and that, increasingly, libraries have wi-fi connectivity, which allows students to access resources electronically on a range of platforms and electronic devices, and also that more and more resources are being made available online. An analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports shows that 21 of the 23 universities explicitly state that they have wi-fi connectivity in their libraries; at some the library is the most technology-friendly space on campus. The analysis also shows that the trend towards e-sources/digital resources in the library is also gradually increasing, based on strategic prioritisation of e-sources.
The 2015 CHE report mentioned that more than half of the universities have institutional repositories, often based on open-access principles, where research by their own academics is stored and made available online. This, too, is an ongoing development.

In today’s era of knowledge explosion, it is important that students have access to information when and wherever they need it. Students need to develop the literacies that are necessary to access, evaluate and apply information. This awareness has also had an impact on the role the library plays in universities. Generally, the functions of the library have become broader. In this regard, the 2015 CHE report noted the following:

*In over half of the submissions it was clear that the ambit of the library’s and librarians’ activities is considerably broader now, in the information age, than in the past. Increasingly librarians are involved in training for both students and staff. Training spans a range of needs, from basic information literacy to complex knowledge management. Staff training sometimes includes how to use plagiarism detection software, most commonly Turnitin. ... Many institutions indicated that support services are increasingly being provided online or using other technologies that enable self-help.*

(CHE, 2015: 162, 163)

The 2017 institutional feedback report on UWC gives a good overview of the extent to which library functions have changed:

*Provision of training opportunities for students; development of online guides; continued diversification of the types of learning spaces available (silent study areas; meeting rooms; Knowledge Commons; Reading Room; Reference Desks; Self Learning Zone; Disabled Student Centre; Print & Go Kiosks; and Training Rooms); extension of Library Opening hours; and creation of a Past Exam Papers website. A feedback form for student comments is available through the Library website. The Library also has a long history of the acquisition of digital resources, which are only now being acknowledged by the University, in discussions around blended learning.*

(CHE (UWC), 2017: 19, 20)

The historical role of the library has been extended at most institutions to include a range of additional functions. These include a writing centre, assistance with assignments, mobile device-to-library printing facilities, varied learning spaces (silent study, meeting areas, knowledge commons, reading rooms, innovation spaces), information-, digital-, data-literacy training areas and disabled student centres.
3.5. Formal teaching and learning spaces: virtual spaces

The built environment of universities is informed by historical concepts of teaching and learning. Despite the rapid increase in available, affordable and approved technologies, these historical ideas continue to dominate the design and functionality of the majority of buildings on most university campuses. At the same time, the rapid changes in ICT prompt a re-appraisal of the way a lecture room might be functioning, the choice of pedagogical approaches, the use of technology-enhanced educational resources, and the way the institution handles its communication. As a result, the concept of the classroom has expanded to include new classroom capabilities and has sparked new pedagogical approaches. Wireless networking, for example, makes real-time or synchronous interaction among all class participants a possibility. Video conferencing makes it feasible for an invited expert from a remote institution to join a class session. Discussions, notes, and other in-classroom events can be captured and disseminated for further study.

Today, universities are challenged to continuously redefine the notion of a conducive learning environment that takes cognisance of up-to-date ICT systems. Obviously, as alluded to earlier in this chapter, this has implications for the way the teaching and learning process is perceived, and it has consequences for the design of learning spaces, both formal and informal.

Although these are exciting and interesting developments, ICT infrastructure is costly and, according to the 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 169), a number of universities referred to a lack of funding as the reason they have been unable to acquire (enough of) certain equipment or services. An analysis of the 2016/16 and 2017 reports suggests that acquiring adequate funding to update facilities continues to be a challenge. Apart from the provision of facilities and equipment, regular and accessible digital literacy and pedagogical training and support (such as readily accessible, even automated, helpdesks) in the use of technology for supporting teaching and learning to both students and staff are important.

Yet, despite these resource hurdles, the drive to provide ICT systems continues unabated. An adequate and well-maintained (built) physical infrastructure, with an adequate and well-maintained IT infrastructure, founded on an appropriate pedagogy, contributes to a conducive learning environment. It is important, however, for institutions to adopt a structured and integrated approach towards knowledge and information management to achieve this.

3.5.1. Learning management systems (LMSs)

Through the availability of a LMS with additional wi-fi connectivity, institutions can create a virtual learning environment (VLE) as part of the blended learning approach. Different ways of creating VLEs have evolved over time. They range from course content that is placed online beforehand and student learning is then supported online and by means of occasional face-to-face tutorials; pre-prepared online course content is also supplemented by online interactive discussions and collaborative learning activities; and the most developed
approach to a VLE is where learning is primarily student-centred, in that collaborative online learning activities and online course content is largely determined by the learning group.

The 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 155) noted that most universities indicated that they have a LMS, although there is wide variation in the extent to which it is used. The report noted that usage by lecturers varied considerably, depending on the university, from as low as 18% to as high as 90%. The report also mentioned that the way in which the LMS was used, differed, from its use as a repository for lecture content to its use to foster interactive learning. The three most common LMSs in South Africa are ‘Blackboard’, which is a commercial product, ‘Moodle’, which is a free product, and ‘Sakai’, which is an open-source product that is being developed collaboratively by several hundred universities across the world.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that 13 universities use Blackboard as their LMS (or are migrating towards this platform), five universities use Sakai, and six universities use Moodle (one of which used Sakai for its contact students and Moodle for its ODL students). Interestingly, all UoTs and nearly all HDIs use Blackboard as their LMS, despite the fact that this seems to be costlier.

As to usage, the 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that this continues to be quite varied, both in quantity and application. The reports indicate that the presence of modules on the LMS varies from 30% to nearly 100%. Most universities indicate in their reports that the usage of the LMS is on the increase. Some institutions have opted for a phased implementation of its LMS.

The report also stated (CHE, 2015:36) that while it is useful to make course-related information easily accessible to students, LMSs are capable of much more, including promoting online discussions among students, offering online testing, collating marks, delivering surveys and providing links to outside resources. The report also stated that, judging from the 2014 submissions, these wide-ranging uses of LMSs for enhancing learning are yet to be exploited in many universities and by the majority of academics.

According to the 2015/16 and 2017 reports universities, generally, see the advantages of the LMS both in terms of new pedagogies, student access as well as efficient use of resources. In terms of the applications LMSs are used for, only a few universities provided explicit details regarding their applications, over and above the LMS being used as a repository. It would seem that the wide range of assessment tools available on LMSs and the opportunities they create for interactive student collaboration, are deemed particularly useful.

Although there is a clear move towards using an LMS for e-assessment, some HEIs regard this as risky and possibly disadvantageous to some student groups, because of access concerns.
To provide increased access to a LMS, six universities indicated that they had developed a mobile application that would give students access to the LMS anytime, anywhere. Seven universities expressly reported on the integration of the institutional ITS with the LMS, so that students would have easy access to their marks on the LMS.

Across the board, HEIs indicated that staff training was critical, focusing both on the technical and pedagogical aspects of using the LMS. It is important that academics not only know what tools there are and how to use them, but that they also understand to what purpose they should be applied, within the context of an overarching institutional teaching and learning philosophy.

3.5.2. Wireless connectivity (wi-fi)

The availability of wi-fi enables students to access the LMS and the internet from PCs, laptops and other mobile devices as and when they so desire. Wi-fi connections are crucial for the roll-out of blended learning and ODL and make individual and collaborative learning outside formal teaching venues possible.

The 2015 CHE report (CHE, 2015: 35) stated that the provision of wi-fi on campuses has become increasingly important to enable students to access the internet on their own devices, which eases the burden on universities to provide more and more computer laboratories as student numbers increase. The report also mentioned that bandwidth is a challenge at all universities, as well as off-campus access to the internet for students who do not have their own devices. The report also stated (2015: 158) that all universities provide wi-fi to some extent, varying from a few hotspots to near campus-wide coverage.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports show that there is a marked increase in the provision of wi-fi on the various university campuses, although the level of coverage varies considerably across the sector. All universities reported that they were expanding wi-fi coverage: some had achieved ubiquitous coverage, while others had begun the process of implementation by focussing on the provision of wi-fi at campus hotspots (that serve as informal learning spaces), in (some or all of the) residences and in (some of the) lecture venues.

Wi-fi connections in teaching venues open up new and innovative pedagogical approaches. One such innovation is the introduction into the classroom at some institutions of personal response clickers for use in formative assessment.

The importance of interaction between academics, the ICT and finance divisions of the institutions were emphasised. As alluded to earlier, it is important that ICT provision, including the provision of wi-fi, is part of the institution’s strategic intent and therefore policy-driven in accordance with a master plan.

Students need access to the institution’s LMS as well as to the internet to continue their learning outside teaching venues both on and off campus. Hence, they need access to free
wi-fi or to reasonably-priced wi-fi. This has been attended to by a number of universities. Some HEIs work with local authorities so that students can access wi-fi in public spaces, such as the public library or in areas where large numbers of non-residence students of the institution reside. Other institutions have entered into negotiations with service providers to allow students cheaper or free access to data off campus.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports also indicate that HEIs do not always possess the financial resources to provide ubiquitous wi-fi connectivity. Although much progress has been achieved with the assistance of DHET funding, a lack of financial resources to achieve ubiquitous and quality wi-fi coverage – seen as a vital component of a healthy learning environment - is particularly prevalent at some HDIs.

This is of particular concern since, as DHET mentioned in its 2013 White Paper, HDIs continue to be disadvantaged in terms of infrastructure and teaching facilities, despite DHET’s financial support.

Institutions that have functional wi-fi often indicate that in order to keep up with the information drive, continuous updating is needed, both in terms of saturation, architecture and speed.

4. **EXTENDING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT**

As mentioned earlier, the institution’s teaching and learning strategy must direct the establishment of a conducive learning environment. Generally, HEIs subscribe to student-centred learning and blended learning as their desired approaches. This means that, in addition to formal places of teaching and learning, universities then also create informal learning places for students to engage in collaborative or individual learning at a self-chosen time and place. In addition, some universities do as much as they can to provide security, transport and study space for students who are on campus after hours.

4.1. **Informal learning spaces**

The 2015 CHE report mentioned (CHE, 2015: 154) that more than half of the universities indicated in their 2014 submissions that they had created informal learning spaces, in some cases by making use of public spaces or underutilised spaces in existing buildings. It also stated (CHE, 2015: 166) that in some universities there are limited spaces available in which students can study, which is a particular problem for students who are not in residence and who do not have suitable study spaces at home.

An analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports suggests that currently 18 out of the 23 universities explicitly indicated that they had created informal learning spaces, which is a
substantial increase compared to what was reported in the 2014 submissions. Nearly all indicated that this was ‘work-in-progress’. It must be noted that this figure does not include library facilities, open-access computer laboratories and residences. Some universities (e.g., UCT) have established projects to identify ‘nooks and crannies’, unused spaces such as wide corridors and foyers, which can be turned into learning spaces by installing a few chairs and possibly tables. CUT has conceptualised its entire campus as a learning space, including removing unnecessary internal paved roads, greening the areas and installing benches and solar charging stations. UKZN has established an institution-wide forum on built pedagogy, which looks at ways to encourage social learning through the provision of physical spaces.

In many instances, the realisation of informal learning spaces is dependent on funds being available for such matters as the installation of extra wi-fi connections, charging stations and furniture. Often a creative approach is then needed. Institutions have come to conceptualise spaces such as empty lecture venues and dining halls as informal learning spaces, and smaller spaces have been transformed into ‘buzz rooms’, ‘chill spaces’ and ‘knowledge commons’, sometimes using innovative student designs.

The establishment of informal learning spaces is vital and links well with the idea of a smart campus where, in theory, private study, student engagement and collaboration can take place anywhere, at any time. These spaces, be they in- or outdoor areas, would need adequate lighting, seating, and places to recharge devices. Unused areas in buildings could be transformed into spaces where students might gather. A space audit might assist in gaining an accurate picture of what learning spaces are being used for, by whom and when. Such an audit could be conducted in-house and should aim to identify under-utilised spaces. Extending wi-fi to cover the entire campus area will help to increase the number of spaces that can be used for individual and group learning.

4.2. Student access to the virtual learning environment

The development of blended learning approaches, including the use of a LMS as well as the design of mobile applications, presupposes that students possess or have access to adequate devices to make an internet connection and will, thus, make use of informal learning spaces. This may not necessarily be the case. Informal learning spaces will only function if the students availing themselves of these, in addition to adequate devices, also possess the digital and information literacy required. New technologies should not be used simply because they happen to be there, but rather in order to support learning. Thus, as with all infrastructural development, the teaching and learning strategy (model) should guide the provision of new technologies.
4.2.1. Student access to computer laboratories

The 2015 CHE report stated (CHE, 2015: 35) that, according to the 2014 institutional submissions, HEIs spent a great deal of money providing computer labs, which students could use when they were not being used for formal courses. Computer labs still exist and are still needed, especially when specialised software or high-power computing is required. Computer labs are also needed for students who cannot afford their own devices.

The report also noted (CHE, 2015: 153) that all universities provided open access to computer laboratories and learning spaces in their libraries. Furthermore (CHE, 2015: 169), some universities do not have sufficient computers and computer laboratories on campus. The ratio of students to computers mentioned in the 2014 submissions ranged from 24:1 to 8:1. Some universities referred to the need for more computers for specific purposes, such as online assessment.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports do not provide actual numbers on which to compute the ratio of students to computers. Most universities have extended hours for access to computer laboratories. Many of the residences have dedicated network points. As mentioned, university libraries often have their own open computer laboratories for individual and collaborative study.

It is clear that institutions have different approaches regarding the provision of computer laboratories for internet access. Ten HEIs, mostly HDIs and UoTs, mentioned that it was important that they provide sufficient access to computer laboratories, because of the inability of many of their students to purchase their own devices. They also mentioned that, despite funding assistance from DHET and other sources, the provision was still inadequate, in terms of both quantity and quality.

Five universities provide for regular upgrading of their computer facilities, have many seats and make a sizeable number of computer labs available on a 24-hour basis, even though a large number of their student cohort have their own devices.

A particular challenge is the fact that in all universities some of the computer laboratories are ‘faculty-owned’ or ‘department-owned’. In some cases, this is because faculty computer labs are funded by faculty-specific grants and administered at faculty level, but also because specific software may be required for certain disciplines. However, especially in HEIs where there is a shortage of computer facilities, sharing of computer facilities needs investigation, to ensure optimal and efficient use of scarce resources. At some institutions (e.g., NWU and UNISA) this matter has been investigated and resolved.

Thirteen HEIs expressly indicated that they utilised their computer facilities for computer-based assessment (‘e-assessment’), or were in the process of implementing this. Often the reason for using online assessment is the need to give rapid feedback to large numbers of students, which is efficient, saves time and maintains an automatic data record. At UCT, one faculty was in the process of using students’ own devices for online assessment.
The introduction of blended learning stands or falls with access to the institution’s LMS and to the internet. To provide equal student access to resources across the HE sector, the sector would do well to deliberate on how to address the backlog in provision in institutions, as well as the balance between the provision of institutional computer facilities and the possession of personal devices.

4.2.2. Student access to personal mobile devices

In the past decade laptop computers have become more affordable and, also, newer devices, such as tablets, enable students to perform (limited) computing functions, as well as to access the internet. Smart phones also allow internet access and can perform a range of functions by means of specialised applications. The 2015 CHE report mentioned (CHE, 2015: 169) that, although the proportion of students with their own internet-enabled devices is increasing, there are still large numbers of students who do not possess such devices, or do not have connectivity off campus (which hampers out-of-class online collaboration).

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports show that 16 universities expressly indicated that they had undertaken or were planning to undertake measures to alleviate this situation, given the undoubted pedagogical benefits of having students use personal and portable devices in their learning activities. These measures vary from advising students how to procure laptops at a reasonable price, e.g. via PURCO, the Student Laptop Initiative or the Student Technology Programme; to the library making devices available on loan; to making laptops available on an instalment payment basis; and to providing students (such as NSFAS students or students on extended programmes or first-year students) with tablets/laptops free of charge or at subsidised rates. Others have negotiated favourable data bundle rates with private providers. Some institutions prefer students to have laptops, rather than the much cheaper tablets.

One possible way to ensure that students have an internet-enabled device is for the HE sector to engage with industry in order to negotiate prices collectively. The HE sector as a whole could try to identify what students need and negotiate collectively, or request the production of low-cost purpose-built laptops.

4.2.3. Students’ digital and information literacy

The 2015 CHE report commented (CHE, 2015: 160) that computer literacy training is essential for students who have no experience of computers at their high schools or homes. The report further mentioned that universities have various units that are responsible for computer literacy development. This may take place through stand-alone courses or may be integrated into other courses. It is not indicated in the report how widespread the offering of courses in computer literacy is or whether these are credit-bearing.

World Wide Worx (2017), in its report on the digital divide in South Africa, stated that a ‘digital divide’ remains a stark reality in South Africa, despite more than half of all adults in the country now having internet access. The report revealed that the clearest divide is manifest in income disparity. Among adult South Africans earning more than R30 000 a month, internet
penetration is at 82.4%, on a par with overall penetration in many industrialised countries. However, penetration declines to 61.3% for those earning between R14 000 and R18 000, to 42% for those earning between R3 000 and R6 000, and below 30% for those earning below R2 500 a month. Demographic, socio-economic and cultural factors, such as ethnicity, education and even gender influence the level of access and use. As the internet has spread to the majority of the population, this divide makes it increasingly important to look at not only who uses the internet, but also to distinguish varying levels of online skills among individuals. The divide has begun to shift from unequal resource and physical access to inequalities related to skills and usage.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicate that all universities see the need for enhancing the computer skills of students, particularly first-year students, albeit the approach, span and focus varies considerably. Four HEIs indicated that they offer computer literacy training to first-year students as a compulsory course. Five HEIs mentioned that computer literacy training was offered, but not university-wide; in some universities, the implementation is left to the faculties, in others it is a credit-bearing and/or compulsory part of the undergraduate programme. In one institution, computer literacy training is provided by the library, in others by the IT division or the teaching and learning centre, or jointly. One institution indicated that it was about to start offering computer literacy training, while another mentioned that not only students but also staff needed computer literacy training, which was also noted in several other reports.

One university offers large-scale, non-compulsory digital academic literacy training and has developed a document, *Guidelines on embedding information literacy into teaching and learning*. Two institutions offer digital literacy to a vast number of first-year students. Eight HEIs indicated the involvement of libraries, sometimes together with the IT division, in the provision of information literacy, sometimes combining this with digital literacy. Of these institutions, three have made this a compulsory programme. Three universities did not provide.

Based on the analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports, it seems that the terms ‘computer literacy’, ‘digital literacy’ and ‘information literacy’ are used somewhat interchangeably, despite the scholarly distinctions that can be drawn in respect of each of the three types of ‘literacy’. The development of information literacy in combination with digital literacy is vital for all students to attain academic success and will assist them in developing competences needed to be fully functional in a society that is becoming increasingly more digital. With the digital divide apparent in South Africa, in terms of resource and physical access and in terms of skills, strategies and usage, strategies to bridge this divide is urgently needed. Considerations could centre on issues such as whether digital and information literacy courses should be compulsory and credit-bearing; whether these should be embedded in undergraduate programmes or be lone-standing courses; which parts of the institution would be best placed to offer these courses; through which mode; and at what point in the students’ academic career.
4.3. Residences as part of the learning environment

The 2015 CHE report noted (CHE, 2015: 152, 153) that only a few HEIs made mention in their 2014 baseline submissions of the role residences played as learning spaces. Some did refer to study areas in residences, both for students to study individually and for collaborative work which, in some cases, involved the re-purposing or broadening of access to existing spaces. The report also noted (CHE, 2015: 158) that some institutions provided wi-fi connections in residences, which, coupled with online access to library resources and availability of residence computers or students’ personal devices, also meant that students had direct access to library resources after hours.

The analysis of the 2015/16 and 2017 reports indicates that a considerable shift has taken place in the way residences are regarded. This is largely due to the massification phenomenon and its attendant demand for constant student support and development initiatives that are related to academic performance.

A reconceptualising of the learning environment, where residences both on and off campus are considered as learning spaces, seems to be a widespread development amongst universities. Institutions are making every effort to create seamless living and learning environments for their students, irrespective of where they are beyond the classroom. This involves the creation of ‘listening-living-learning’ student communities (at, e.g., SU and UP), that are typically organised around residences (university-based or private) and function within clusters.

A number of universities emphasised in their 2015/16 reports the need to build new residences, refurbish old residences and to do a quality check on private student accommodation. In some institutions, particularly the HDIs, the need for student accommodation is dire. With grants from DHET and internal funds, much building and refurbishment is taking place, including the establishment of wi-fi connectivity. DHET recognises the importance of student accommodation as an enabling environment for learning. In its 2013 White Paper DHET committed itself to providing funding for the refurbishment and maintenance of existing student accommodation and the construction of new student housing (at HDIs in particular) (DHET, 2013: 34).

Having realised the important role of residences in providing a supportive learning environment, some universities strive to significantly increase the number of students in university (or university-controlled) residences.

Critical for the function of residences (university and private residences, on- and off-campus) as learning spaces is internet connectivity. This is recognised by all universities and, substantial resources allowing, universities have achieved this, or are working towards it. One of the residences at UCT, for example, has, at the instigation of the students, converted its common/social areas into study areas.

The 2015/16 and 2017 reports provide clear indications that, generally, institutions increasingly view student residences and other student accommodation as integral parts of
the learning environment and are acutely aware of the implications this has for the physical and IT infrastructure.

5. SUMMARY

A vital component of a quality teaching and learning experience for students at HEIs is the nature and extent of the physical environment within which and by means of which teaching and learning takes place. This refers not only to what has been appropriately called the ‘built pedagogy’, that is, the spaces, actual and virtual, within which teaching and learning takes place, but also to information technology, the ubiquitous advent of which has demanded careful consideration of how and to what extent it can be applied as mainstream teaching and learning tools.

Academic literature emphasises the need for HEIs to clearly identify the strategic direction and purpose of curriculum-based teaching and learning in each institution, which will in turn guide the design of the learning environment. All 23 of the HEIs have a teaching and learning strategy in place, some more developed and broad-ranging than others, which forms the basis for the provision of physical spaces, equipment/facilities and ICT. Physical space is understood by all to encompass not only the classroom and the campus, but also student living spaces (residences) as well as the geographic environment. These teaching and learning strategies also inform the campus master plan or development plan for each institution. It is clear that careful coordination between and integration of various role-players is needed to create a learning eco-system that ensures that planning and implementation is carried out within the confines of available resources, the strategic vision of the institution and the demand for equitable access for all in multi-campus or multi-site environments.

The 2014 submissions and the 2015/2016 and 2017 reports provide copious evidence of how the HEIs have planned for and implemented fit-for-purpose learning environments for their students. These include the introduction of multi-purpose, multi-functional teaching and learning venues; the introduction of blended learning into the curriculum; the use of learning spaces beyond the confines of the classroom, the re-purposing of libraries to serve a teaching and learning purpose far beyond the mere provision of information; provision for students and staff with disabilities; the use of LMSs; training of staff and students in digital and academic literacies; and the provision of wi-fi connectivity.

The overriding concern expressed by HEIs, but especially prevalent at HDIs, is the lack of financial resources to provide a learning environment for students which is adequate for the teaching and learning demands of the 21st century. In many instances the lack of financial resources is critical: the inability to build new or improved teaching venues means that venue overcrowding remains a stark reality; buildings in urgent need of maintenance remain in a state of serious disrepair; an inadequate ICT infrastructure means that wi-fi cannot be rolled out ubiquitously and students cannot benefit as much as they should from blended learning.
CHAPTER FIVE
FOCUS AREA FOUR: ENHANCING COURSE AND PROGRAMME ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT

1. INTRODUCTION

Managing enrolment has been an issue for educators worldwide since the establishment of institutions of higher learning. Admission standards and academic programmes have been continuously evaluated for decades by institutions seeking to enrol a desired student population. Along with this quest to enrol an optimal student population, the environment of higher education has been undergoing tremendous changes. Demographics of students, academic preparedness of students, and how students communicate with their preferred institutions of higher learning or post-secondary institutions, have presented new challenges for institutions seeking to recruit and enrol appropriately qualified students.

A student life cycle begins with recruitment, followed by admission, orientation, learning and teaching, retention and progression, programme completion and graduation. To properly serve the needs of a student engaged in this academic life cycle calls for an effective integration of administrative processes, student services, curriculum planning and employment preparedness. This can only be achieved when adequate systems are in place, underpinned by the necessary resources, to drive course and programme enrolment management.

Planning for student enrolments within the context of resourcing has always been an important part of university planning. Through the enrolment planning process, DHET has, since 2005, introduced annual targets for each university with regard to its size and shape by study level and main field of study. However, it has been a challenge for many HEIs to translate the total enrolment targets into targets for individual qualifications. This means that the current enrolment planning process is not wholly in sync with the prevailing undergraduate programme and curriculum structure.

The management of course and programme enrolment at most HEIs seems to happen in a largely fragmented manner, involving a myriad of disparate functions, from marketing, recruitment and student admissions to financial aid. All reside in multiple and disconnected silos, ranging from academic departments to support divisions. This often results in an incoherent and detached engagement with students.

It is common knowledge that first-year attrition is a problem internationally and that it is usually associated with high levels of access. In South Africa, empirical evidence indicates that the situation is exacerbated by the fact that the majority of first-entering students are ill-prepared for tertiary education. As such, the role of extended programmes in facilitating student success has been central in government policy and was formally recognised in the 1997 White Paper (DoE 1997: 2.34), reaffirmed in the National Plan for Higher Education in
2001 (DoE 2001: 2.3.2) and recognised for funding purposes in the new funding framework introduced in 2004.

There are two clear levels of engagement with university enrolment planning processes: firstly, DHET, through various Ministerial Statements on Student Enrolment Planning for Universities, sets the framework for the sector; secondly, an individual institution’s internal enrolment planning processes begin after the release of a ministerial statement. There have been four such ministerial statements since democracy: in September 2005, October 2007, April 2011 and June 2014.

According to the 2014 Ministerial Statement on Student Enrolment Planning for Universities:

*Enrolment planning, funding and quality assurance are still the three key steering mechanisms necessary to transform the higher education sector and to contribute towards the establishment of an integrated and effective post school system. It is essential to support universities in developing the skilled and capable workforce necessary to contribute to the development of an inclusive growth path. Enrolment planning is a mechanism to manage many of the inefficiencies in the system but it is not the solution to all the challenges faced. Enrolment planning alerts us to some of the areas which may require further attention and additional strategies that could be embarked upon to produce better quality graduates. These strategies include but are not limited to improving academic development and support; addressing blockages in the system; increasing student financial support; promoting inclusive institutional cultures and social cohesion; addressing infrastructure backlogs; producing the required skills for increasing knowledge production; and enabling student access through success.*

At the institutional level, the high-level government enrolment plan is then integrated and aligned to the institutional student recruitment strategies, admissions, registration and placement. These processes determine and inform the size and shape of an institution’s programme and qualification mix (PQM). This, in turn, influences the academic architecture, admission criteria, and faculty and institutional planners’ thinking and conceptualisation of course and programme enrolment and management strategies. Universities use enrolment data generated within these academic structures to populate the various HEMIS tables required annually by DHET. This has been made simple by the availability of the Higher Education Data Analyzer (HEDA) application and the Integrated Tertiary System (ITS) programme software, respectively.

In the 2014 baseline submissions, universities were requested to comment on how institutions have managed admissions, selection and placement, re-admission refusals, pass rates in ‘gateway’ courses and management information systems. They were also asked to identify those activities which were recently initiated and proved to be successful, as well as evidence of such successes. This chapter looks at the advances made in the past three years in the course and programme enrolment management area, as well as challenges faced by the sector in managing this aspect of higher education management.
All over the world, transition to higher education always involves a range of stakeholders. These include students, parents, higher education institutions, higher education authorities and, in some countries, a central applications agency or centre managed by higher education authorities. It is thus imperative that the processes are undergirded by lucid institutional and government policies as well as transparent procedures and practices. This also applies to practices and processes associated with course and enrolment management of all the individual courses, programmes and academic qualifications. In many cases, the process also involves an element of selection.

In South Africa, the systems for managing entry into the public higher education sector reflect fundamental core values and policy priorities at a national level for a country that has emerged from an apartheid system. These systems also serve as instruments of public policy to address the injustices of the past, e.g., equity, widening participation, effective use of public funds and resources. Within the sector, and indeed even within individual institutions, the priority given to the processes of recruitment (of students to programmes) and selection (of students where programmes are oversubscribed) varies. These are acceptable practices worldwide. However, given our history, these admission processes must also be seen as striking a balance between managing course and programme enrolment while ensuring equity and wider participation. In addition, close attention and effort must be devoted to programmes for which there is competitive selection. In South Africa, where a common national curriculum and school-leaving examinations systems are in place, the common denominator determining entry to HEIs has to be the individual’s performance in the final grade 12 examinations. Hence school-leaving examinations are generally relied upon as the basic measure of academic achievement.

Discussions around recruitment and admission to tertiary institutions will be incomplete without making reference to the establishment of a National Higher Education Information and Applications Service, inaugurated 2002. The purpose of this service, as then conceptualised, was to serve as a first point of contact for all course inquiries, applications and enrolments. In so doing, it would enhance equitable access to higher education, provide prospective students with the full benefit of fully knowing what programmes and courses are offered at the various HEIs, and so help them make informed choices about their futures and attract students into scarce skills areas.

For the National Higher Education Information and Application Service to add value to the system/sector, it must therefore provide a personalised initial information, advice and guidance service to all applicants from initial enquiry.

2.1 Recruitment

All universities indicated in their 2014 submissions and 2015/2016 reports that they have units or divisions that deal with student recruitment throughout the academic year. Some institutions make use of their corporate marketing and communications divisions to recruit
students. The role and function of such departments is to inform prospective students of the study opportunities available at the various universities and the careers that are associated with the programmes on offer. In this regard they provide all relevant information, such as entrance requirements and programme duration. In executing their function as the student recruitment department, they invariably showcase the university as a first choice tertiary institution in South Africa.

The recruiting agencies/divisions always work in partnership with the relevant faculties and academic departments on various projects and exhibitions which are held at schools and at the HEIs themselves from time to time throughout the year. The prospective student is given first-hand information and knowledge by an expert in the academic field. The experts normally set up relevant displays and artefacts relating to the programme of study. This approach is backed up by the printed material that is disseminated, together with application forms and enquiry cards.

Some institutions have developed focused strategies to recruit certain types of students (e.g., Black African students) to their institutions. Others make use of recognition of prior learning (RPL) to recruit targeted group of students to some of the professional degree and diploma programmes on offer at an institution.

2.2 Selection

In 2008, the new school-leaving certificate, the National Senior Certificate (NSC), replaced the previous school-leaving certificate known as the Senior Certificate. As a result, universities had to revise the entrance requirements for university, as the school subjects offered, and the evaluation thereof, had changed considerably, compared to those for the previous school leaving certificate. It became important for universities to adjust their admission requirements from the 2009 first-year intake onwards.

All South African universities make use of the Admission Points Score (APS) system to select prospective students. However, the method for calculating the APS differs substantially between the universities, as does the minimum score required for university admission. Although any two institutions may use similar methods for calculating their APSs, they may have very different minimum APS entry requirements for the same qualification.

To all intents and purposes, the NSC is now standardised across South Africa. If the APS is also calculated in a standardised manner, it should be sufficient to use this information to determine which students would be able to succeed at university. The minimum admission requirement could vary from university to university, depending on the programme for which a student applies. The minimum APS for a programme should be carefully considered and adjusted so that selected students have a chance to succeed. If academically underprepared students are selected for tertiary studies, the universities should be aware that these students will need extensive extracurricular assistance. Without additional interventions, these underprepared students will have no chance of succeeding at university, which cannot be justified ethically.

All universities indicated that they have had to raise the required APS scores over the past few years, while some universities reported that they regularly review the minimum scores
following a thorough analysis of the performance of previous cohorts of students. Some institutions, like UCT and SU, make their selections very early in the admission cycle, to ensure that they recruit highly talented individuals.

There are also institutions that use selection tests to give alternative admission/selection opportunities to prospective students.

2.3 Placement

Currently, HEIs’ placement and admission practices are based on the NSC or grade 12 results. However, the placement strategies differ from one institution to another and also from faculty to faculty within an institution. In some instances, placement of students in a programme also takes into consideration their performance while at school (grade 11 results), the NBT and any other senate-approved relevant assessment instrument.

The 2015 CHE report noted that, although South African universities have had selection mechanisms in place for many years, the concept of placement as a separate process from selection has only recently entered university discourse. Indeed, even some of the 2015/2016 reports treat the three notions of admission, selection and placement as if they are inseparable.

In a contextualised South African study, Wilson-Strydom (2012) documented the placement practices and use of the NBTs at UFS. The study analysed the use of the NBTs for placement purposes since 2010. It found that a combination of NSC and NBT results has predictive value for performance in university modules. Many universities require that prospective students write the NBT test before finalising the registration process. However, the demonstrable value of the NBT is not usually fully appreciated and is often underestimated, and therefore many institutions use NBT for diagnostic purposes only. UFS, with UCT, is currently involved in a project which will hopefully provide data to enable institutions to make meaningful use of NBTs.

2.4 Admission and registration

The application cycle for admission to all the universities in South Africa starts early in the preceding year – usually prospective students’ performance in grade 11 is the basis on which provisional offers are made. Firm offers for admission to the university are only made once the grade 12 (NSC) results are released by the Department of Basic Education in late January of each year. As noted above, some universities make firm offers early in the cycle, long before the NSC results are released, in order to capture top students. All universities allow prospective students to apply for admission to two or three programmes and rank them in order of preference. Admission to any programme usually depends on the APS and availability of places.

In the past, universities used to register first-entering students before dealing with returning students. Given the fact that the NSC results are released late in January of each year, some institutions have decided to register returning students first.
In the past few years, most universities experienced serious challenges as a result of students who would literally walk in without any form of prior notice. Some of these students failed to secure admission from their institutions of choice or were unable to get provisional admission as a result of their grade 11 results. Some of them would have not bothered to apply at all. Ironically, some institutions make use of these ‘walk-ins’ to fill some of their ‘First-Time Entering Student’ quotas as approved by DHET.

The 2015 CHE report also noted that this practice has now been banned at most institutions as a result of the violence that accompanied this phenomenon in the past. These institutions have since established alternative online mechanisms for dealing with late applicants.

Most universities have established mechanisms to ensure that registration numbers match the enrolment targets set for the institution and others use real-time monitoring tools during registration. Also, many universities monitor the actual number of credits carried by individual students, to ensure that students do not carry excessive course-loads.

Online application and registration processes have been implemented by many institutions for years, and relative success has been achieved in encouraging potential and returning students to make use of the systems. Some institutions have done away with manual application and registration processes. The level of maturity of the processes (and systems) is highly uneven throughout the sector. For instance, at some institutions students who have to repeat modules are not able to complete the registration process online and may have to approach the registry in order to do so. In these instances, improvements are needed with regard to continuous change-management strategies, turn-around times, and automated responses to students. Some institutions only came online recently and are struggling to perfect the processes, while others (very few) have described elaborate on-line registration processes and systems.

All the submissions and reports noted that for an efficient application, admissions and enrolment process to succeed, close cooperation and coordination is imperative between and among the various sections involved in the process (student academic administration, faculties and schools, finance and the communications and marketing directorate) and strict adherence to calendar rules governing the process.

A general challenge to the HE system is that for some time now, but especially in the last decade, the number of applicants to universities far exceeds the available sector-wide capacity (in terms of financial, physical and human resources). Some institutions are sometimes overwhelmed by the sheer numbers of applications and this places an enormous burden on these institutions. Add to this the phenomenon of ‘walk-ins’ and it becomes a recipe for chaos. Also, the majority of these applicants are usually ill-prepared for university education. As the NSC results are only released late in January, this leaves institutions with limited time to adequately deal with enrolment management processes (admission, registration, selection and placement). The following two examples illustrate this point.
3. GATEWAY OR ‘KILLER’ COURSES

Gateway or ‘killer’ courses are so called because they ‘kill’ a student’s motivation or academic progress. There have been many anecdotal causes for these effects, but the lack of academic preparedness in STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects contributes enormously to massive failures and dropouts among university first-entering students.

While it is appreciated that the impact of these gateway courses on graduation rates is severe throughout the sector, there has not been significant detailed analysis and contextualisation of the challenges facing the sector. Universities need to understand the root cause of the problem in order to salvage the situation.

The issue of gateway or ‘killer’ courses was expressly mentioned only by less than half of the universities in their 2014 submissions and 2015/2016 reports. These institutions reported on how they were currently dealing with the challenges occasioned by these gateway modules, one challenge being to define across disciplines and faculties what in fact a ‘gateway course’ is, and how they planned to deal with the problem going forward.

4. ACADEMIC EXCLUSION AND RE-ADMISSION APPEAL

It is common cause that students who fall prey to academic progression rules of any tertiary institution anywhere are subjected to academic exclusion. The information pertaining to conditions which may lead to academic exclusion is easily available and appears in the general prospectus of any institution, as is the case with faculty and school calendars and relevant documents which spell out guidelines, policies, rules and procedures applicable to academic progression and graduation within individual programmes and qualifications.

However, as much as this information is easily available, there is still a need for vigilance and constant interaction with those students who are at risk of falling prey to these rules, on the part of academic staff and professional support services staff. They need to continuously remind students of the consequences of not meeting the minimum requirements for progression to the next level of study.

Refusing students re-admission should be the culmination of a careful process, as the impact of dismissal to the student, parents and in some instances whole communities (some students from poor backgrounds are sponsored by the community) can have far-reaching consequences.

There are often many reasons for refusing re-admission to excluded students, and institutions all have processes in place to deal with appeals against exclusions. Some acknowledge the potentially serious consequences of exclusion and adopt an empathetic approach in the process of exclusion, providing detailed information on why the student is unlikely to succeed and therefore why the decision to exclude has been made. Others have an online appeal
process against exclusion and provide psycho-social and academic support which might culminate in a ‘recovery plan’.

5. ENROLMENT PLANNING AND MANAGEMENT

At the beginning of every enrolment planning cycle DHET meets with each university individually to map out that institution’s enrolment trajectory for the period under consideration. During these meetings, the department lays down the priorities identified nationally for the coming years. Generally, enrolment planning takes into consideration the policy context and developments which were highlighted in the *White Paper for Post-School Education and Training - Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System* (2014) and the *National Development Plan* (2011). The key considerations taken into account include: expansion needed in the system; increasing student access; enhancing student success; mobility and articulation within the post-school system; differentiation; the demand for growth in the academic profession; research and innovation; infrastructure development; and collaboration between stakeholders.

It is accepted that uniform sets of planning goals and targets cannot be applied across all institutions in the public HE system. Rather, what is developed is a strategy of differentiated growth for each university in line with its institutional capacity. Therefore, discussions with individual institutions focus on the contributions which each institution could make with regard to the priority areas mentioned above.

Meeting the enrolment targets agreed with DHET is a serious challenge for the sector. First-entering students apply to HEIs for admission during their grade 12 year and universities usually grant provisional offers on the basis of their grade 11 results. Final offers for admission are made after the release of the NSC results. Also, not all offers are honoured, and in some institutions (as discussed above) the phenomenon of ‘walk-ins’ presents a significant challenge. This leads to a mismatch between what institutions planned for and the actual number of candidates who present themselves for registration. Some institutions have put monitoring mechanisms in place to ensure that DHET targets are met.

A number of institutions indicated that course and enrolment management is sometimes bedevilled by ‘walk-ins’, late registration, high dropout rates and unplanned decline in first-entering candidates.

The CHE 2015 report noted that there was great variation in the level of detailed enrolment and monitoring that is undertaken at different universities. The 2015/2016 institutional reports confirm this assertion. Very few universities described in detail how they use institutional student data to plan ahead. In addition, it was observed that some institutions never dealt with this aspect of enhancing course and enrolment management at all in their reports, while at most institutions (and at all of the HDIs), only one official from the institutional planning office accompanied university delegations that met with the peer
review panels when they visited universities in 2016. There seems to be lack of requisite capacity at this level.

Some institutions have come to understand that course and enrolment planning management’s strategic role in is not fully appreciated. They have therefore embarked on communication and training exercises (such as training workshops for HoDs, academics and support staff) to raise awareness throughout the institution of the interplay between graduation rates, dropout rates and the setting of enrolment targets through planning.

The 2017 peer review panels’ reports indicated that some institutions (like UKZN) have achieved impressive innovations in the manner in which they track and monitor students’ performance over the course of their degree programmes.

Lastly, the 2015 CHE report also noted that of all of the aspects of university management processes associated with the four focus areas, institutional planning is one in which the disparities in institutional capacity are most evident. The situation remains unchanged in 2017. This is also reflected in the manner in which executive portfolios are structured at these institutions: well-resourced institutions have elevated the status of the planning portfolio to vice-principal/deputy vice-chancellor level, whereas normally only one individual (at a director or manager level) is responsible for both planning and quality assurance at some of the HDIs.

6. MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEMS IN ENROLMENT AND COURSE MANAGEMENT

The course and programme enrolment management at institutions of higher learning worldwide has, over the years, become a comprehensive process designed or custom-made to enable sustainable institutional student records for every student enrolled at that institution, from the time of recruitment and first enrolment to graduation.

There are currently a number of software packages designed to facilitate course and programme enrolment management at HEIs. Businesses are increasingly interested in the education market and are continually introducing improved technology into the market. Perhaps most importantly, advances in computer hardware and software have made practical solutions to data use dramatically more cost-efficient. A course and programme enrolment management information system (MIS) for an institution of higher learning facilitates the management of student data. These MISs provide capabilities for registering students in courses and documenting any assessment outcomes, provide transcripts whenever needed, the results of student tests and other assessments’ scores and marks, build student schedules, track students’ performance in general and manage many other student-related data needs in an institution.

This should not be confused with a LMS or virtual learning environment, where course materials, assignments and assessment tests can be published electronically. The 2014
submissions to the CHE showed that a number of institutions have either developed relevant software or acquired the same commercially to deal with LMSs and the management of institutional data. Two of the widely-used off-the-shelf systems in this country are HEDA and ITS.

Those institutions which have the necessary resources and requisite expertise have been able to build ‘home-made’ or custom-made MISs capable of servicing the data management needs of their institutions. Examples are the Intelliweb management system at NMU and the SUN-I system at SU.

Most of the commercially-available systems, as well as those that are ‘purpose built’, enable institutions to monitor students’ performance and also track those students who are at risk of being excluded for academic reasons. UJ’s MIS, for example, is capable of blending enrolment planning and enrolment management information.

7. SUMMARY

It is very important that robust course and enrolment management systems and processes are maintained by all HEIs as they greatly influence the success and retention of students. Students selected for admission need to be placed in the most appropriate programmes of their choice and supported accordingly. In order to achieve this, institutions need to have appropriate resources in place – an enrolment planning framework, relevant policies and procedures, management information systems (hardware and software) and adequately qualified officials (such as academic advisors and counsellors).

The level of detailed enrolment planning and monitoring processes necessary to sustain the cyclical government enrolment plans for individual institutions vary greatly from institution to institution. Only some institutions have elaborate plans, which is indicative of a lack of high-level institutional planning skills and the availability of requisite infrastructure in the sector. At some institutions there is a dire shortage of such skills. Issues of skills shortages at some of the institutions need to be addressed along with investment in relevant infrastructure. The same situation pertains to the MISs in the sector – some institutions have ‘purpose-built’ MISs, while others do not seem to be capable of optimally exploiting the capabilities inherent in the available off-the-shelf systems such as HEDA and ITS. Collaboration and information sharing among HEIs should be encouraged and promoted, as some institutions have a great deal of knowledge and expertise to share with the rest of the HE sector. For example, some institutions have established course and programme enrolment management systems which allow them, on a regular basis, to ensure that enrolments are within a few percent of enrolment targets set by DHET.
CHAPTER SIX
CONCLUSIONS AND FINDINGS

CONCLUSIONS

1. GENERAL INTRODUCTION AND ENGAGEMENT WITH THE QEP

Before 1994, higher education in South Africa was fragmented and skewed in ways designed to entrench the power and privilege of the ruling white minority. After 1994, successive democratic governments have sought to reshape the system into one that aimed to meet the goals of equity, democratisation, responsiveness and efficiency, through mergers and incorporations, as well as through the development of requisite HE policies.

It is obvious from the various QEP institutional submissions and the institutional feedback reports that the availability of appropriate institutional level policies, strategies, qualified professionals and enabling frameworks is a precondition for institutionalising a quality enhancement culture and activities in the teaching and learning environment throughout the HE sector.

Overall it appears that very satisfactory progress has been in addressing and embedding improvements in the four focus areas at institutional level. Indeed, following the peer review group visits to the participating institutions, there was consensus that the QEP has significantly raised the profile of teaching and learning throughout the sector. Genuine effort has been made and continues to be made to put in place policies, strategies and/or plans to institutionalise practices in order to enhance the teaching and learning environment.

A deeper understanding and appreciation of the various institutional contexts should provide insights that might better inform policy initiatives at the national level. Based on the historical background to higher education in South Africa and an analysis of the QEP institutional submissions and reports that were received from institutions in varied socio-economic-geographic contexts, the following cross-cutting features influence quality teaching and learning: history, geographic location, resources, leadership and sound administrative processes. These features pertain to the structural and cultural domains of the institutions. Although these features may be highlighted separately for analytical purposes, they are in fact inextricable and should not be looked at in isolation.
2. FOCUS AREA ONE: ENHANCING ACADEMICS AS TEACHERS

As part of the QEP Phase One, universities were requested to comment on how institutions dealt with the area of enhancing academics as teachers, which includes professional development, SoTL, reward and recognition, conditions of service and performance appraisal. This section reports on advances made in this focus area as well as challenges faced by the HE sector in managing these aspects.

2.1 Institutional intent and commitment

To effect successful, sustainable changes leading to enhancement of academics as university teachers, professional development, SoTL, reward and recognition, workload, conditions of service, and performance appraisal are critical. These are complex issues for any university, which need to be embedded in the structures, policies and practices of the institution, and must be grounded in an institutional philosophy and identity that embraces teaching and learning as a key activity in the institution. By far the majority of 23 participating HEIs have developed a vision and/or mission that publicly and explicitly espouses the importance of teaching and learning. One third of these institutions explicitly makes mention of the significance of staff development in the area of teaching and learning. Moreover, nearly all institutions mention that they have a teaching and learning strategy (plan/framework) in place.

The HE sector’s increased emphasis on teaching and learning also found expression in the establishment of senior leadership posts. From just over one third of the universities having the post of deputy vice-chancellor for teaching and learning (or equivalent), this has increased to just under two-thirds of the universities having established this position. Furthermore, from one third of the universities having established a dedicated position of assistant dean for teaching and learning (or equivalent) around 2014, this has now increased to just over half of the institutions having established such a leadership post.

Seventeen HEIs have now established a Senate Teaching and Learning Committee (or equivalent). At present, only two of the UoTs have a Senate Teaching and Learning Committee in place. Senate Teaching and Learning Committees play a crucial role in setting and monitoring the institution’s teaching and learning agenda. Ten universities now Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees (or equivalent) or formal faculty-based teaching and learning forums.

2.2 Continuous professional development

Professional development is of critical importance. The majority of HEIs have developed and
implemented, or are in the process of developing and implementing, an institutional framework that guides CPD. Such a framework facilitates the formulation of outcomes, the implementation of activities and the measurement of the effect of the activities.

Professional development initiatives can be formal or informal in nature and may comprise activities such as induction programmes, workshops, seminars, symposia, short learning programmes, formal programmes leading to a qualification, mentorships and peer support arrangements, and communities of practice. Institutional or faculty-based teaching and learning support units play a critical role in the professional development of academics. Universities with multiple central or faculty-based support units may run the risk that cohesion between the initiatives is lost. Often staff in teaching and learning support units is employed on short-term contracts, which means that staff turnover is potentially high.

2.2.1. Induction

An induction programme that is aligned with the educational philosophy of the institution, that is part of the institution’s inherent strategic drive to enhance teaching and learning and that is, thus, part of an institutional set of policies, signals the seriousness with which the institution regards the induction of its new academic appointees. It also emphasises the fact that induction is the first phase of CPD. Such an alignment provides the institution with a coherent approach to induction and will assist in guaranteeing the quality of the induction activities, both generic and discipline-specific.

There is now an increased emphasis on the orientation of new appointees into the institution and the discipline. By and large, induction programmes have become more extended and more structured and frequently include discipline-based induction. Moreover, several induction programmes have recently been re-designed or are in the process of being reviewed. These positive changes signal a growing institutional awareness of the need for newly-appointed academics to have the know-how needed to effectively teach in their discipline, have a sense of belonging in their department and the institution, and have a general understanding of the complex demands of higher education in South Africa.

Over the past period a considerable number of HEIs have been moving from an ad hoc approach to induction, consisting of short courses and workshops, to the design and implementation of induction programmes that have a well-defined structure, often including both generic and discipline-specific activities. Some universities offer or are intending to offer their induction programme in a blended mode, with part of the programme offered online. Currently 16 HEIs have made the participation in an induction programme compulsory for newly-appointed academics or enforce it as part of the probation criteria. Of these, nine universities have explicitly linked compulsory participation in induction programmes with
2.2.2 Ongoing professional development

Universities have many academic staff who are specialists in their discipline, but have not had expert training in teaching and learning. There is a need for academics to not only master their discipline, but to also possess the necessary pedagogical expertise to teach their discipline well in a changing educational context.

A well-designed CPD framework that integrates development activities with human resource development policies and includes appropriate incentives, may encourage the continued participation of younger, mid-career and senior academics in teaching development. It is clear that a considerable number of universities has moved towards including discipline-based, or specific group-based, professional development (such as mentoring, communities of practice, special interest groups, retreats and symposia). The reports also indicated that universities continue to make it possible for staff to attend post-graduate programmes on teaching and learning in higher education, either offered in-house or elsewhere. Other initiatives are aimed at building a new generation of academics, for instance through the nGAP, or through a clear institutional commitment towards ‘growing the institution’s own timber’. Some projects aim at capacitating current leadership such as HoDs, and at empowering Black female academics.

It is critical to change systems, perceptions and behaviours towards professional development activities, from being considered an additional demand that clashes with other academic interests such as research, and one that is not rewarded or held in high esteem, to simply being a norm for professionalism. To realise that professional development is fundamental to academic work and that it need not constitute a clash between teaching and research, is crucial. This requires a mind-shift at the level of the institution as well as at the level of individual academics.

2.2.3 Professional development for part-time and temporary staff

In a considerable number of universities more than half of the lecturing staff is part-time or on temporary contract appointment. However, less than one third of the universities provide CPD, which includes induction, to their part-time and contract staff. Some institutions offer a bespoke programme for non-permanent staff, or have found alternative, suitable times to offer their induction programmes to part-time and non-permanent new staff, or offer the programme through blended learning. An additional avenue to encourage participation in development activities might be by including this in performance appraisals and as part of the workload allocation.
2.3 Scholarship of teaching and learning

Evidence of an institutional commitment to SoTL is apparent when resources are made available for staff to engage in SoTL and disseminate their research results and if there is engagement with SoTL at a high institutional level. Such a commitment will assist in the establishment of an institutional culture where the contribution of SoTL to the enhancement of the quality of teaching and learning is valued.

Twenty-one HEIs make explicit mention in their institutional reports of SoTL. Currently, one quarter of the universities makes available internal funding to promote and support SoTL, in addition to external funding. Many of the SoTL activities are aimed at the development of research skills in SoTL. More than half of the HEIs organise an annual teaching and learning conference, albeit varying in status from in-house colloquia to international conferences. Several universities have in-house publications, ranging from magazines to journals, in which academics can publish their work, some of which are now being submitted for formal accreditation.

2.3 Workload model

Institutional workload models assist in creating a more equitable division of workloads amongst individuals in a department, while considering their interests and situations, such as the need for research, or higher-degree study, or the need for professional development for early career academics. Ideally, the workload model allows for the development of teaching competence, and for specific departmental and individual needs, and is linked to the performance management system.

Generally, HEIs that have developed workload models have done so in close consultation with academic staff. A few institutions have incorporated professional development in their workload model, but postgraduate supervision is rarely included. At present, 20 universities have either developed and implemented a workload model or are in the process of revising/developing such. A challenge facing some HDIs with respect to the introduction of a workload model, is the unfavourable student-staff ratio and general staff shortage which makes it very difficult to implement such a framework.

2.5 Performance appraisal

Commonly, performance appraisal serves two basic purposes, namely to evaluate performance and to enhance performance through the development of staff capacity. A well-designed performance appraisal system is critical for the success of institutional endeavours towards professional development of academic staff. Yet, such a system is not common in the
HE sector. Currently less than half of the universities indicate that they have a formal performance appraisal system in place for all academics. Some have a performance appraisal system only for senior and executive management. The rest of the HEIs are either developing such a system or use performance appraisal only in the case of requests for promotion or use this merely for developmental purposes.

Some institutions who have a performance appraisal system in place, battle to implement it. This may have to do with the prevailing organisational culture in an institution, which affects the interpretation, implementation and success of this practice. Importantly, in the face of the changes taking place in the HE sector, with their concomitant challenges, there is a real need for the implementation of an institutional performance appraisal system. A performance appraisal system can be adapted to an institution's culture without losing its central tenet and purpose, which is the continuous professional development of university teachers.

2.5.1 Performance agreements and PDPs

Just under half of the HEIs have instituted performance agreements (or equivalent) with their academic staff or are in the process of developing such a tool. In some HEIs performance agreements are not implemented as a university-wide practice but reside with faculties. In several HEIs, performance contracts have been implemented at senior and executive management levels. Under the nGAP, performance contracts are in place between every appointed nGAP academic and the appointing university, which clearly spell out obligations, expectations, roles and responsibilities. Another recent development is the use of PDPs as a tool for professional development. Just over half of the institutions make mention of this. In some instances, PDPs are linked to probation and/or performance reviews. The more recent reports seem to indicate that PDPs work well in assisting staff to complete their formal studies. It may well be that the implementation of nGAP performance contracts will stimulate institutional discussions around performance agreements for all academic staff.

2.5.2 Teaching portfolios

Teaching portfolios are typically used as a developmental process for reflecting on and improving teaching, and as an evaluative product for personnel decisions regarding permanent appointment, promotion, or teaching awards. The development and submission of teaching portfolios is, thus, part of the larger drive towards assuring the quality of the teaching and learning experiences that universities offer to students.

Teaching portfolios are used by nine universities to assess whether newly-appointed staff will receive permanent appointment. Eight HEIs use teaching portfolios as a tool in performance
appraisal for existing staff, while 17 HEIs have adopted teaching portfolios as a requirement for applications for promotion and awards.

2.5.3 Student evaluations

Student evaluation of teaching is a common phenomenon in higher education. Currently, 19 HEIs use student evaluations either as part of performance appraisal and/or as a tool for further professional development. In several cases, the evaluation is administered by the quality unit, in other instances by the unit responsible for teaching and learning development. In some instances, this is done online. Although it is important to heed students’ opinions about a university’s functioning and its education programmes, institutions are cautioned not to draw simple conclusions on the strength of student evaluations, particularly where this concerns promotion, monetary incentives and conferring of awards.

2.6 Conditions of service and promotion

Conditions of service, including provisions related to probation, professional development (including sabbatical and special leave), workloads, performance appraisal and promotions and awards, should provide an environment that supports staff in efforts to pursue professional development, be this discipline-based or in teaching and learning.

HEIs, generally, employ a probation period to decide on the suitability of new staff before granting permanent employment. Probation periods vary from a few months to three years and come with a variety of criteria. Some of these may be the compulsory attendance of an induction programme and/or the submission of a teaching portfolio for assessment.

Most institutions have formal arrangements in place for staff to undertake further studies. In many cases, these studies are funded by the institution, wholly or partly, sometimes with assistance from the NRF and/or a TDG. Most universities provide for sabbatical leave for academic staff, although the conditions for granting this, as well as the actual leave periods, differ. Many institutions grant special leave for the specific purpose of completing a research project.

Aside from a few institutions, workload allocation (including the norms underpinning this) is commonly not part of an academic’s conditions of service. Generally, this merely takes the form of ‘according to instructions by the line manager’. The reports suggest that performance appraisal is not part of the conditions of service either.

Generally, promotion systems for academic staff can be based on a three-track (teaching, research, teaching- and-research), two-track (teaching, research) or a single-track system. In
several HEIs, the promotion criteria continue to weight research more heavily than teaching. Some institutions experience a challenge to define indicators that make it possible to create parity of esteem of teaching with research. Currently, 21 universities have adopted teaching quality as one of the criteria for promotion, albeit the weighting may differ per institution. In addition, one institution has reviewed its promotions policy, while another is engaged in such a review. Promotion on the strength of primarily teaching is a debate that is taking place in many institutions.

2.7 Teaching excellence awards

Twenty-one institutions indicate that they confer annual institutional teaching excellence awards. Mostly, these awards have a substantial monetary component. In addition, 13 institutions have faculty teaching excellence awards in place, although this is not necessarily a university-wide practice. Some faculty awards carry a purse, while other do not.

Generally, awards are viewed as prestigious, even though in some institutions the awarded amount is less for the teaching excellence award than it is for the research excellence award. The award procedures vary considerably, from being criterion-referenced in two universities, to awards-based on nomination, comparison and competition. A relatively recent development is the inclusion of the category ‘emerging lecturers’ into the institutional award categories by at least four HEIs. Some institutions use the award as input for teaching development in the sense that awardees are expected to present seminars to their peers regarding their practice in and insights into teaching and learning processes. Several HEIs are currently amending the criteria for teaching excellence awards as well as their categories of awards, with the aim of bringing these closer to the HELTASA/CHE award criteria and categories.

3. FOCUS AREA TWO: ENHANCING STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

As part of the QEP Phase One, institutions were requested to comment on how they dealt with the area of enhancing student support and development. This includes career and curriculum advising, life and academic skills development, counselling, student performance monitoring and referral. This section reports on advances made in this focus area as well as challenges faced by the HE sector in managing these aspects.

3.1 Aiming for student retention and student success

Sustained student retention and student success at HEIs depend to a large extent on the availability of high-quality student support and development services. The emergence of student support and development as a major concern for HEIs worldwide, can be ascribed to
the increasing rate of student dropouts and withdrawal from university education as well as the impact of massive increases in first-entering students. Although the enrolment numbers have increased dramatically in the South African HE sector, graduation rates have remained very low and dropout rates are unacceptably high. This has resulted in additional support being made available to assist in the academic and personal development of students.

Globally, two types of student support services are identified, namely academic and non-academic support and development services. Academic support and development involves helping students to successfully execute the tasks required to succeed in their academic programme. These include study skills and additional support related to specific courses. Non-academic support and development involves helping students to successfully navigate the challenges associated with being a university student and with life in general. These include life skills, stress management, peer mentoring, lifestyle and psychological counselling, as well as special services needed by students with disabilities.

There have been both qualitative and quantitative improvements regarding student support and development throughout the HE sector. Understandably, the improvements have not been even, since some of the institutions commenced this development long before 2014, while other HEIs are faced with a backlog. The QEP process aimed to consolidate institutional efforts and open up opportunities for sectoral collaboration and information sharing. A key question is whether the significant improvements in the HE sector have led to improved student success and, thus, better graduation rates. Although it is difficult to provide a simple answer to this, some institutions have achieved remarkable results and much improved student performance, especially with regards to the retention of first-entering students.

3.2 Social justice

With the advent of democracy in 1994, higher education had to be fundamentally reimagined from its apartheid legacy, in order to meet the human resources needs and the national goals of a modernising economy. It is against this background that one of the explicit demands placed on teaching and learning in post-apartheid South Africa is that it contributes to social justice. As a consequence of the massive increase in student numbers, including the so-called ‘non-traditional students’ (first-generation students, mature students and students from disadvantaged communities), many developments have taken place to support students. These include the establishment of foundation programmes, support programmes, more sophisticated admission and placement processes, more career guidance and counselling and different pedagogies. At the same time, these developments have not been accompanied by the requisite increase in government funding needed to deal with the new challenges. This has meant that some HEIs with meagre resource bases could not put in place the much
needed policies and management infrastructure to regularise the required practices. The result has been a situation where fragmented and ad hoc solutions have been sought.

The stark reality is that outside of academic conditions, many other factors impede a quality teaching and learning process: most students come from poor backgrounds; some cannot afford three meals a day; some do not have decent accommodation and live in squalor conditions. Many institutions have pointed to major institutional/sectoral challenges and pressure points that require urgent and thoughtful reflection, such as accommodation and food provision for disadvantaged and poor students. It is not surprising that some HEIs (mostly HDIs) still cannot come to terms with the demands of quality teaching and learning as much as they try to create conducive learning environments.

3.3 Institutional intent and commitment

Since learning is a complex and synergistic process premised on the integration of cognitive-academic, personal-affective and social-cultural aspects, student support and development cannot be divorced from the academic function. The two are inseparable elements of the student experience. The student must be placed at the centre of the learning experience. If student support and development is to contribute effectively to student success as well as institutional success, universities should treat the relevant support services as a necessary and integrated part of an HEI’s environment and make these part and parcel of its strategic intent. Student support and development services should thus be embedded within the organisational strategy and structure of the institution.

Institutions need to build the necessary capacity (financial, physical and human resources) to mount integrated student support and development systems fit for individual institutions. The scholarship of and research into student support and development plays a crucial role here, since it can generate evidence on what hinders or promotes student success at HEIs. Based on research data, the institution can decide on the resources necessary for student support and development services. This is especially critical at HDIs where limited resources are available to service the many students from poor backgrounds.

Providing student support and development should aim to assist students to achieve student success within a reasonable period, which is important for the student, the institution and the sector. Thus, student support and development should influence student behaviour and experience as well as that of the institution. For instance, in order to provide support to students, it is vital to provide the requisite support to academic colleagues. Moreover, the skills and expertise of the staff within student support and development services contribute directly to the total learning and personal development experience of students. Therefore, such resources should be appreciated and protected.
3.4 Student support and development structures

Central to an institution with high-quality student support and development systems, is the existence of functional, efficient and effective delivery structures. All HEIs have one or more functional units (or equivalent) that offer support services to students. There have been both quantitative and qualitative improvements regarding the size and form of the various student support and development structures in recent years. In many cases additional resources have been made available; new initiatives and structures have been established; and in some instances new positions were created and appointments made to ensure that these structures function optimally. It is important that individuals appointed to manage student support and development divisions have the required management skills.

While most of the student support and development services are centralised and coordinated through a centre (or equivalent), the precise designation of such centres differs from one institution to another. Moreover, institutions frequently have additional student support and development structures residing in faculties, schools, departments, and residences. Although it may be desirable to spread student support and development activities widely over campuses, the danger exists that this diminishes the central coordination role needed to manage student support and development activities in a cohesive manner. Another risk is that efforts are duplicated in the face of scarce resources. Functional, efficient student support and development structures will ensure that there are no unnecessary functional overlaps between the complementary structures.

3.5 Identification of student support and development needs

In order to ascertain the needs of students and the impact of student support and development services, universities need to conduct institution-wide student surveys that measure and report on all aspects of students’ experiences as an important academic imperative. These would include students’ academic preparedness, the impact of student support and development services on student retention and success, as well as work readiness. Such assessments warrant the establishment of a proper institutional policy framework. Some universities make use of the UFS-developed suite of continuous survey packages called the South African Survey of Student Engagement (SASSE) to assess student engagement activities; others have developed ‘home-brewed’ student-profile diagnostic initiatives to identify students’ needs.

3.6 At-risk students: early warning systems, tracking and referral

With only one exception, all institutions indicated that they have mechanisms in place to monitor student performance early in the first semester, and to identify those who need
remedial action, and that referral systems are available to assist students ‘at-risk.’ This facility can be ascribed to the quality of student data available through the MIS. At the same time, a few institutions are struggling to put rigorous systems in place to track individual students’ performance. All institutions, including those whose early warning systems are not yet fully developed and implemented, seem to have functional tracking and referral systems in place. Some institutions, particularly those which have multiple campuses, have developed sophisticated multi-layered supporting systems to track ‘at-risk’ students and to refer them to appropriate support and development centres or units.

3.7 Institution-wide initiatives to support first-year students

Until recently, institution-wide orientation programmes were the only initiatives universities used to introduce and support first-entering students. Recently, several universities have embraced the FYE initiative, aimed at assisting institutions to more effectively ‘teach the students they have’. Both the orientation programmes and the FYE programme aim to introduce new students to the HE environment and to support them throughout the first year as they navigate this somewhat ‘hostile’ terrain. The shape and form of orientation programmes vary widely in duration, focus and intensity from one institution to another.

The FYE initiative involves scheduled activities from the initial orientation throughout the first semester, and may include aspects of academic development which get integrated into the core first-year curricula. Some institutions have developed online materials for first-entering students which can be accessed at any time by students. Eight institutions now run successful FYE programmes and four institutions are at varying stages of development.

3.8 Academic support: academic literacy and language development

Currently the majority of students enrolled at HEIs are African with diverse home languages. Moreover, most students entering HEIs lack proficiency in the academic literacies required to succeed in higher education, such as academic writing and reading, computer literacy, quantitative literacies and information literacy. All universities provide support programmes to students to improve students’ proficiency in the academic literacies by, for example, offering modules such as Computer Literacy, English for Academic Purposes and English for Specific Purposes, some of which are compulsory and credit-bearing. In some institutions, student support and development programmes may be compulsory for certain groups of students and voluntary for others, designedly so, such as SI, while other development programmes are embedded in the formal curriculum.

Some institutions are in the process of piloting multilingualism to facilitate learning across faculties and disciplines, such as the use of isiXhosa and Afrikaans as media of instruction.
during tutorial sessions, especially at the first-year of study. These are important and significant developments in the HE sector, given the current ‘decolonisation’ discourse and the role that the language of instruction plays in the mastery of academic literacies.

Currently 21 institutions have established well-developed reading and writing centres, and two institutions are in the process of establishing such a centre. The shape and form, as well as the designation, of these entities vary from one institution to another.

3.9 Academic support: subject-specific academic support and development

All HEIs provide subject-specific academic support and development programmes to first-entering students as well as to senior students. Such support commonly takes the form of extra tutorial sessions, usually offered by departments over and above the tutorial sessions that form part of the formal class time-table. In several institutions, support is also given in the form of SI. The number of institutions doing so is gradually increasing. Several universities have established discipline-specific centres to offer extra tutorials for students struggling with first-year mathematics. Results obtained so far indicate that there have been significant improvements in the performance of these students since the inception of these interventions. Some HEIs make use of TAs to assist lecturers during class and tutorial sessions. In addition to providing subject-specific assistance, these senior students (with first degrees or involved in postgraduate studies) are role models to undergraduate students.

The HE sector has responded positively to the call for greater access to historically disadvantaged and marginalised individuals, but the figures relating to drop-out rates and completion (graduation) rates of Black students show that much still needs to be done to level the playing field for Black students, particularly at the so-called historically white institutions. However, several institutions indicated that students who had been identified as needing academic support often appeared to shun the proposed intervention, as if there was a stigma attached to this.

3.10 Non-academic support and development

Study success can rarely be achieved if other areas of student life are unbalanced or facing serious challenges. In this regard, the study context is very important, given the existential challenges many students face daily. Students at HDIs face serious challenges regarding such matters as accommodation, finances, food, clothing, health and safety. Any one of these challenges can cause serious disruption to the academic study of a student. In addition, students who do not relate emotionally, socially and academically to the institutional culture, may withdraw and leave without completing their programme of study. The majority of students at HDIs will need support of one kind or another throughout their academic life,
hence it is imperative that student support services be proactive, rather than reactive, and responsive to students’ needs. In a significant number of universities many people, including students and academics, were ignorant of or ill-informed about the availability of student support and development services at their institutions.

3.10.1 Mentoring and peer support

Mentoring and peer support programmes are available to students at all HEIs, albeit the format and intensity varies from institution to institution. Most mentoring and peer support programmes focus on first-entering students. Some HEIs have peer mentoring for all first-year students, while others offer peer mentoring to first-year students in residences, which is sometimes campus-dependent. The reports also indicated that mentoring and peer support as well as extra tutorials and one-on-one consultations are contingent on the voluntary and committed support of senior students and academics throughout the sector. Commonly, mentors are accepted after being interviewed and undergo brief training.

3.10.2 Life skills development, career advising and counselling

The provision of student support services focusing on life skills development, career advising and counselling is often located in the student services unit (or equivalent) of the institution and students and staff make use of these services voluntarily. The designation of these units varies per institution. The main focus of the units is to provide counselling and developmental services to students and staff in pursuance of the optimal well-being and happiness of students and staff.

At all HEIs, student support services are provided by professionals, including trained counsellors, academic development practitioners and clinical psychologists. Activities and interventions focus on study skills, life skills, career advising and counselling. There have been significant qualitative and quantitative institutional and sector-wide improvements in student counselling and advising activities over the past three years. All institutions conduct annual career fairs, the duration of which tends to vary from one institution to another. Several institutions have recently developed online platforms dedicated to career advising. Most institutions indicated that they provide workplace related skills training to their students during their academic and career advising activities. Very few institutions made reference to WIL or SL, which is an essential element of training and development of students to become skilled, knowledgeable, ethical and confident graduates who are ready for the workplace. Some institutions, though, have made WIL and SL integral parts of their student support and development activities.
3.10.3 Support for students in university residences and those with disabilities

Fifteen institutions provide student support services in university residences. Commonly, these support services are provided by senior students in residences, mentors and peers, as well as dedicated residence staff. At some institutions there are formal structures in place to facilitate these programmes. There is an increase in the availability of wi-fi connectivity in university residences throughout the sector, allowing students access to the internet all the time.

The support offered by HEIs to students with disabilities is diverse and varied. Seven universities have established functional disability units (or equivalent), which provide academic and non-academic support services to students with disabilities, and two more are in the process of establishing such support units. There has in recent years been only a minimal increase in the number of institutions that have established units that offer support to students with disabilities. Inclusive higher education is a right for people with disabilities, and yet the number of students with disabilities in HEIs is only about one percent. Access to post-secondary education is crucial for attaining an improved livelihood and achieving income security. It is, therefore, imperative that HEIs attend to the question of inclusivity, together with the attendant multidimensional support needed to create a conducive environment for teaching and learning.

4 FOCUS AREA THREE: ENHANCING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

As part of the QEP Phase One, universities were requested to comment on how institutions have dealt with the area of enhancing the teaching and learning environment. This includes teaching and learning spaces, ICT infrastructure and access, technology-enabled tools and resources and library facilities. This section reports on advances made in this focus area as well as challenges faced by the HE sector in managing these aspects.

4.1 Strategic direction

The provision of physical spaces, equipment and ICT for teaching and learning must be planned and resourced at institutional level. Decisions about what is provided, when, where and why, need to be guided by the institution’s teaching and learning strategy, which must be directly informed by the pedagogical and curriculum transformation needs of the institution.

The majority of HEIs have developed a campus master plan, often based on an infrastructure audit. The reports indicate that, although there is a growing awareness of the need to align
the provision of facilities with the institutional strategy (philosophy) on teaching and learning, only a few universities explicitly indicate that the campus master plan is developed in conjunction with other strategic plans, particularly the teaching and learning strategy (or similar).

4.2 Alignment of the intended curriculum with teaching and learning spaces

The overarching issues affecting decisions about enhancing the learning environment are, (1) how to assure the quality of education through supportive pedagogical approaches in the face of an increased intake of students; (2) how to move institutions into 21st century tertiary education that is characterised by rapid changes; and (3) how to provide a conducive learning environment for teaching and learning, including an appropriate ICT environment and teaching and learning spaces that are fit for purpose in the light of dwindling resources.

4.2.1 Blended learning

The global advent of IT applications as mainstream teaching and learning tools in higher education, has prompted a reconceptualization of pedagogical approaches in higher education worldwide, and also in South Africa. In South Africa’s HE sector, the increased intake of students into higher education in the face of limited resources, as well as the recent student protests, have also played a significant role in rethinking the way academic programmes are offered, and the facilities that are needed to do so.

Blended learning is seen as a way to provide quality education to increasing numbers of students without the need to create a massive physical infrastructure with dwindling resources. Moreover, it is generally accepted that blended learning fosters the development of key graduate attributes and competencies, such as critical thinking, collaboration and creativity. Thus, by offering programmes through the mode of blended learning, HEIs intend to follow the global trend of providing a conducive learning environment for teaching and learning that incorporates an appropriate ICT environment, while at the same time dealing with the massification of education. With one exception, all universities have introduced or are preparing to introduce blended learning. The need for pedagogical and technical support to deliver quality blended learning has prompted institutions to create new supportive structures that comprise staff with academic and ICT backgrounds.

It was found that in some institutions there is a disjuncture between the ‘official stance’ of the university in respect of the introduction of blended learning as per the teaching and learning strategy, and the actual infrastructure development taking place, such as the continued need for very large lecture theatres. There are some issues that potentially slow down the introduction of blended learning: an outdated existing physical infrastructure; an
antiquated ICT system; limited financial resources; the socio-economic environment; geographical location of the HEI; and the need for student access to internet-enabled devices.

4.2.2 The learning environment: a networked learning landscape

The concept ‘learning environment’ must be regarded as a ‘networked learning landscape’, that includes, (i) formal teaching spaces and resources, physical and virtual, and (ii) learning spaces and resources, formal and informal, on-campus and in residences (private or university-provided), at the university or in the workplace or community, physical and virtual. There is a growing awareness in the sector of the need for clear strategic intent, and an integrated approach to the (re)development and extension of the learning environment, albeit some institutions have progressed further than others. In view of issues such as the traditional functions of universities, the traditional academic culture, the existing and inherited physical infrastructure, as well as the general lack of funds, the creation of a networked learning landscape is a considerable challenge.

4.2.3 Formal teaching and learning spaces: physical spaces

Decisions about the learning environment, including physical spaces, must be underpinned by strategic intent, explicitly focusing on the enhancement of teaching and learning. This is a challenge for some HEIs, given the increase in student enrolment, which in many cases was too rapid relative to the available infrastructure. Several institutions have undertaken infrastructure audits to identify the optimisation of teaching and learning spaces. The trend of creating multifunctional and flexible teaching and learning spaces has continued. In order to provide discipline-specific specialised venues, some HEIs have repurposed existing spaces to suit their needs, others utilise DHET funding, while yet other universities manage to get outside funding assistance. Many universities indicate the need for maintenance, renovation and re-development of physical infrastructure, but that this is difficult to achieve because of the lack of financial resources.

The increase in student numbers in the past 20 years has outstripped the increase in the provision of new physical facilities. This makes the efficient allocation of teaching venues a crucial matter. Generally, universities continue to struggle with a lack of formal teaching and learning venues that are fit for purpose, as well as with the actual allocation of venues. At the same time the reports suggest that, in the face of growing student numbers and the limited availability of resources, there is also a growing awareness of the need for enhanced efficiency regarding the use of existing teaching and learning venues. Institutions are coming to realise that these challenges can be resolved in part through central management of the timetable and space allocation.
The campus as a whole should be regarded as an environment that supports student learning. This entails that teaching and learning venues should be fit for purpose. Some HEIs have adopted standards for formal teaching venues, which include the provision of audio-visual facilities, sometimes based on international benchmarks. In some institutions, the equipping of teaching venues is handled by a multi-stakeholder team, in other institutions it is part of the campus development plan. Providing equitable facilities that are fit for purpose is a challenge for multi-campus HEIs and for institutions that have multiple delivery sites. Some universities battle with the provision of basic teaching and learning amenities and have not yet reached the stage of setting minimum standards.

All universities make provision for physically disabled students, albeit the actual provisions differ considerably. In the majority of institutions, the promotion of universal access to physical, academic and social spaces is driven by the institution’s disability unit. Some universities state the need for data-based decisions and integrated planning to provide for disabled students, others have made this part of their general guidelines for teaching and learning spaces.

4.2.4 Formal teaching and learning spaces: the library

The explosive growth in technology that impacted on teaching and learning in higher education fundamentally changed how academics and students search for and use information. Hence, these advances in technology also prompted university libraries to adapt to and in some cases lead these changes. More and more the library is regarded as an essential and active partner in the learning enterprise.

All HEIs have re-conceptualized the functions of their libraries, resulting in a broadening of the role of the library, in addition to providing access to information. This is, namely, to train students in, for instance, digital and information literacy and anti-plagiarism; to develop online guides; to provide learning spaces such as silent study areas, social learning spaces, knowledge commons, reading rooms and reference desks; to provide for disabled students; student printing and photocopying; extended library opening hours; and a repository for past exams and research papers. It seems that most, if not all, libraries have wireless connectivity. Many libraries have developed mobile applications so that students have easy digital access to the library. Some libraries have formed regional consortia to create a more cost-effective information provision system. Some institutions have provided additional library space by repurposing under-used spaces as satellite libraries.

4.2.5 Formal teaching and learning spaces: virtual spaces

An adequate (built) physical infrastructure, with an adequate IT infrastructure, founded on an
appropriate pedagogy, contributes to a conducive learning environment. Because of the rapid growth of ICT, the notion of the classroom has both expanded and evolved. Virtual space has taken its place alongside physical space, resulting in a reappraisal of the way a lecture room might function, the choice of pedagogical approaches and the use of technologically enhanced educational resources. The availability of a LMS with additional wireless connectivity (wi-fi) makes it possible for institutions to create VLEs as part of the blended learning approach.

Universities, generally, recognise and appreciate the advantages of a LMS both in terms of new pedagogies, student access as well as efficient use of resources. The use by lecturers of a LMS has in recent years gradually increased, both in terms of variety in applications as well as quantity. The presence of modules on a LMS varies from 30% to nearly 100%. Some institutions have opted for a phased implementation of a LMS. Although there is a clear move towards the use of a LMS for e-assessment, some HEIs regard this as risky and possibly disadvantageous to some student groups who may not have access to the LMS. A quarter of the universities indicated that they had developed a mobile application that would give students access to the LMS anytime, anywhere. Just under one third of the HEIs explicitly reported that they had integrated their ITS with the LMS, so that students would have easy access to their marks on the LMS.

The availability of wireless connectivity (wi-fi) enables students to access the LMS and the internet from PCs, laptops and other mobile devices as and when they so desire. Wi-fi connections are crucial for the rollout of blended learning and ODL and make individual and collaborative learning outside formal teaching venues possible. Wi-fi connectivity in teaching venues opens up new and innovative pedagogical approaches. There is a marked increase in the provision of wi-fi on the various university campuses, although the level of coverage varies considerably across the sector. By and large, universities are in the process of extending wi-fi to teaching venues, informal learning spaces and residences. Half of the institutions mention that they see the wider rollout of wi-fi as a priority.

4.3 Extending the learning environment

The availability of technology has the potential to widen the range of spaces and places in which learning happens, as well as enabling new styles of learning. Generally, HEIs subscribe to student-centred learning and blended learning as their desired approaches. This entails that, in addition to formal places of teaching and learning, universities are also expected to create informal learning places for students to engage in collaborative or individual learning at a self-chosen time and place.
4.3.1 Informal learning spaces

There has been a considerable increase in universities creating informal learning spaces. At nearly all institutions this is ‘work in progress’. It must be noted that for the purpose of this section, ‘informal learning spaces’ does not include library facilities, open-access computer laboratories and residences. Gradually, institutions are approaching the issues around student-centred learning in a more systemic way by, for instance, considering ‘built pedagogy’, which looks at ways to encourage collaborative learning through the provision of informal physical spaces. A lack of funding hampers the realisation of informal learning spaces, since the establishment of these involves installation of extra wi-fi connections, charging stations, furniture, and so on. Several universities attempt to resolve the need for informal learning spaces by repurposing under-used spaces, sometimes involving student input.

4.3.2 Student access to the virtual learning environment

The development of blended learning approaches, including the use of a LMS as well as the design of mobile applications, presupposes that students possess or have access to adequate devices to make an internet connection and will, thus, make use of informal learning spaces. This may not necessarily be the case. Additionally, informal learning spaces will only function if the students availing themselves of these, also possess the digital and information literacy required, in addition to adequate devices.

Institutions have different approaches regarding the provision of computer laboratories for internet access. At nearly half of the universities, mostly HDIs and UoTs, it is important that sufficient access to computer laboratories is provided, because many of their students are unable to purchase their own devices. Despite funding assistance from DHET and other sources, the provisions were still inadequate. Other universities are more fortunate. They are able to provide ongoing upgrading of their computer facilities, have many seats and make a sizeable number of computer laboratories available for 24 hours a day, even though a large section of their student cohort has devices. Most universities attempt to provide 24-hour access to at least some computer laboratories. A particular challenge is the fact that in all universities some of the computer laboratories are ‘faculty/department-owned’. In some institutions cross-cutting conversations around expanded access to these computer laboratories have started.

Many students cannot afford to purchase internet-enabled devices. This hampers their participation in class, as well as learning outside class. In addition, many students do not have connectivity off campus, which makes out-of-class online collaboration challenging. Two-thirds of the universities have introduced or are planning to introduce measures to alleviate
this situation. These vary from advising students how to procure laptops at a reasonable price; making devices available on loan; making laptops available on an instalment payment basis; and providing tablets free of charge to particular groups of students, such as NSFAS students and students in the extended programmes. One university has provided tablets to all of its undergraduate students. A number of institutions have negotiated favourable data bundles with private internet providers. Some universities prefer students to have laptops rather than the much cheaper tablets, and have made this a requirement.

The development of information literacy in combination with digital literacy is vital for all students to attain academic success and will assist them in developing competences needed to be fully functional in a society that is becoming increasingly more digital. All universities recognise the need to enhance the computer skills of students, particularly first-year students, albeit the approach, span and focus vary considerably, from university-wide, compulsory and credit-bearing to faculty/department-based and voluntary. Over and above digital literacy, several universities are offering modules in information literacy, which in combination with digital literacy is deemed to be a crucial factor in student-centred learning.

4.3.3 Residences as part of the learning environment

There is currently an explicit conceptualisation of residences as part of the learning environment. The massification of higher education created expectations that universities will support students, inter alia by providing accommodation and learning support in the residences. As a consequence of this, some universities actively strive to increase the number of students in university residences. The re-conceptualisation of the learning environment, where residences both on- and off-campus are included as learning spaces, is widespread among universities. Critical for the functioning of residences as learning spaces, is internet connectivity. This is recognised by all universities and within budgetary constraints, universities have achieved this, or are working towards it. In some institutions, particularly the HDIs, the need for student accommodation is dire. With grants from DHET and internal funds, much building and refurbishment is taking place, including the establishment of wi-fi connectivity.

5 FOCUS AREA FOUR: ENHANCING COURSE AND PROGRAMME ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT

Universities were requested to comment on how institutions have dealt with enhancing course and programme enrolment management. This includes admissions, selection and placement, re-admission refusals, pass rates in gateway courses and management information systems. This section reports on advances made in this focus area as well as challenges faced by the HE sector in managing this aspect of higher education management.
5.1 Recruitment, selection, placement, admission and registration

It is imperative that recruitment, selection, placement, admission and registration processes are undergirded by clear institutional and government policies as well as transparent procedures and practices. This also applies to practices and processes associated with course and enrolment management of individual courses, programmes and academic qualifications, commonly referred to collectively as ‘the admission process’. The systems for managing the entry into the public HE sector should also serve as instruments of public policy to address the inequities of the past through the provision of equity, widening participation, and effective use of public funds and resources. Within the HE sector, and even within individual institutions, the priority given to the processes of recruitment (of students to programmes) and selection (of students where programmes are oversubscribed) varies. Since South Africa has in place a common national curriculum and school leaving examinations system, the common denominator determining entry to higher education institutions has to be the individual’s performance in the NSC examinations.

All universities have units (or equivalent) that deal with student recruitment throughout the academic year. The role and function of such units is to inform prospective students of the study opportunities available at the various faculties and the careers that are associated with the programmes on offer. Several institutions make use of their corporate marketing and communications divisions to recruit students. Some institutions have developed focused strategies to recruit certain types of students to their institutions, for instance, in order to increase the number of Black African students to an institution which previously was a historically White university. Another practice is that some universities make use of RPL to recruit targeted groups of students to some of the professional degree and diploma programmes on offer at the institution.

All HEIs make use of the APS system to select prospective students, albeit the method for calculating the APS differs substantially between the universities, as does the minimum score required for university admission. Thus, although two institutions may use similar methods for calculating their APS, they may have very different minimum APS entry requirements for the same qualification. All universities indicated that they had to raise the required APS scores over the past few years, while some universities reported that they regularly review the minimum scores following a thorough analysis of the performance of previous student cohorts.

Universities should be aware that if academically underprepared students are selected, these students will need extensive extracurricular assistance. Without additional interventions, these underprepared students will have little chance of succeeding at university, which is ethically unjustifiable. Some institutions make their selections very early in the admission
cycle to ensure that they recruit highly talented individuals. Other institutions use selection tests to give alternative admission/selection opportunities to prospective students.

Even though HEIs’ placement and admission practices are based on the NSC or grade 12 results, placement strategies differ from one institution to another, and often also from faculty to faculty within an institution. In some instances, placement of students in a programme also takes into consideration their grade 11 results, or the NBT, or other senate-approved assessment instruments. Although research has pointed out that a combination of NSC and NBT results gives a demonstrable predictive value of performance in university modules, the value of the NBT is not fully appreciated in the sector and is often underestimated. Therefore, many institutions use NBT for diagnostic purposes only.

Although universities have had selection mechanisms in place for many years, the concept of placement as a separate process from selection has only recently entered the universities’ discourse. Some institutions treat the admission, selection and placement processes as if they are inseparable, or in some cases, synonymous. For them, once a student fulfils a certain criterion for admission, the process is concluded and students should be placed in the programme of their choice.

Although the application cycle for admission to all HEIs starts with provisional offers for admission based on prospective students’ performance in grade 11, the majority of firm offers are only made once the grade 12 (NSC) results are released by the Department of Basic Education in January of each year. Some universities make firm offers long before the NSC results are released in order to capture top students. All universities allow prospective students to apply for admission to two or three programmes and to rank them in order of preference. Admission to any programme usually depends on the APS and availability of places. Since the NSC results are released late in January of each year, some institutions have decided to register returning students first. The walk-in practice has been banned at most institutions and alternative mechanisms of dealing with late applicants have been established.

Most HEIs have established mechanisms to ensure that registration numbers match the enrolment targets set for the institution. Also, many universities monitor the actual number of credits carried by individual students in order to ensure that students do not carry excessive course loads.

Online application and registration processes have been implemented by many institutions and relative success has been achieved in encouraging potential and returning students to make use of these systems. The level of maturity of the processes (and systems) is highly uneven throughout the sector. For instance, at some institutions students who have to repeat modules are not able to complete the registration process online and may have to approach
the registry in order to do so. For an efficient application, admissions and enrolment process to succeed, close cooperation and coordination is imperative between and among the various sections involved in the process, as well as strict adherence to calendar rules governing the process.

5.2 Gateway (‘killer’, ‘gatekeeper’) courses

Empirical evidence worldwide points to a number of reasons for students’ continued failure in so-called ‘gateway’ or ‘killer’ courses. These relate to lack of academic preparation, large class sizes, inadequate placement procedures, lack of early feedback to students, late enrolment, missed classes and faculty grading patterns. Although the South African HE sector can identify with all these causes, the lack of academic preparedness in particularly science, technology, engineering and mathematics courses contributes to massive failures and dropouts among universities’ first-entering students. One of the challenges is to establish criteria to identify gateway courses, which might differ from programme to programme.

5.3 Academic exclusion and readmission appeal

The information pertaining to conditions which may lead to academic exclusion is easily available, since it appears in the public information any institution provides to its students. At the same time, academic staff and professional support services staff need to be vigilant and to remind students of the consequences of not meeting the minimum requirements for progression to the next level of study. The impact of academic exclusion on the student, parents and in some instances whole communities (some students from poor backgrounds are sponsored by the community) can be devastating.

5.4 Enrolment planning and management

Generally, enrolment planning takes into consideration the policy context and developments highlighted in the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training - Building an Expanded, Effective and Integrated Post-School System (2014) and the National Development Plan (2011). It is accepted that uniform sets of planning goals and targets cannot be applied across all institutions in the public HE system and, thus, a strategy of differentiated growth for each university has been developed, which is in line with their institutional capacity.

Meeting the enrolment targets agreed to with DHET is a serious challenge for the sector. At times there is a mismatch between what institutions planned for and the actual number of candidates who present themselves for registration. There is significant variation in the level of detailed enrolment and monitoring that is undertaken at the different HEIs. Very few universities described in detail how they use institutional student data to plan ahead, which
strongly suggests that they lack capacity at this level of planning. By contrast, other institutions have achieved impressive innovations in the manner in which they track and monitor students’ performance over the course of their degree programmes. To raise institutional awareness, some HEIs have embarked on a communication exercise, or training workshops to ensure that academics and administration staff responsible for implementing enrolment plans are familiar with the processes involved.

Of all the aspects of university management processes associated with the four focus areas, institutional planning exhibits most glaringly the disparities in institutional capacity. This is a systemic problem, which is also reflected in how executive portfolios are structured: well-resourced institutions have elevated the status of the planning portfolio to DVC/vice-principal level, whereas at some of the HDIs one individual (at a director or manager level) is responsible for both planning and quality assurance.

5.5 MISs in enrolment and course management

Worldwide, the course and programme enrolment management at HEIs has become a comprehensive process designed to achieve sustainable institutional student records for every student enrolled at that institution, from the time of recruitment and first enrolment to graduation. MISs assists in managing a large body of data and information such that it can be readily retrieved, processed, analysed and made available for use, dissemination and institutional planning. Two of the widely used off-the-shelf MISs in South Africa are the HEDA and ITS. Institutions with the necessary resources and expertise have been able to build custom-made MISs capable of servicing the data management needs specific to their institutions. Most of the off-the-shelf systems, as well as those that are custom-made, enable institutions to monitor students’ performance and track those students who are at risk of being excluded for academic reasons.
FINDINGS

This final section provides a succinct overview of the results of Phase One of the CHE’s Quality Enhancement Project. The QEP sought to evaluate the endeavours of individual HEIs to enhance the quality of student learning and, in so doing, to increase the number of graduates who acquire valuable personal, professional and social attributes. This evaluation has led to the formulation of the results of the project into a number of “findings” in respect of each focus area of the QEP. These findings are presented for consideration by the HE sector and each HEI and, if deemed desirable, for the sector and each HEI to undertake appropriate action to strengthen each HEI as a learning organisation devoted to the enhancement of the quality of student learning.

FOCUS AREA ONE: ENHANCING ACADEMICS AS TEACHERS

FINDING 1.1:
Teaching and learning at a university will benefit considerably from the establishment of a Senate Teaching and Learning Committee, as well as Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees, with clearly-defined terms of reference.

FINDING 1.2:
Teaching and learning at universities will be significantly professionalised if every university designed and implemented an institutional CPD framework, in which provision was also made for:
(i) a separate personnel category for staff employed in teaching and learning support units that implement the CPD framework;
(ii) a compulsory induction programme for all staff newly-appointed to the institution, whether early career or experienced academics, full-time, part-time or contract staff;
(iii) a balance to be maintained in the induction programme between institution-based induction and discipline-based induction;
(iv) the professional development of university teachers embedded in the CPD framework in a manner that links professional development activities with recognition and reward, as well as with conditions of service, workload allocations, and career paths;
(v) SoTL that is underpinned by an enabling policy framework that links this type of research to performance appraisal within a CPD framework; and
(vi) part-time and temporary academic staff to also participate in a CPD programme.

FINDING 1.3:
A workload model for academic staff in a department, that takes into account an equitable division of workload within a context of course-specific staff-student ratios, research
requirements, higher-degree studies, professional development requirements and personal situations, and is embedded in a performance management system, is conducive to staff satisfaction and enhanced productivity.

**FINDING 1.4:**
A performance appraisal system is an important tool for an institution to both evaluate and enhance academics’ performance in changing circumstances, therefore to hold academics accountable as well as to develop their competencies. An advanced performance appraisal system has the following qualities:
(i) It recurs periodically;
(ii) it has quality teaching as one of the key criteria; and
(iii) it is capable of context-specific interpretation, while using criteria that are consistently interpreted across the institution.

**FINDING 1.5:**
Where a teaching portfolio is developed on the basis, not of faculty or departmental criteria, but of institutional criteria, it provides an opportunity for the institution to develop a common understanding of what teaching excellence in the institution means.

**FINDING 1.6:**
The value and validity of student evaluations, whether used for performance appraisal or for professional development, based on their format, content, frequency, administration and purpose, are not immediately apparent and demand careful evaluation.

**FINDING 1.7:**
Conditions of service provide optimal support to academics in their professional development, if they include conditions related to workload and to performance appraisal.

**FINDING 1.8:**
Promotion is an important incentive for academics to engage with professional development and to adopt career paths that give prominence to teaching and to research on teaching and learning, and as such can create a conducive environment for the enhancement of academics as university teachers.

**FINDING 1.9:**
Institutional teaching excellence awards have institutional as well as sectoral impact if their criteria are aligned to the HELTASA/CHE award criteria and categories and the best practices and insights, on the grounds of which the awards are conferred, are disseminated amongst peers at the institution and in the sector.
FOCUS AREA TWO: ENHANCING STUDENT SUPPORT AND DEVELOPMENT

FINDING 2.1:
There is a persistent lack of funding in the HE sector to create the necessary conditions for social justice to prevail in teaching and learning (including the existential needs of poor students), resulting in a lack of parity between institutions in the extent of the resources dedicated towards student support and development initiatives.

FINDING 2.2:
Student support and development services can benefit greatly from research into student support and development, to enable HEIs to make evidence-based decisions on the resources needed to provide adequate and appropriate student support and how best to utilise such scarce resources to enhance student success.

FINDING 2.3:
Student support and development activities and services function optimally in institutions where:
(i) a participatory process is undertaken in the institution to identify the roles and responsibilities of the various entities offering student support and development;
(ii) an institutional oversight committee exists to promote cohesion and integration;
(iii) there are adequate numbers of properly trained professionals engaged in student support and development;
(iv) equitable student support systems exist on every campus;
(v) mechanisms exist to ensure meaningful interaction between academic and non-academic student support systems; and
(vi) all student support and development activities/initiatives/services are housed within one integrated structure, thus ensuring a single reference point for students.

FINDING 2.4:
Surveys conducted nationally and collaboratively to identify students’ support needs, can, if well-analysed, reveal useful insights about students’ experiences and behaviour and enable appropriate institutional and sector-wide decisions to be taken.

FINDING 2.5:
Early warning, tracking and referral systems are well-developed at a number of institutions and can offer their guidance and expertise to those institutions who would otherwise have to invest their scarce resources in new and untested systems.
FINDING 2.6: 
There is clear benefit in a FYE (or extended orientation) programme for all HEIs (a host of information on which is available at the South African National Resource Centre for the First Year Experience and Students in Transition (SANRAC) at UJ), so much so that some modules/activities in such a programme could become compulsory and credit-bearing.

FINDING 2.7: 
Students, for the majority of whom English, the almost universal language of instruction, is not their first language, can only benefit from an improvement in their academic literacy, one component of which is the introduction of multilingualism in tutorials.

FINDING 2.8: 
To enhance student success:  
(i) Black students’ performance and progression, especially at historically White institutions, demand close monitoring; and  
(ii) tutor training and support programmes improve the value of tutorial sessions.

FINDING 2.9: 
Sustainable, quality student and support services are underpinned by:  
(i) the availability of adequate capacity (qualified professionals, physical facilities and funding); and  
(ii) communication campaigns, including awareness campaigns conducted by student leadership, that inform all students and staff of the positive effect on students attaining success of student support and development services.

FINDING 2.10: 
Online platforms provide convenient and accessible information to students on career advice and counselling.

FINDING 2.11: 
In respect of students with disabilities:  
(i) Far too few students at HEIs (only about one percent) are students with disabilities;  
(ii) less than half of HEIs provide students with disabilities with the support (financial, social, infrastructural) needed for a conducive learning environment; and  
(iii) no sector-wide minimum standards exist for the provision and coordination of support to students with disabilities, including the establishment of disability units, the provision of disability-friendly facilities and technology such as wi-fi, and, generally, service delivery models.
FOCUS AREA THREE: ENHANCING THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

FINDING 3.1:
An institution’s teaching and learning strategy/philosophy is best implemented through its systematic integration into a campus master plan for the design of enhanced teaching and learning spaces; and it is prepared by a working group which is: representative of all stakeholders; includes university teachers, teaching and learning specialists, technical staff, facilities staff and students; and, in the case of multi-campus institutions, is representative of all campuses and the various academic and support units to ensure equity of provision.

FINDING 3.2:
The maximum benefit of blended learning is achieved if:
(i) it is aligned in a campus master plan with the required infrastructure, in particular the ICT infrastructure, and its regular maintenance;
(ii) staff are provided with professional development with respect to pedagogical approaches and materials development in this area, as well as in the general area of technology-assisted learning; and
(iii) resources can be made available across the sector for a sizeable number of HDIs to implement the infrastructural and technological plans needed for the introduction of blended learning.

FINDING 3.3:
The reconceptualization of physical learning spaces and modes of delivery of academic programmes is best achieved if:
(i) There is an appropriate relationship between planned and actual student enrolment in relation to the available infrastructure; and
(ii) There are innovative approaches within the sector to provide additional and/or specialised teaching and learning spaces, and to re-develop, refurbish and maintain existing teaching and learning spaces.

FINDING 3.4:
Optimal use of available teaching and learning venues will be achieved if a centralised, automated timetabling and venue allocation system exists that:
(i) is linked to accurate student enrolment;
(ii) accurately matches teaching requirements to spaces needed;
(iii) uses teaching and learning spaces outside of traditionally preferred periods; and
(iv) allocates venues for general purposes when not in use by the home department.
FINDING 3.5:  
Fit-for-purpose teaching and learning venues, including the technology that is needed, should be equipped:  
(i) on the basis of sectoral guidelines for teaching and learning spaces that are applied consistently across the institution and, where possible, on different campuses and delivery sites; and  
(ii) in a way that creates a more or less standardised, conducive environment for teaching and learning across the sector.

FINDING 3.6:  
Facilities for students with disabilities are best conceptualised and provided on the basis of input from the disability unit, and from students with disabilities and other role-players, and within an institution’s teaching and learning strategy (philosophy), so that it becomes part and parcel of the university’s strategic intent and is integrated into the campus master plan.

FINDING 3.7:  
ICT provision, including the provision of LMS and wi-fi, is a crucial part of the institution’s teaching and learning strategy, and as such is best included in the campus master plan to ensure close interaction between the academic, IT and financial divisions of the university.

FINDING 3.8:  
Just under half of the HEIs use either Sakai or Moodle as their LMS platform; just over half of the universities (which includes all UoTs and nearly all HDIs) use Blackboard, which might come at an associated cost higher than the other platforms, for HEIs that can ill-afford such higher costs.

FINDING 3.9:  
Blended learning depends greatly on a well-functioning LMS that is easily accessible and utilised by staff that are well-trained in the technological and pedagogical aspects of the use of a LMS.

FINDING 3.10:  
Ubiquitous wi-fi connectivity is a requirement for the rollout of blended learning and ODL and makes individual and collaborative learning outside formal teaching venues possible. However, some HDIs, in particular, lack the financial resources to provide ubiquitous wi-fi connectivity.

FINDING 3.11:  
A space audit, conducted in-house and aiming to identify under-utilised spaces to be
repurposed as informal learning spaces, will assist in gaining an accurate picture of what learning spaces are being used for, by whom and when.

**FINDING 3.12:**
The shortage of computer facilities at some HEIs can be addressed through:
(i) The provision of expanded access to ‘faculty/department-owned’ laboratories through close collaboration; and
(ii) addressing, at sectoral level, the backlog in institutional computer facilities, particularly at HDIs, and deliberating on the desired balance between the provision of institutional computer facilities and the possession of personal devices.

**FINDING 3.13:**
Collective engagement by the HE sector with industry is one possible way to ensure that students have an internet-enabled device or a low-cost, purpose-built laptop based on student needs.

**FINDING 3.14:**
The digital divide, in terms of material and physical access and in terms of skills, strategies and usage, can be addressed through compulsory and credit-bearing courses on digital and information literacy. Each institution must make its own decisions on whether these courses are embedded in undergraduate programmes or in lone-standing courses, which parts of the institution would be best placed to offer these courses, through which mode and at what point in the students’ academic career.

**FINDING 3.15:**
Residences are an important part of the learning environment, so the more residence places there are for students, the better, and the more conducive will they be as fully functional learning spaces, if provided with the necessary technology and physical infrastructure needed.

**FOCUS AREA FOUR: ENHANCING COURSE AND PROGRAMME ENROLMENT MANAGEMENT**

**FINDING 4.1:**
An appropriate admission process for HEIs:
(i) strikes a balance between managing course and programme enrolment and ensuring equity and wider participation; and
(ii) ensures that students who are admitted, are placed in their programmes of choice following appropriate selection criteria, and supported accordingly.
**FINDING 4.2:**
A standardised NSC presupposes consideration in the HE sector of:
(i) a standardised manner in which to calculate the APS; and
(ii) ways to introduce a similar minimum APS for similar programmes at different institutions, including relevant extended curriculum programmes.

**FINDING 4.3:**
Admission, selection and placement are related, but different processes with different outcomes, although they are not treated as different at some HEIS, which can result in confusion and a lack of transparency among prospective students.

**FINDING 4.4:**
The use of the NBT in combination with the NSC has a demonstrable predictive value regarding the academic performance of students and its use can avoid the high drop-out percentage experienced by all HEIs.

**FINDING 4.4:**
Registration processes at HEIs can be significantly enhanced if:
(i) collaboration in the HE sector results in yet further improvements to online registration processes, in matters such as turn-around times and automated responses to students; and
(ii) the considerable burden placed on some institutions to manage the excessive number of applicants that far outstrip the available sectoral capacity to absorb such applicants, were to be lifted.

**FINDING 4.6:**
The impact of gateway courses on graduation rates is severe throughout the sector, therefore a detailed analysis of the root causes of the problem and the challenges in dealing with the problem, will facilitate a concerted approach to resolving this serious issue.

**FINDING 4.7:**
Academic exclusion and readmission appeal processes that unambiguous, transparent and fair, and include a recommendation to the student on how to proceed with an academic career, acknowledge the sometimes devastating impact of academic exclusion on the students and their immediate social circle.
**FINDING 4.8:**
Enrolment planning is crucial to an institution’s functioning with respect to its finances, human resources and infrastructure, and demands appropriate high-level appointments and capacity building.

**FINDING 4.9:**
Enrolment planning is optimised if:
(i) the required enrolment planning framework, relevant policies and procedures, a regularly-maintained MIS and appropriately qualified staff are in place; and
(ii) collaboration and information-sharing in the sector results in all HEIs (and not just some) ensure that enrolments are within a few percent of enrolment targets set by DHET.
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