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# ITL Introduction

## Introduction to the HEQC's Improving Teaching and Learning Resources

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Each of the seven Improving Teaching & Learning Resources can be read and used individually, although there are cross-references as some are closely related. However, it is important to read this *Introduction*, as it deals with the purpose of the Resources and how they relate to the Higher Education Quality Committee's quality assurance mandate and its quality promotion and capacity development activities.

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## FOREWORD

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The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) prioritised quality issues in teaching and learning very early on in the development of its quality assurance systems. Mandated by legislation to conduct institutional audits and programme accreditation and to promote quality and quality assurance, the HEQC initiated a project in 2002 aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

The project on teaching and learning was intended to refocus attention on one of the core functions of higher education in an environment where the restructuring of higher education had given much attention to issues such as governance, financing and the 'size and shape' of the system. The project also reflected the importance of quality-related capacity development in the work of the HEQC, especially in a context where historical disadvantage impacts on the capacities of academic staff to plan and deliver good quality programmes and on the capacities of students to benefit from them. These issues needed to be addressed and to be brought to the centre of the debate about the purposes of a new quality assurance system for South Africa. Moreover, the project fitted in with international debates and developments in higher education, which were prioritising the learning experiences of students as well as giving increased attention to the professionalisation of higher education teaching and to staff development and support.

The HEQC set up the project in a way that would involve a number of role-players. It was important to draw on teaching and learning expertise in higher education as well as maximise the impact of those involved within higher education institutions. The Resources for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning should be seen therefore as the fruit of an extensive collaboration between the HEQC, a large number of experts and practitioners and a range of public and private higher education institutions.

It is hoped that the Resources will be adapted creatively for a number of purposes and used by higher education practitioners individually and in teams in the process of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to give effect to the transformation objectives in the restructuring of higher education, especially in relation to redress and equity and to the responsiveness of higher education to national goals and challenges.

The HEQC looks forward to further cooperation with key partners in higher education in effectively developing and using the Resources. We would like to acknowledge that funding for the project and this publication was made available by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation.

Dr Mala Singh  
Executive Director  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources are the product of collaboration between the HEQC and a wide range of academics based in private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). These included several academics from other countries who assisted with the project or provided advice. The 14 regional workshops at which the draft Resources were introduced and discussed in 2003 were generously hosted by public HEIs.

## THE QUALITY PROMOTION AND CAPACITY DEVELOPMENT PRIORITIES OF THE HEQC

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The Higher Education Act (1997)<sup>1</sup> gives the HEQC of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) responsibility for the promotion of quality assurance (QA), in addition to the accreditation of higher education (HE) programmes and the audit of QA mechanisms of all HEIs. The HEQC's Founding Document (2001: 10) interprets the HEQC's quality promotion role, which is to:

**Promote quality among constituent providers in higher education in order to facilitate the development of quality awareness and quality responsiveness in public and private provision.**

The Founding Document (2001: 20) identifies two broad areas of work in recognition of the importance, in the South African context, of both promoting quality and supporting capacity development:

**Capacity Development: The development and implementation of initiatives to build and strengthen the capacity for high quality provision at institutional, learning programme and individual levels; and**

**Quality Promotion: The development of a programme of activities to institutionalise a quality culture in higher education and the commitment to continuous quality improvement.**

The HEQC established a Directorate of Quality Promotion and Capacity Development (QPCD) in order to take forward the programmes outlined above. In accordance with Education White Paper 3: A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education (1997),<sup>2</sup> the HE Act (1997) and the Founding Document (2001), the work of the QPCD directorate is based on two closely related principles:

- HEIs have the primary responsibility for quality and for developing effective quality management systems.
- In fulfilling its quality promotion mandate the HEQC will play a facilitating role by developing partnerships with HEIs and a broad range of stakeholders.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter: HE Act (1997).

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter: White Paper (1997).

As part of its legal mandate, the HEQC has developed sets of institutional audit and programme accreditation criteria, many of which drew on earlier drafts of the Resources. However, the Resources are both broader and more detailed than the criteria, and represent what a wide spectrum of HE practitioners considers to be good practice.<sup>3</sup> The Resources are thus not intended to correspond exactly with HEQC criteria,<sup>4</sup> and they do not necessarily reflect the views of the HEQC on teaching and learning policies and practices.

## THE IMPROVING TEACHING & LEARNING PROJECT

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The White Paper (1997) envisages a single, coordinated HE system with a wide range of institutional and teaching and learning contexts. Sub-sectors include universities, emerging universities of technology and comprehensive universities, and a large number of diverse private HEIs.

The ITL project was initiated in 2002 to give effect to the HEQC's prioritisation of teaching and learning in the national QA systems it is implementing from 2004.<sup>5</sup> A parallel project is promoting quality and building capacity in respect of research, and a Good Practice Guide on the Quality Management of Research (forthcoming in 2005) will be available on the CHE website. A key objective of the ITL project is to provide HEIs with resources for the improvement of teaching and learning – resources that they, as individual institutions and via regional and national networks, may reproduce and use or adapt and develop further, as appropriate.

A related objective of the ITL project is to promote the development, by HEIs, of internal systems and practices that will effect and sustain improvements of teaching and learning at an institutional level. This includes the quality management systems that are the main focus of HEQC institutional audits. At the level of programmes, the project aims to support the development of systems that will enable HEIs to meet and go beyond HEQC programme accreditation requirements.

A working group<sup>6</sup> was appointed in 2002 with members drawn from Academic Development, Curriculum Development and Staff Development units across the spectrum of South African HEIs. The working group first undertook a scoping exercise in order to define the focus of the work and its conceptual underpinnings. A Needs and Capacity Analysis<sup>7</sup> was also undertaken in a selected sample of 12 institutions. The findings identified the following as key areas for capacity development in South African public HE:

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<sup>3</sup> While the criteria are focused on achieving minimum standards, the Resources are aimed at supporting development that goes beyond the minimum.

<sup>4</sup> This is discussed more concretely below, in the section on Relationship of the Resources to the HEQC's Institutional Audit and Programme Accreditation Systems.

<sup>5</sup> The systems, which are related, are: institutional audit, programme accreditation, self-accreditation and national reviews. See the CHE website for details: [www.che.ac.za](http://www.che.ac.za).

<sup>6</sup> The members of the working group, consultative panel and reference group, as well as other contributors, are listed in the Appendix.

<sup>7</sup> D'Andrea, Gosling and Scott (2002).

- The transition from school to HE;
- Curriculum development;
- Language, numeracy and higher level cognitive development; and
- Professional development relating to teaching and learning and quality assurance.

To varying degrees the Resources address the above areas, either directly as in the case of curriculum or staff development, or less directly in the case of 'transition from school to HE', through Resource No. 4 on *Student Development & Support*. Areas such as assessment might fall within a broad definition of 'curriculum development' but are allocated a separate Resource because they require specific attention.

Once members of the working group had produced draft *Guides to Good Practice*, the project ran a consultative panel for each of the Guides. Students and senior academics and academic managers<sup>8</sup> with expertise in the focus area under consideration were invited to share their expertise and to comment on the project's work-in-progress. The rationale was to elicit feedback from the perspective of those who would need to use the Guides for internal review and for improving teaching and learning. A reference group comprising national and international experts was also asked to comment on the Guides, as were members of the HEQC Board. On the basis of the comments received, the Guides were revised and submitted to the HEQC for approval and internal discussion. Thereafter they were used as resources by the HEQC for the development of many of its criteria for institutional audit and programme accreditation. The Guides have since been edited and renamed *Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources*.

As part of its quality promotion and capacity development work, the HEQC ran 14 regional workshops late in 2003 to introduce these resources to HEIs and to obtain feedback. All the public HEIs and a number of private HEIs sent teams of up to ten people to these workshops, which included the sharing of good practice and developing teaching and learning improvement plans. Participants took the draft resources back to their institutions. On the basis of feedback from the workshops, the Resources were edited once more. Given that these Resources are provided as guides, to be adapted to local conditions and disciplinary contexts at the discretion of academics and academic managers, it is envisaged that they will continue evolving. In reproducing, adapting, using and developing these Resources further in their practice contexts, academic users will be adding value to these existing ITL Resources.

<sup>8</sup> The names of all those who contributed to the development of the Resources are included in Appendix 1.

## AN APPROACH TO QUALITY MANAGEMENT AND IMPROVEMENT

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Quality management includes arrangements for QA, quality monitoring, quality development and quality support (including sustainability). Each of these elements needs to be evaluated by HEIs in respect of their mission, in relation to inputs, processes, outputs and impact.<sup>9</sup> The position taken by the working group was that the main focus of any QA system for HE should be on continuous improvement of the quality of student learning. The HEQC has developed an approach to institutional audits and programme accreditation that recognises that in any QA system there is a complex relationship between improvement and accountability, which carries both risks and possibilities. On the one hand, both quality management systems and accountability should be developed, and linked in ways that enhance rather than undermine the capacity and freedom to make academic judgments. On the other hand, there is the need to ensure that basic systems are in place, consistently within and across HEIs, to ensure the rights of students to an acceptable level of quality learning and teaching. The HEQC has developed an integrated national QA system, with programme accreditation based on minimum standards, and institutional audits having a development focus. It should be noted, however, that both systems have strong accountability and development elements and they seek to link quality to issues of equity, redress, access, social justice and development.

Actual improvements in quality depend substantially on the linking of quality management to planning and resource allocation at all levels of an HEI. This principle is built into the HEQC's institutional audit and programme accreditation criteria. As advocated in the Accreditation Framework document, at the level of departments and programmes the findings of self-evaluations need to be sufficiently diagnostic to lead to concrete and detailed plans for improvements in teaching and learning practice. Another implication is that the implementation of improvement plans will depend in part on reflective practitioners having a sufficient understanding of learning; in other words, that HEI staff themselves will need to be involved in developing an empirical and theoretical base to inform their improvement of teaching and learning.

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<sup>9</sup> See the HEQC's institutional audit framework document and criteria documents, also available on the CHE website.

## RELATIONSHIP OF THE RESOURCES TO THE HEQC'S INSTITUTIONAL AUDITS AND PROGRAMME ACCREDITATION SYSTEMS

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The HEQC has published the criteria to be used for its external evaluations. These criteria are contained in the HEQC's institutional audit and programme accreditation documents (2004). In drawing up these criteria, the HEQC drew on earlier drafts of the Resources as one source of information, although the Resources are more detailed and discursive than the criteria documents:

- Resource No. 1, Resource No. 2 and Resource No. 5 relate closely to the HEQC's audit criteria on teaching and learning, and programme accreditation criteria on programme planning, design and management.
- Resource No. 7 relates to the audit criteria for postgraduate education.
- Aspects of all seven Resources speak to the HEQC's criteria for programme accreditation. However, an important distinction is that the Resources deal with good practices while the programme accreditation criteria are based on minimum standards.

In including Suggested Good Practice Descriptors alongside Evaluative Questions, the Resources provide suggestions for what could serve as indicators of good practice. By using the quality cycle (planning – implementing – reviewing – improving) as an underlying framework for the suggested Evaluative Questions and their indicators (Suggested Good Practice Descriptors), the Resources set up ideal models of good practice. As already emphasised, it is important not to lose sight of the *ideal* nature of these models; they are systematic representations of patterns among variables – simplifications of the 'messy realities' and 'situated practices' found on the ground.

## PURPOSES OF THE RESOURCES, AND THEIR INTENDED TARGET AUDIENCES

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One specific purpose of these Resources is that they should be used by HEIs alongside HEQC criteria when developing their internal quality management systems, including self-evaluation and review mechanisms. Several HEIs have used earlier drafts of the Resources to improve their self-evaluation systems and instruments. In other cases, academics have used the draft Resources to inform the development or redesigning of specific programmes. From the HEQC's perspective, the Resources serve to remind those who conduct institutional audits and programme evaluations of the complexities of learning and teaching issues. Their ongoing development is part of building a sense of what is current best practice in our understanding of quality.

As mentioned, the Resources aim to set out 'ideal types' or models of 'good practice' for the management and QA of teaching and learning. The models are intentionally heuristic,

illuminating and illustrative. The intention is to set up common reference or starting points for institutions to use in developing and refining their own self-evaluation instruments. A significant audience is thus senior and middle managers, programme directors (or equivalent) and expert personnel such as those who work in QA, academic development units, the library, student development, staff development and other academic services.

The Resources, while generic, are also intended to be used individually and collectively by academics, and in such cases need to be mediated creatively as appropriate to academics' contexts, specific disciplines and needs.

In partnerships with institutions, relevant professional associations<sup>10</sup> and student organisations, the HEQC has initiated a project to promote quality literacy among students and a major focus is on teaching and learning. One objective is to raise levels of awareness of quality issues among prospective students so that they can make informed decisions. Another objective is for HE students generally to become aware and engaged in terms of the quality of teaching and learning and their rights and responsibilities in this regard. Student representatives on bodies such as the Senate could use the Resources to deepen their understanding of teaching and learning issues. Course and faculty representatives could similarly use the Resources to engage more effectively and constructively in the QA and improvement of teaching and learning.

It is expected that, for merging and restructuring institutions, the Resources could be used to provide starting points for deliberation around the establishment of new policies and systems for teaching and learning and the QA thereof. In its guidelines for merging institutions, the Department of Education (DoE, 2003: 44) provides the following advice:

**The Quality Assurance unit (of a merging institution) will need to attend to the development of policy in key target areas such as teaching and learning. The implementation of good practice at the teaching–learning interface is critical to institutional quality and equity of outcomes. Merging institutions would be well advised to establish policies in the primary fields of curriculum development and review, the evaluation of teaching and courses and the assessment of student learning. These will be taken into account in the HEQC audit.**

However, these Resources are not intended to be prescriptive, nor are they comprehensive or exhaustive. Owing to the contingent, context-dependent nature of teaching and learning, the Resources cannot pretend to be directly applicable to any particular situation on the ground. They are also not intended to be applied literally or rigidly to specific practices. In short, it is hoped that the Resources will function as useful *guides*, to be contextualised and adapted to specific institutional, departmental, disciplinary and individual needs, priorities and situations.

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<sup>10</sup> One such association is the National Association of Student Development Officers (NASDEV).



## SCOPE OF THE RESOURCES

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In selecting key focus areas of the provision of teaching and learning in HE, the HEQC has attempted to cover all stages of the quality cycle plus key value-adding or transformatory aspects of provision. The following Resources, along with this *Introduction*, have been conceptualised to be used in conjunction with one another:

- Resource No. 1: *Programme Planning, Design & Management*
- Resource No. 2: *Programme & Course Review*
- Resource No. 3: *Access & Admissions*
- Resource No. 4: *Student Development & Support*
- Resource No. 5: *The Assessment of Student Learning*
- Resource No. 6: *Staff Development*
- Resource No. 7: *Postgraduate Research & Supervision.*

The attempts of the working group to articulate what might be considered 'good practice' in teaching and learning were limited in a number of ways. First, the expert group was aware that such attempts have been carried out from within the members' own limited knowledge, perspectives, contexts, interests and values. The interests and values on which assumptions about good practice are based are likely to be contested. Second, 'good practice' is contingent, context-dependent and defies generic description. If these Resources are to be useful at all, those who use them must feel free to reinterpret and re-describe them and make them their own. The Resources are not discipline-specific, and it is particularly important that they be owned, mediated and adapted by subject specialists.

It is noteworthy that there is no Resource on Teaching Approaches, Methods and Delivery. After some debate, the working group decided that, given that this area is particularly context- and discipline-dependent, it would be inappropriate to attempt a generic typification of 'good teaching practice' that is applicable to all contexts. Rather, the working group decided to explain its view of the nature of teaching and learning (see Discussion, and Suggested Reading, below), and also included a number of principles for 'good teaching practice' in the Resources, where appropriate. The view of the group is that these principles should be interpreted and applied appropriately by professional educators to different disciplinary and institutional contexts.

Other omissions from the Resources include more specialised aspects of educational provision, such as distance education, service learning, e-learning, experiential learning, short course provision, library services and the recognition of prior learning (RPL). There already exist national quality-related initiatives in respect of several of these areas, and the HEQC's approach is to encourage relevant organisations and specialists to debate and disseminate good practice. The HEQC is in the process of developing further materials in some of these areas and, in accordance with its usual practice, will involve practitioners and relevant bodies in this work.

## FORMAT OF THE RESOURCES

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Each of the ITL Resources is structured as follows:

- The **FOCUS AREA** describes the scope of the Resource, indicates the levels at which it applies (institutional, programme or course/ module) and the moments of the quality cycle it addresses (planning, implementing, monitoring or improving). Given that the boundaries between the focus areas are not always clear-cut, links with other, closely-related, Resources are also pointed out.
- The **RATIONALE** develops an argument, with reference to the current policy context, as to why a particular area of learning and teaching is significant and why it should receive attention in respect of self-evaluation and other quality assurance and improvement processes.
- The **DISCUSSION** section was written largely by Kathy Luckett, who coordinated the working group, and it reflects the debates, theories and current contextual issues that emerged in their discussions. It should be noted that the Discussion does not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC. The intention of this section is to deepen thinking about improving teaching and learning by encouraging debate and discussion.
- The **EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS** are intended to provide prompts or lines of enquiry into the essential elements of the practice under consideration.
- Each Evaluative Question is 'answered' by statements or **SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS**. These attempt to describe or indicate, in a generic and idealised manner, 'good practice' as it is widely understood in the current HE context.
- The **SUGGESTED SOURCES OF DATA FOR SELF-EVALUATION & REVIEW**<sup>11</sup> provide suggestions for where documented evidence might be found or gathered in order to answer the Evaluative Questions in an evaluation. As far as possible, use should be made of information that HEIs already gather for other purposes. It should be noted that the data sources suggested are limited to documented information. Obviously, the process of an internal review or external evaluation will generate other types of evidence from meetings, interviews, observations, and so on, which will serve to triangulate with the evidence documented in the review reports that HEIs generate to meet internal and external requirements.
- **ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS** are listed.
- **A GLOSSARY OF TERMS** is provided.
- **REFERENCES & SUGGESTED READING LISTS** are provided. Suggestions for further reading are indicative and are largely confined to accessible literature that might be appropriate for staff development.

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<sup>11</sup> Evidence tables for the institutional audit and programme accreditation criteria are under development and will be published by the HEQC in the near future.

## DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. **Kathy Luckett**, the coordinator of the working group, was asked to write this section so as to reflect on issues discussed by the working group in the course of developing the first draft of the Resources.

The views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

This discussion is intended to introduce and problematise three issues that challenged the ITL project's working group in the process of developing the Resources. First the working group discussed the nature of teaching and learning in HE. Secondly it looked at some of the challenges related to implementing change in HE, and thirdly it discussed how outcomes-based education (OBE) might be applied to HE, given that OBE is a significant element in the South African National Qualifications Framework (NQF).

### THE NATURE OF TEACHING AND LEARNING IN HIGHER EDUCATION AND PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING GOOD TEACHING PRACTICE

Historically, the primary function of universities has developed from being institutions for teaching (in the Middle Ages), to being institutions for research (post-Humboldt), to currently being institutions for learning (which includes both teaching and research). The idea that HEIs should be places of learning is not new. But what is increasingly of concern in the 'knowledge society' is the question of what *kind* of learning is taking place. In keeping with a conceptualisation of quality as transformation, the ITL working group suggests that one of the central concerns of HEIs in South Africa should be the enhancement of 'transformative learning'. The broader implications of this are discussed below.

Given that teaching is not an end in itself, but exists to bring about learning, it is not surprising that academics tend to teach (implicitly or explicitly) according to how they think learning happens. Traditional approaches to teaching in HE have assumed that the presentation of content (usually via lectures) is sufficient for learning to occur. But increasingly this assumption is being questioned. In his well-known book, *Learning to Teach in Higher Education*, Ramsden reflects on the relationship between teaching and learning:

**The best way to improve teaching is to inquire into the effects of one's teaching on student learning ... The nature of teaching is context-related, uncertain and always improvable. Effective teaching refuses to take its effect on students for granted. It sees the relation between teaching and learning as problematic, uncertain and relative. Good teaching is open to change; it involves constantly trying to find out what the effects of instruction are on learning, and modifying that instruction in the light of evidence collected. (1992: 102)**

However, teaching is more than a craft. It is also a profession. This means that it should be knowledge or theory-based:

**The professional authority of the academic-as-scholar rests on a body of knowledge. The professional authority of the academic-as-teacher should rest on a body of didactic knowledge. This comprises knowledge of how the subject he/she professes is best learned and taught. (Ramsden, 1992: 9)**

There now exists an extensive body of knowledge not only on theories of learning and cognition but also on learning in HE, and specifically on the teaching and learning of particular disciplines in HE. These theories offer particular definitions and explanations of learning and, in particular, transformative learning. According to Bowden and Marton:

**The most important thing we can do in order to develop, raise or assure the quality of the learning produced in higher education is to reveal the kind of learning we should bring about, the ways of seeing we think it is important for students to develop. (1998: 16)**

Most theories that understand learning to be transformative are based on constructivist notions of cognitive development. In terms of such notions, students are understood to build and change their existing meaning and knowledge structures in order to assimilate or accommodate new knowledge. The emphasis is on the student actively constructing knowledge for him/herself through learning activities or 'performances of understanding' and through social interaction or mediation by the lecturer. Some examples of definitions of learning within this school of thought are quoted below:

**Learning is a qualitative change in a person's view of reality; it involves conceptual change on the part of the learner. (Ramsden, 1992)**

**Learning is the internalisation and transformation of social tools of thought which are communicated to the learner through social interaction and instructional conversation. (Tharp and Gallimore, 1988)**

**Learning is the reconstruction of elements of one's meaning production system which are collective and socially and culturally constructed. This also involves acquiring usage of unfamiliar discourse. (Northedge, 1994).**

Many influential adult educationists understand learning to be transformative. For example, while Mezirow's theory of 'perspective transformation' (in Merriam, 1993) suggests that learning occurs as a result of 'critical reflection' on prior assumptions, Freire's critical pedagogy uses 'conscientisation' (in Merriam, 1993) to change the way adult learners see the world and act on it. 'Phenomenography' (see Entwistle, 1988) has contributed an additional perspective on learning in HE, namely, that how students perceive particular learning task demands largely determines whether their approach to learning will be 'deep', 'strategic' or 'surface'. It is only the deep approach to learning that results in transformative learning, for it is characterised by a focus on underlying meaning, the use of a well-structured knowledge base, relating new knowledge to old knowledge, and working conceptually and relationally.

Theories of learning such as these suggest that 'good teaching practice' can facilitate 'deep' approaches to learning and enable students to participate in actively building and transforming their cognitive and knowledge structures. The following principles of 'good

teaching practice' are suggested as a means to this end:

- Making clear to students the purposes and intended outcomes of the learning task;
- Achieving 'curriculum alignment' – i.e. the learning outcomes, selection of content, and teaching and assessment methods all support one another (are coherent and aligned);
- Modelling the epistemic principles and discursive conventions of the discipline and making explicit 'the rules of the game';
- Facilitating the development of students' cognitive structures by 'lending' them one's own cognitive structure, conceptual anchors and strategies, to assist their thinking and acting;
- Developing an appropriate motivational context so that the learning is meaningful to students;
- Creating powerful learning environments that focus on student activity, interaction, variation in task demands and the application of knowledge to real world problems in order to facilitate the building of cognitive structures;
- Providing opportunities for students to test, extend, reflect on and revise their ideas through performances of understanding;
- Questioning to prompt students to undertake cognitive operations that they would not produce unassisted;
- Getting students to make connections with previous knowledge and maximising their awareness of their own knowledge construction;
- Assisting students to build meta-cognitive knowledge about their own thinking processes, approaches to learning and learning needs; and
- Changing students' ways of seeing and thinking about the world.

The constructivist view of teaching for transformative (deep) learning is summed up by Bradbury:

**The task for mediation is, therefore, to represent tasks to students in such a way that their epistemic character, which is usually implicit or covert, is heightened or made salient. ... In terms of this approach the locus of the problem which must be overcome, is neither the learner nor the teacher; rather our attention should be focused on innovation within the curriculum and the mediated interaction which occurs between learner and task. The teaching-learning process needs to be constructed in such a way as to modify and change, not just the content of what the learner knows, but rather, to create conditions for restructuring and reorganizing information that will produce a new way of cognizing reality. (Bradbury, 2000: 72)**

It is interesting to note that several of the principles for 'good teaching practice' that are listed above have been confirmed by empirical studies based on student opinion data. Such principles include:

- Enthusiasm for one's subject and the ability to motivate students to learn;
- Respect for students and sensitivity to their levels of understanding;

- Appropriate expectations and work-loads for students;
- Competence in one's field;
- Sound preparation, clarity of course requirements and good organisation of the material;
- Clarity of explanation and the ability to support discussion;
- Encouragement of independent thought in students; and
- Fair assessment procedures and constructive feedback. (Webbstock, 1999)

However, excellent teachers have never operated in isolation. Good teaching practice needs to be developed and supported by an institutional environment and culture that are conducive to learning. Discussed below is how managers might work to create the conditions for transformative learning through the formulation and implementation of institutional policy.

## POLICY-MAKING AND THE CHALLENGE OF IMPLEMENTING CHANGE IN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

At this stage of the discussion, it might be useful to summarise various approaches with regard to management models and the assumptions they make about policy-making and implementation.

**Traditional approaches** to policy-making have assumed a rational-purposive, stagist model, in which policy gets formulated, implemented and evaluated. This somewhat naïve approach views policy-making as a top-down intervention, based on causal social laws and with predictable consequences that can be empirically verified. It can be argued that the assumption that policy is unproblematically implemented is based on an invalid theory of change. For example, such a theory assumes, on the part of the implementers, adequate time and resources, complete acceptance, perfect communication and perfect obedience. This traditional approach is mirrored in a top-down management style that assumes that organisational policy and planning stand in a deterministic relation to implementation. Such 'scientific management' tends to focus on efficiency, and assumes that the conditions of implementation are fixed and stable within a closed system.

More recent **interpretive approaches** to policy-making would suggest that policy reforms are akin to 'reasoned arguments' or 'social transactions' (Parsons, 1995). Policy-making is understood to be a process of interaction between goals, intentions, contexts and local interests and perceptions. It is viewed as an evolutionary process that should include democratic deliberation as policy gets re-made in the process of implementation. Interpretive approaches to management tend to view organisations as cultures, socially constructed and maintained by everyday practices, rituals and symbols. Such approaches emphasise the importance of values, images and meaning-making in the change process and argue that organisational change requires changes in organisational culture, identity and discourse.

By contrast, **critical approaches** to policy-making and management emphasise the conflicts and power struggles involved in change processes. They suggest that wherever power is exercised there is resistance. One critical approach is **neo-Marxism**, which understands policy as constructing social reality to suit the interests of the dominant group or class; and thus such approaches question the claim that policy, law or governments can guarantee freedom, democracy or quality for all.

In approaches to policy-making that could be characterised as **post-modernist**, there is a denial of the idea that rationality can be disinterested – and policy discourses get deconstructed to prove this.

As mentioned earlier, a key challenge facing leaders of HEIs is how to go about implementing policy that will create the conditions for transformative learning to occur. One means of attempting to do this is the development and implementation of institutional 'Teaching and Learning Strategies'. This practice is common in Holland, the United States of America (USA), Australia and the United Kingdom (UK) and is government-funded in the last two countries. The idea of a Teaching and Learning Strategy is also currently being implemented in several South African HEIs.

A Teaching and Learning Strategy is essentially a set of specific goals, priorities and targets set at institutional level within a specified time frame for the management and improvement of teaching and learning. It includes setting out responsibilities, resources and review and evaluation mechanisms. It is usually aligned to the institutional mission, strategic plans and quality management system.

In the UK the format for Learning and Teaching Strategies funded by the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) includes the following categories:

- Context (what already exists and what needs changing);
- Process of creation (how 'buy-in' by academics was achieved);
- Goals;
- Targets;
- Strategies to address institutional culture;
- Curriculum development;
- Learning–teaching–assessment practice;
- Quality assurance;
- Quality enhancement;
- Infrastructural changes;
- Implementation; and
- Monitoring and evaluation.

However, when it comes to implementation, it is widely agreed that HEIs are some of the most complex organisations in existence (Clarke, 1983; Kells, 1999; Becher, 1999). HEIs are key organisations of civil society and, in the West, have survived and resisted the



incursions of both church and state over centuries. While the very idea of the university presupposes debate, change and the discovery of new ways of knowing and doing, the systems, structures and cultures of HEIs are notorious for being resistant to change. According to Kells (1999), the reasons for this include:

- HEIs serve multiple stakeholders and therefore have multiple purposes and goals, which are usually poorly stated and attract only minimal or nominal support from academics. This is because there is an inbuilt tension for academics between loyalty to their disciplines or fields of study, and loyalty to their institutions.
- As 'loosely coupled systems', 'networks of networks' or 'constellations of communities of practice', HEIs are characterised by the decentralisation of power and an extensive and complicated delegation of authority, particularly with respect to the core functions of teaching and research.
- The nature of governance in HEIs is a messy mixture of collegial, managerial, bureaucratic and political modes and, as a consequence, decision-making procedures are often fluid, complex and inconclusive. Governance is also often resisted by academics in their pursuit of disciplinary, departmental or individualistic goals.
- The management of HEIs is often hindered by the absence of timely and useful information about the organisation, and limited mechanisms to gather such information.
- It is difficult to measure the achievement of goals in HE, particularly with respect to teaching and learning, because there are not only numerous variables that cannot be isolated but also few, if any, direct cause and effect relationships.
- Academics are socialised to be single-minded, critical and individualistic. They are typically distrustful of authority and resistant to (perceived) infringements of their academic freedom. (Adapted from Kells, 1999: 301-302)

The characterisation of HEIs above would suggest that rational-purposive, top-down management models (which seem to be assumed in much of the discussion on Teaching and Learning Strategies) are generally counter to HE cultures and so are unlikely to be successfully implemented. Likewise, implementation processes are seldom linear or sequential, making it difficult to pinpoint the causes of problems. According to Trowler and Knight (2002), the conceptualisation of institutional change in HEIs is usually carried out simplistically (following the traditional approach outlined earlier) and is therefore often based on wrong assumptions about the nature of the organisations and the process of change. For example, it is often assumed that HEIs are culturally homogeneous and well-coordinated organisations; it is also then commonly assumed that strong leadership, tough, top-down management and the effective use of control and measurement techniques will effect change. But in the rather messier, imperfect and dynamic context of HEIs as characterised above, such approaches to change management would clearly be inappropriate.

Analysing the weaknesses of institutional Teaching and Learning Strategies in HEIs in the UK, Gibbs (2001) makes the following observations:

- Some strategies have remained policies on paper and are unlikely to change everyday teaching practices because of lack of attention to change mechanisms and processes.
- Initially many HEIs focused on simply doing 'more with less' but retained traditional teaching and learning approaches.



- Other HEIs realised the need to change teaching and learning approaches, but focused on changing the practices of individual lecturers. Such an approach has failed to develop critical mass and to effect change to institutional teaching and learning conditions and cultures, and has thus had minimal impact.
- Institutional factors that constrain teaching innovations on the ground and that typically are not addressed include timetabling; the allocation of teaching time for contact hours but not for curriculum development; assessment regulations and practices; the layout and design of classrooms; and lack of support and incentives for innovators (e.g. lack of funding for research into teaching).
- Many Teaching and Learning Strategies are not based on explicit theories of learning.
- Many Teaching and Learning Strategies fail to link directly into the 'quality gaps' identified in evaluation findings.

By contrast, following Kells (1999) and Trowler and Knight (2003), the following interpretive approaches to implementing change strategies in HEIs are put forward here. Given that power in HEIs is distributed and that change gets reinterpreted and socially constituted in locally contingent ways in particular 'communities of practice', it is recommended that the focus for strategies for change be the *academic department or programme team*. Managers should expect diverse results from change processes because those who carry out the change need to develop psychological ownership of the process – usually through collective exploration, negotiation and bargaining. This means that successful change strategies need to be closely aligned to the norms and values of those who must implement them. Change strategies need to be supported by leadership, a sustainable resource base and good infrastructure. Change strategies also require adequate levels of internal motivation and leaders who attend to people's feelings as well as using rational argument to persuade them to change.

According to Kells, the quality of support for the implementation process and the degree of discretion granted to those implementing change on the ground appear to have a marked effect on the outcome. He warns that,

**Unless the institution is ready, unless a significant number of formal and informal leaders are interested in using the proposed scheme to accomplish high priority items on their agendas, one should not proceed with the intervention. Unless the key working professionals are comfortable with the method because they have helped to design its local implementation, [...] and unless one takes the time to accomplish these things in ways attuned to local needs and rhythms, very little will happen, or that which is introduced will fail in such complex institutions. (1999: 305)**

These ITL Resources could be used to stimulate debate and discussion around the formulation of Teaching and Learning Strategies. Such strategies can serve to give authorisation, resources and coordination to efforts to improve teaching and learning across HEIs. The working group recommends the development of institutional Teaching and Learning Strategies, but with certain provisos. International experience suggests that if these policies are to become properly institutionalised, they need to be carefully planned, resourced and supported, integrally linked to the institution's mission and quality management system and, most importantly, collectively interpreted, developed and owned at departmental and programme level. An analysis of the departmental culture and context

should be undertaken, and the real concerns of academics taken into account. Teaching and Learning Strategies should also be underpinned by valid theories of learning. Furthermore, given the current overwhelming demands of the state's restructuring requirements for South African HEIs, it is important that Teaching and Learning Strategies prioritise a few do-able goals within realisable time frames.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE DEBATE AROUND THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK AND OUTCOMES-BASED EDUCATION

The use of OBE as a method of curriculum design and specification and its place in the QA of teaching and learning in HE is debated internationally, but it has a particular relevance to South Africa given the nature of the NQF.

The NQF was established in 1995 in order to provide South Africa with a coherent qualification system that would underpin transformation by allowing effective progression and articulation and the integration of education and training, as well as by supporting principles such as lifelong learning and the acquisition of critical generic skills and competences. While there was broad support for these objectives from all sectors of South African society, it became evident that the NQF would have to take account of the particular features of the general education and training and further education and training (FET) bands on one hand, and those of the HE band on the other. Thus when HEIs submitted their qualifications in an outcomes-based format to SAQA for interim registration in 2000, they could register whole qualifications and qualifications based on unit standards, as well as unit standards as originally conceptualised. This allowed HEIs to deal with meaningful units of curriculum and it avoided the inordinate fragmentation and atomisation of knowledge and the need to register countless unit standards on the NQF. Academics had mixed reactions to the NQF and the related national standards-setting system. While there were perceived and actual benefits, such as more attention being focused on programme design and outcomes, academics also encountered perceived and actual difficulties, ranging from the organisational to the conceptual.

The HEQC is the accredited 'umbrella' Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) for HE, responsible to SAQA for QA for the entire higher education and training (HET) band and it is committed to working within national policy frameworks, including the NQF.

In 2001 the CHE produced *A New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications Discussion Document*<sup>12</sup> (released by the Department of Education in 2002), which was an attempt to make the SAQA–NQF system more appropriate to the needs of HE. In doing so, the NAP proposed an articulation column between general formative qualifications and career-focused qualifications, in order to provide a 'catch-up' space in the curriculum for students moving across the framework and for those who do not meet formal entry requirements. The NAP also proposed a 'nested approach' to standards-setting. The 'design-down' approach was adopted; namely, that each layer of the standards-setting 'Russian doll' would inform the standard nested within. What this was intended to achieve

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<sup>12</sup> Hereafter: the NAP (2002).

was that national standards – such as level descriptors, qualification types and the generic qualification standards registered on the NQF – would inform the design of a set of nested qualifications, which would therefore not need to be registered individually on the NQF.

In 2001 the Departments of Education and Labour set up a study team to review the implementation of the NQF. In its report, the study team recommended a reconfiguration of SAQA's roles and functions, with additional standards-setting responsibilities for the CHE. The study team also emphasised the need to build relationships of trust between the different institutions of education and training in South Africa. In 2003, in response to the study team's report, the Departments of Education and Labour produced further proposals for discussion, in a consultative document entitled *An Interdependent National Qualifications Framework System*, which proposed a third qualifications ladder for trade, occupational and professional qualifications.

However in July 2004, the DoE put out the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework*,<sup>13</sup> which returned to the original single ladder NQF. Much of the earlier NAP document has been retained, such as the 'nested' approach to qualifications and generic level descriptors, but the proposal to have separate general and formative career-focused qualifications with an articulation route between them has been dropped. Although at the time of publishing these resources the HEQF had not yet been finalised, it nevertheless reflects the current position of the DoE. The draft policy

**[...] provides the basis for integrating all higher education qualifications into the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and its structures for standards generation and quality assurance. It improves the coherence of the higher education system and facilitates the articulation of qualifications, thereby enhancing the flexibility of the system and enabling students to move more efficiently over time from one programme to another as they pursue their academic or professional careers.**

**The new qualifications framework establishes common parameters and criteria for qualifications design and facilitates the comparability of qualifications across the system. Within such common parameters programme diversity and innovation are encouraged. Higher education institutions will have ample scope to design educational offerings to realise their different visions, missions and plans and to meet the varying needs of the clients and communities they serve.**

The development of the NQF has stimulated debate around a number of curriculum and teaching and learning issues. Some of these issues are outlined below, together with references to critiques offered by some academics, as an indication of the nature of the debate.

## 1. The Integration of Education and Training

One of the goals of the South African NQF is to integrate education and training. An assumption made by some advocates of this idea (often using an industrial training model) is that different forms of learning are interchangeable and transferable and that their equivalences can be measured and calibrated on a qualifications framework. Some educationists and policy analysts from the HE sector (Ensor, in Ensor and Ogude,

<sup>13</sup> *Higher Education Qualifications Framework: Draft for Discussion*, Ministry of Education (2004). Hereafter: HEQF.

2001; Morrow 2001; Shalem, Allais and Steinberg, forthcoming) have objected that this assumption is incorrect, because different forms of knowledge are based on different epistemologies and knowledge acquisition is context-dependent. Furthermore, Ensor (in Ensor and Ogude, 2001) points out that education and training are based on different modes of social organisation, which cannot be regarded as equivalent. Distinguishing between education and training, Ensor argues that educational institutions are set aside to educate; traditionally they were considered to be a 'public good' and education was considered intrinsically worthwhile. Education is provided by expert educators who deal with hierarchical structures of knowledge. On the other hand, training takes an instrumental view of knowledge (it is always for something else), and knowledge in training has a flat, segmented structure, which is suited to the unit standards method of packaging and specifying the curriculum (see below).

The above critique points to the need to deepen our understanding of the different social logics of education and training and of the relationship between them, especially when conceptualising their integration at the level of HE.

## 2. Separation of Educational Functions

As indicated above, the NQF system sets up separate systems for the following tasks:

1. Curriculum design (standards-setting);
2. Educational provision or delivery; and
3. Curriculum evaluation (QA).

It is only for the second function that responsibility is delegated to 'providers' or HEIs, while responsibility for the conceptual work involved in the first and third functions is delegated to groups of representative stakeholders, centrally appointed: National Standards Bodies (NSBs) and Standards Generating Bodies (SGBs) for standards-setting, and ETQAs for QA.

Some academics have criticised simplistic statements of learning outcomes, particularly at HE level, because learning is specified in a decontextualised form. The critique is that this ignores the social and institutional nature of learning and the role of human agency in learning, which is always socially and culturally mediated. The latter understandings of learning imply that no amount of detailed specification of statements of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and so on will enable 'outsiders' to fully understand the intentions or effects of learning (Shalem, Allais and Steinberg, forthcoming). That is to say, it is only 'insiders' – disciplinary or professional experts – who can provide the content and context required to make statements of learning outcomes and assessment criteria meaningful. And this would suggest that, at the level of complexity demanded by HE and professional practice, primary responsibility for the design and evaluation of curricula should remain in the hands of those who teach – members of disciplinary and professional communities of practice that share a common epistemic culture, norms and discourse.

However, the problem remains of the need for the HE sector to try, albeit within the limitations of language and inter-subjectivities, to describe its curricula to external stakeholders.

### 3. Unit Standards and Outcomes-based Approaches

In recent decades, the university curriculum has been widely criticised for being constructed around the nature of the disciplines and for its isolation from and irrelevance to the world of work. In the quest for greater transparency and accountability in education, HEIs have been required to make explicit the knowledge and skills that they intend students to develop. In attempting to fulfil this requirement, HEIs have translated competence-based approaches from training to education. The competence-based approach is derived from the task analysis of an occupation – an analysis that leads to the explicit and precise description of observable workplace performances (performance standards). Learning outcomes are then derived from these workplace performances, as in turn are assessment criteria, range statements and so on. In SAQA's NQF system, these specifications were to be registered on the NQF as unit standards. As mentioned above, in 2000 SAQA made a concession to HE to register 'whole qualifications' – as opposed to unit standards – on the NQF. However, the SAQA system was originally designed using unit standards as its basic building blocks, and this methodology of curriculum design had an influence on the HE sector.

The assumptions underlying the unit standard methodology are that knowledge can be broken up into small, discrete units described primarily by learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Where, by whom and how these units get taught and learnt is irrelevant to the quality of learning. Instead, national systems of standards-setting and QA linked to assessment and based on the outcomes-based method are established to ensure the consistency and reliability of quality across the system (Ensor, in Ensor and Ogude, 2001). In such an approach to curriculum design the learning outcomes stand in a privileged relation to other elements of the curriculum and are supposed to determine its content, teaching methods and assessment. This idea is linked to the 'design-down method', whereby the final, exit-level outcomes of a programme or qualification are meant to determine the learning outcomes of smaller units of learning (unit standards or modules) that a student undertakes in order to get there. This logic is built into the 'nested approach' to qualifications design, whereby the more generic standards (e.g. level descriptors) are supposed to determine the more specific standards nested within them (e.g. qualification types and then generic qualification standards), which in turn stand in a prescriptive relation to specific programme and module designs.

Critiques from the HE sector of this methodology, especially in its simplistic 'strong' form, have pointed out that it is generally incompatible with the discrete and hierarchically structured nature of disciplinary knowledge and, to a lesser extent, with the disciplinary clusters that are found in professional fields of knowledge. In a collection of unit standards, learning is assumed to be additive, the parts equalling the whole. In HE, however – which is supposed to prepare students for an unknown rather than a known future – learning outcomes are often experienced as over-prescriptive and cumbersome, leaving little space in the curriculum for innovation, creativity and excellence. Furthermore, outcomes-based approaches have been criticised for marginalising both discipline content and the process of learning. Shalem, Allais and Steinberg (forthcoming) insist that, in considering and judging the quality of learning, all of the following need to be taken into account: the content of the curriculum; its conceptual frameworks; its order and logic of acquisition; and the context and process of learning. Other critics have noted that unit standards tend

to describe objectified, decontextualised behaviours or performances that oversimplify the nature of practice (Morrow, 2001). Unit standards or statements of learning outcomes cannot account for the conceptual and theoretical frameworks (powerful ways of seeing) offered by the disciplines and professions, and which are critical for transformative learning to take place. Shalem, Allais and Steinberg (2004) also argue that learning requires 'cognitive distancing' from the immediacy of practice, which allows the student to locate an issue within a conceptual web and knowledge base and to see it in new or different ways.

A final critique of the outcomes-based method is its naïve view of language linked to an empiricist epistemology (Morrow, 2001). In other words, this method assumes that knowledge is simply 'out there' – transparently available for all to observe and describe objectively and precisely, through language that corresponds directly and unproblematically to reality. Such a 'correspondence' view of language underpins the assumption that any knowledge and practice can be sufficiently described in language (the unit standard) for any stakeholder to understand, whether or not s/he belongs to the community of practice concerned. However, a more sophisticated understanding of language would suggest that reality is always mediated and interpreted by language; that is, language is discursive and is linked to particular ways of seeing and talking about the world.

In conclusion, it must be pointed out that 'strong' forms of outcomes-based approaches (including the use of a unit standards format) may have led to an improvement in programme design at FET level, particularly in respect of vocational education. The impact on HE has been more uneven and has been subject to various critiques, which indicate why it is important to use the unit standards format only where appropriate. In general, 'weak' forms of outcome statements may be more appropriate in HE, particularly above NQF level 5. Whatever critiques emerge of inappropriate forms of OBE, there are good reasons as to why curriculum and programme developers need to attempt to make their aims and objectives clear to students, staff and the public. These reasons encompass issues of accountability, the efficient use of resources, social relevance and learning and teaching effectiveness.

#### 4. Generic Skills

One of the underlying principles of the NQF is the promotion of generic skills across the curriculum offered at all levels of education. Thus every qualification is required to include the achievement of 'critical cross-field outcomes' in its design. The underlying principles are that this will develop and empower South Africans to be critical citizens, engage in lifelong learning and respond flexibly to a rapidly changing society and economy. While these principles enjoy broad support, as in the case of OBE, a number of critiques have problematised their application, particularly in respect of HE.

One critique is linked to arguments against the instrumental view that links education, including HE, directly to the employment market and specific jobs. The argument is



that the simplistic promotion of general, transferable skills cannot broaden the notion of education, as is claimed. What is being critiqued is the decontextualised depiction of such skills as problem-solving, communication, the ability to learn and work in teams and so on, and the assumption that acquiring these generic skills will allow graduates to flexibly adapt to novel situations. The empirical basis of the critique is that much educational research disputes the existence of generic, transferable skills (Ashworth and Saxton, 1990; Bowden and Marton, 1998). This suggests that skills are necessarily embedded in content and are developed primarily through experience of the professional field to which they are meant to relate. Skills are therefore not generic, because problem-solving means different things in different contexts, and they are transferred only with difficulty, even by experienced students. The importance of the acquisition of such skills is not questioned, but the critique implies that the complexity and contextualisation of the process should be taken into account particularly in respect of discipline-based professional knowledge at HE levels.

## Conclusion: An Interpretive Approach to Outcomes-based Education

The HEQC, and all institutions and academics, work within national frameworks, such as the NQF, and these frameworks were broadly endorsed by wide sections of our society after lengthy consultations. The paradigm that appeared to be adopted by most members of the working group is that effective implementation of these frameworks in the HE sector requires an interpretive<sup>14</sup> as opposed to technical<sup>15</sup> approach. With respect to interpreting the NQF and OBE, the discussions of the working group were informed by their notion of principles underlying good practice in learning and teaching in general, and by their particular application to HE. The following captures the main points of the discussion.

1. It is important that the detail of what happens within a programme is controlled by those who teach it. Furthermore, curriculum knowledge and skills should not be understood as self-evident and given. Academics need to be assured of the authority, discursive space and discretion to deliberate in programme teams or with external peers on the nature of the curriculum and its effects on student learning. At programme level, academics – as disciplinary experts and professional educators – should continue to take responsibility for curriculum design and development; this includes selecting content, setting learning outcomes, and determining teaching–learning methods and methods of assessment. Academics should also take primary responsibility for the evaluation of the curriculum through self-evaluation. As suggested above, external evaluation should be used to validate self-evaluation and expert peers should be relied upon in this process.
2. Curriculum knowledge should be underpinned by social institutions, epistemic cultures and social networks of expert practice. Traditionally these have been located in the disciplines and professions, and different disciplines and fields have different cultures, norms and epistemic assumptions. These differences should be taken into account when designing QA systems.

<sup>14</sup> The interpretive paradigm is informed by Habermas's practical or hermeneutic knowledge constitutive interest, which is governed by communicative rationality (see Grundy, 1987).

<sup>15</sup> The technical paradigm is informed by Habermas's technical knowledge constitutive interest, which is governed by instrumental rationality.

3. Standards-setting and QA in HE, and the evaluation of teaching and learning in particular, should take into account the knowledge base and conceptual framing that a programme offers its students. Again this means relying on the opinions of expert peers, who are members of the community of practice under consideration, when making judgments about quality.
4. Learning outcomes should be derived from the knowledge base of the curriculum and the demands of the discipline as well as from the needs of the profession or career. They should be understood as useful planning tools to guide students and assessment procedures. However, learning outcomes should not stand in a prescriptive or deterministic relation to other elements of the curriculum. They should be used only to guide and shape pedagogy, teaching-learning activities and assessment. Assessment, in particular, requires an interpretive approach, in which professional judgment is used to make context-dependent decisions about the quality of learning achieved. In a properly aligned curriculum, all its elements, learning outcomes, content, pedagogy and assessment are mutually supportive, providing students with an optimal learning environment.
5. It follows that national standards such as level descriptors, qualification types and generic qualification standards registered on the NQF should also be used descriptively rather than prescriptively – for both curriculum design and QA; they should be used to guide and advise curriculum development and evaluation at programme level. National standards should not be used to prescribe the curriculum or to determine accreditation judgments. The system should allow space for the latter decisions to be made on the basis of context-dependent, professional judgment.
6. It should not be expected that stand-alone, generic skills be taught in the HE curriculum. Rather, the achievement of academic and professional skills should be explicitly built into the curriculum and taken into account in assessment.
7. A high quality programme should provide students with a solid knowledge base, with opportunities for conceptual development and transformation and the ability to apply this knowledge appropriately in real world contexts. The emphasis on either the knowledge base or the application to professional contexts will depend on the nature of the programme but, in either case, students should be forced to go beyond surface, rote learning of content and understand the relations between content and concepts and between content and context.

The position advocated here – of understanding curriculum from within an interpretive paradigm – has implications for how users should read and understand the set of ITL Resources. It must be reiterated that the Resources are provided as guides for self-evaluation practice, and are to be adapted to local conditions and disciplinary contexts at the discretion of academics and academic managers. The Resources are intended to be used descriptively and not prescriptively. In Resource No. 2 on *Programme & Course Review* academic and programme teams are encouraged to develop their own criteria for self-evaluation, using these and any other resources available to them. In this way self-evaluation can produce useful knowledge for reflection and improvement and contribute to curriculum innovation and creativity. The need for reflection and deliberation by those who teach should be recognised and encouraged by institutional managers as well as by the HEQC and other ETQAs in exercising their external quality assurance mandates.



## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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CHE	Council on Higher Education
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
DIT	Durban Institute of Technology
DoE	Department of Education
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
FET	Further Education and Training
HE	Higher Education
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HESDI	Higher Education Staff Development Initiative
HET	Higher Education and Training
ITL	Improving Teaching & Learning
MEDUNSA	Medical University of South Africa
NAP	New Academic Policy
NASDEV	National Association of Student Development Officers
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSB	National Standards Body
OBE	Outcomes-based Education
QA	Quality Assurance
QPCD	Quality Promotion and Capacity Development
RAU	Rand Afrikaans University
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAUVCA	South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association
SGB	Standards Generating Body
TSA	Technikon South Africa

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## APPENDIX: CONTRIBUTORS TO THE PROJECT

In 2002 the first phase of the ITL project was led by Ms Sheila Tyeku, then HEQC Director of Quality Promotion and Capacity Development (QPCD) and managed by Ms Kathy Luckett, of the then University of Natal (now University of KwaZulu-Natal).<sup>16</sup> Ms Nikki Groenewald of the HEQC provided organisational and administrative back-up. The second phase of the project was led by Dr John Carneson, then Acting Director of QPCD.

The HEQC would like to thank all those from the academic community who contributed to the development of the Resources, as members of the working group, the consultative panels and the reference group:

Working Group Members	Institution
Dr C. Boughy	Rhodes University
Dr A. Erasmus	Technikon Northern Gauteng
Dr H. Hay	University of the Free State
Ms K. Luckett	University of Natal
Ms M. Madiba	Technikon Northern Gauteng
Mr K. Masha	University of the North
Mr R. Moore	University of Cape Town
Ms E. Sayigh	Rhodes University
Prof. I. Scott	University of Cape Town
Dr N. Tisani	Cape Technikon
Ms J. Vorster	Rhodes University

Consultative Panel Members	Institution
Prof. T. Auf-der-Heyde	Witwatersrand Technikon
Prof. N. Bak	University of the Western Cape
Prof. P. Beard	ICESA
Prof. R. Becker	University of the North
Prof. J. Bradbury	University of Natal
Mr D. Briedenhann	Technikon Pretoria
Prof. J. Cooke	University of Natal
Prof. H. Fransman	Peninsula Technikon
Prof. N. Gawe	Durban Institute of Technology
Prof. W. Gevers	University of Cape Town
Ms H. Griesel	South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA)
Prof. T. Gugushe	Medical University of South Africa (MEDUNSA)
Dr M. Maharasoa	Technikon Free State
Ms K. Marala	University of Fort Hare
Dr I. Miller	University of the Western Cape
Dr D. Moore	Technikon South Africa

Table continued on page 30

<sup>16</sup> Note that many of the names of HEIs have changed, owing to ongoing restructuring of the sector.

Consultative Panel Members	Institution
Prof. W. Morrow	University of Port Elizabeth
Mr V. Motabela	Technikon South Africa
Prof. J. Mouton	University of Stellenbosch
Mr D. Naidoo	Technikon Pretoria
Mr S. Nakana	University of Cape Town
Prof. Z. Nel	Damelin
Ms L. Ngalo-Morrison	University of Fort Hare
Prof. L. Nongxa	University of the Witwatersrand
Prof. T. Ntusi	Border Technikon
Prof. K. Pienaar	Potchefstroom University
Ms P. Powell	Durban Institute of Technology
Prof. M. Samuel	University of Durban-Westville
Dr P. Steyn	Midrand Graduate Institute
Ms L. Sutherland	University of Zululand
Dr J. Swanepoel	University of Stellenbosch
Prof. W. van der Merwe	University of Stellenbosch
Prof. K. van Warmelo	Rand Afrikaans University
Prof. T. Wood	University of the Western Cape

Reference Group Members	Institution
Prof. V. D'Andrea	Critical Change Consultants for Higher Education, UK
Prof. D. Gosling	Critical Change Consultants for Higher Education, UK
Prof. A. Hope	Commonwealth of Learning
Ms B. Sattar	Durban Institute of Technology (HEQC Board representative)
Prof. R. Ryan	Rand Afrikaans University (SAUVCA representative)
Dr J.F. van Koller	Technikon South Africa (Committee of Technikon Principals representative)
Prof. G. Webb	Monash University, Australia

Other Contributions	Institution
Dr M. Bresciani	North Caroline State University
Ms S. Cohen	Higher Education Staff Development Initiative (HESDI)
SAUVCA National Quality Assurance Forum, Workshop on Good Practice 7-8 August, 2003	SAUVCA and CTP

# 1

## ITL Resource No. 1 Programme Planning, Design and Management

Each of the seven Improving Teaching & Learning Resources can be read and used individually, although there are cross-references as some are closely related. However, it is important to read the *Introduction*, as it deals with the purpose of the Resources and how they relate to the Higher Education Quality Committee's quality assurance mandate and its quality promotion and capacity development activities.

### In this Resource...

- **Focus Area**
- **Rationale**
- **Discussion**
- **Evaluative Questions**
- **Evaluative Questions and Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**
- **Suggested Data Sources for Self-evaluation and Review**
- **Abbreviations and Acronyms**
- **Glossary of Terms** (academic planning; curriculum; curriculum alignment; programme; qualification)
- **References and Suggested Reading**

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## FOREWORD

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The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) prioritised quality issues in teaching and learning very early on in the development of its quality assurance systems. Mandated by legislation to conduct institutional audits and programme accreditation and to promote quality and quality assurance, the HEQC initiated a project in 2002 aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

The project on teaching and learning was intended to refocus attention on one of the core functions of higher education in an environment where the restructuring of higher education had given much attention to issues such as governance, financing and the 'size and shape' of the system. The project also reflected the importance of quality-related capacity development in the work of the HEQC, especially in a context where historical disadvantage impacts on the capacities of academic staff to plan and deliver good quality programmes and on the capacities of students to benefit from them. These issues needed to be addressed and to be brought to the centre of the debate about the purposes of a new quality assurance system for South Africa. Moreover, the project fitted in with international debates and developments in higher education, which were prioritising the learning experiences of students as well as giving increased attention to the professionalisation of higher education teaching and to staff development and support.

The HEQC set up the project in a way that would involve a number of role-players. It was important to draw on teaching and learning expertise in higher education as well as maximise the impact of those involved within higher education institutions. The Resources for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning should be seen therefore as the fruit of an extensive collaboration between the HEQC, a large number of experts and practitioners and a range of public and private higher education institutions.

It is hoped that the Resources will be adapted creatively for a number of purposes and used by higher education practitioners individually and in teams in the process of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to give effect to the transformation objectives in the restructuring of higher education, especially in relation to redress and equity and to the responsiveness of higher education to national goals and challenges.

The HEQC looks forward to further cooperation with key partners in higher education in effectively developing and using the Resources. We would like to acknowledge that funding for the project and this publication was made available by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation.

Dr Mala Singh  
Executive Director  
November 2004



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources are the product of an ongoing collaboration between the HEQC and a wide range of academics based in private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). These included several academics from other countries that assisted with the project or provided advice. The 14 regional workshops at which the draft Resources were introduced and discussed in 2003 were generously hosted by public HEIs.

## FOCUS AREA

This ITL Resource on *Programme Planning, Design & Management* applies to both an institution's and a faculty's academic planning system and the school/ department responsible for managing a particular programme.<sup>1</sup> While the Resource has a bearing on all moments of the quality cycle<sup>2</sup> (planning, implementing, monitoring and improving), it applies particularly to the planning moment that, at programme level, includes a focus on the conceptualisation, design and inputs for a particular programme.

There can be no single, abstract definition of a higher education (HE) programme. In the South African system, as in many other systems, programmes and their constituent parts (course, module etc.)<sup>3</sup> are defined according to historical developments and policy frameworks, such as the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (or HEQF, Ministry of Education: 2004).<sup>4</sup>

This Resource deals with the setting of the purpose and learning outcomes for a programme and thus sets the agenda for programme and course review (see Resource No. 2 on *Programme & Course Review*). HEIs are therefore urged to use Resource No. 1 and Resource No. 2 as being closely related. Also relevant are the HEQC's framework and criteria documents for institutional audits and programme accreditation.

It should be noted that the HEQC is establishing an integrated national quality assurance (QA) system. Programme accreditation requirements are based on minimum standards, while institutional audits have a more developmental orientation. In an audit, HEIs must explain how they are meeting and going beyond minimum standards by continuous improvement of their quality management of areas such as programme planning. This Resource should be read together with the HEQC's *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (2004a; see Criteria 7–10 for programme development, management and review) and also the HEQC's *Criteria*

<sup>1</sup> Users of this Resource who are based in private HEIs may need to adapt some of the terminology, such as reference to 'schools'.

<sup>2</sup> The HEQC audit criteria document defines different aspects of quality management, each of which can be evaluated against input, process, output and impact (see the *Introduction* to the ITL Resources).

<sup>3</sup> In all cases in these Resources, the term 'course' can be replaced with the term 'module'. The term 'subject' is sometimes used, particularly with reference to parts of vocationally oriented programmes.

<sup>4</sup> At the time of publishing these Resources, the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework: Draft for Discussion* (Ministry of Education: 2004) – which replaced the *New Academic Policy* (2002) – had not yet been finalised.

for *Programme Accreditation* (2004b), particularly in relation to the activities that should be taking place, resources that should be available and conditions that should be present in preparation for the offering of a programme.

## RATIONALE

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The planning, management and resourcing of academic programmes are key focus areas for managing quality at any HEI. Without sound planning and adequate resourcing, programmes will fail to meet the needs of their students and other stakeholders; and without good management the implementation and ongoing improvement of programmes are impaired. Furthermore, the review of programmes becomes very difficult if adequate planning and design of the programmes have not been undertaken beforehand. The quality of the planning, design and management of academic programmes is thus an important indicator of the effectiveness of educational provision.

At programme level, high quality conceptualisation and design of a programme and its qualification are the first steps towards achieving high quality educational provision. It is at this planning stage that teams of academics need to deliberate and decide how to meet the needs of their target student population; the vision, mission and plans of their institutions; the demands of their discipline(s); and the various external stakeholders to whom they are accountable. The clear definition of the purpose of a programme, its knowledge base, the exit-level learning outcomes of its qualification, and the associated assessment criteria, provide key reference points against which the effectiveness of the programme and the performance of its students can be evaluated. The HEQC audit criteria document defines different aspects of quality management – namely QA, quality monitoring, quality development and quality support (including sustainability) – each of which can be evaluated against inputs, processes, outputs and impact.

In the current context of institutional restructuring, academic planning is an urgent priority for all institutions that are merging or in other ways restructuring. One way in which this Resource may be useful is to assist these institutions to re-plan and rationalise their curricula.

In this regard the Department of Education (DoE), in its guidelines for merging institutions, advises that:

**Decisions (about academic planning) should be taken on the basis of rational, defensible criteria and rise above personal interests and keep the strength and integrity of the academic programmes as a major objective. (DoE 2003: 36)**

The Evaluative Questions and Suggested Good Practice Descriptors in this Resource may be of assistance to merging or restructuring institutions in setting up coherent academic planning systems and in providing some guidelines for 'rational, defensible criteria' that can be used to determine what their curriculum offerings should be.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> One strategy is to state what constitutes 'graduateness' for each programme leading to a qualification.

## DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. **Kathy Luckett**, the coordinator of the working group, was asked to write this section so as to reflect on issues that were discussed by the working group in the course of developing the first draft of the Resources.

Note that the views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

Although QA in HE has traditionally used the department or school as the unit of analysis/evaluation, the HEQC has designed its QA system using the institution and the programme as the units of evaluation. One reason for this is that it is in keeping with international practice and recent national policy. A further reason is the assumption that a programmes-based approach is a student-centred approach; during their time at an HEI, students register for and aim to complete a programme of study leading to a target qualification. Given that the programme is the umbrella concept that defines a student's academic experience, the programme is the appropriate unit for the evaluation of teaching and learning.

Traditionally, the content of an academic discipline, and the academic's conscious or unconscious epistemic framing of that content, were the key determinants of the HE curriculum. However, in the past two decades the following factors have begun to impinge on the design of the HE curriculum: globalisation; massification of HE; internationalisation; distance and e-learning; the concern for greater responsiveness; shifts in knowledge production and the presumed emergence of Mode 2 forms of knowledge; concerns about the meaning of 'graduateness', including the need for graduates to demonstrate 'employability'; and the need to produce 'lifelong learners' (see Breier, 2001, Chapter 1, for further details). In post-apartheid South Africa, the curriculum structure proposed for responding to these various pressures was the academic programme, which early policy documents such as the *National Commission on Higher Education Report* (1996)<sup>6</sup> and the *Education White Paper 3* (1997)<sup>7</sup> suggested should be the unit for planning, funding and QA in a single coordinated HE system. It was also assumed that a programmes-based approach to curriculum would allow for greater flexibility, responsiveness and inter-disciplinarity than the traditional disciplinary curriculum had done.

In South Africa, recent curriculum restructuring has also been shaped by the implementation of the NQF, and the insistence by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) from 2000 onwards on the use of an outcomes-based format for the design and interim registration of all HE qualifications.

<sup>6</sup> Hereafter: NCHE report (1996).

<sup>7</sup> Hereafter: White Paper (1997).

However, not only do some academics on the ground often react negatively to the discourse relating to the NQF and OBE, but it could also be argued that an ‘implementation vacuum’ followed early visionary policy documents.<sup>8</sup> In addition, the DoE’s finalising of the HEQF (2004), which replaced the New Academic Policy (NAP, 2002), has been a protracted process. These factors, taken together, have contributed to a situation where individual institutions, without adequate guidance, have had to implement the policy shift to programmes. HEIs have interpreted and implemented the ‘programmes-based approach’ to curriculum development in different ways. The very concept of ‘programme’ has been defined differently by different HEIs and the trend of modularising programmes has meant different things in different institutional contexts (Breier, 2001). Some analysts have argued that, in the absence of finalised national planning guidelines and frameworks, national system goals such as articulation, mobility, regional cooperation and system coherence may be even more elusive than before (Breier, 2001: 36).

However, since 2001, when such concerns were articulated, greater policy coherence and detail have been emerging. For example, the HEQC’s *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (2004b) provide detailed minimum standards on what is required for a programme, and the DoE’s HEQF is in the process of being finalised.

With respect to the NQF, the HEQC remains committed to working within the framework, but in a way that does not compromise the creativity, innovation and expertise required to offer high quality HE programmes. With respect to outcomes-based education (OBE), the HEQC supports the use of learning outcomes, although a ‘weak’ form of the outcomes-based approach to curriculum design<sup>9</sup> may often be more appropriate in the HE context.

Where HEIs adopt a programmes-based approach, this has far-reaching implications for curriculum development, practice and QA, including the following:

1. Academics need to work in programme teams (often led by a programme director or convenor) in order to plan, design and review the programmes on which they teach.
2. Institutional academic planning and management information systems (MIS) need to cater for qualifications, programmes and courses/ modules.
3. Institutional quality management systems need to incorporate sub-systems that cater for the programme as the primary unit of academic review. However, for reasons of efficiency and cost-effectiveness, given the HEQC’s six-year accreditation cycle, multi-purpose HEIs may choose to review, in a single, clustered process, all the programmes offered by a school or department. (Such a layered method of organising a review/ evaluation need not detract from programmes being used as the primary unit of review.)
4. Courses/ modules need to be designed and reviewed as components of programmes and not as isolated units. This raises a number of complicating issues. For example, a module may serve more than one programme and its status (e.g. prerequisite, core or elective) may vary from programme to programme. While it is desirable to review all the courses/ modules comprising a programme in terms of their fitness-for-purpose for

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<sup>8</sup> The NCHE report (1996) and the White Paper (1997).

<sup>9</sup> For a more detailed discussion of OBE and the NQF see the Discussion section of the *Introduction*.

that particular programme, this is likely to become onerous and time-consuming for the academic staff concerned. A consensus that seems to be emerging among quality managers is that an institution's quality management system should ensure that all courses/ modules are reviewed regularly but not excessively, and that a judicious selection of course review data for the review of a particular programme is acceptable. While the process of programme review should collate and analyse data from course/ module reviews, this need not necessarily include data from every single course/ module comprising the programme. Furthermore, the data from course/ module reviews should be collected throughout the review cycle (e.g. over a period of five years).

5. The coordination of qualification planning, design and registration requirements with those of programme accreditation suggests that institutions should ensure that their programme and qualification designs conform to the 'general qualification standards' laid down in the DoE's current HEQF (2004) proposals, so that programmes and qualifications are recognisable and fundable and can articulate on the NQF. In the candidacy phase of the accreditation process for new programmes, the HEQC will ensure that programme and qualification designs conform to the HEQF in terms of level descriptors (e.g. Level 7 for a degree), qualification type descriptors (e.g. for a Bachelor's Degree), and as laid down in the 'generic qualification standards' (e.g. for the BSc), where these are registered on the NQF. The HEQC may also use specific qualification standards, if these exist and are registered on the NQF, to evaluate specific programmes and their qualifications. However, as discussed in the *Introduction* to these Resources, in making accreditation judgments, the HEQC will not in a mechanistic and prescriptive manner impose national standards on specific programmes. Rather, it will use national 'general qualification standards' as one among a range of criteria to guide it in its decision-making process.

Curriculum design also needs to be informed by *explicit* learning theory, in the sense that we in HE should plan to teach according to the way(s) in which we know students learn. In the *Introduction* to these Resources we defined learning as conceptual change – change in the way the student sees the world and change in the student's cognitive structure. Such a definition draws on a 'constructivist' view of learning.<sup>10</sup> A constructivist approach posits students as innovative thinkers, and emphasises that meaning is created by the student, through the student's learning activities (active learning). To facilitate this meaning-making by students, academics need to make the purpose and outcomes of learning tasks clear, motivate students to achieve these and provide a sound content and conceptual base. Academics also need to make learning activities and opportunities available so that students may interact with others around the learning tasks. In the constructivist conception of learning, the emphasis of teaching should always be on developing student understanding. The associated curriculum challenge is therefore to determine what selection of content and kinds of teaching–learning activities are required, so that students attain the kinds of understandings intended.

<sup>10</sup> Note that the HEQC does not prescribe or support any particular theoretical approach to learning and teaching.

A key principle underpinning a constructivist approach to curriculum design is that of curriculum alignment (Biggs, 1999). This means that content, teaching–learning activities and assessment methods all support students in the attainment of the specified learning outcomes. In other words, all four dimensions of the curriculum – content, learning outcomes, teaching–learning activities and assessment – should be mutually supportive. In this Resource, the principle of curriculum alignment underpins our elaboration of what ‘good practice’ in curriculum design entails.

The specification of learning outcomes raises the contested issue of OBE, the method of curriculum design and qualification specification currently required by SAQA and promoted by the DoE in the schooling system. The Discussion section of the *Introduction* argues that a technicist, instrumentalist implementation of OBE – in which learning outcomes are rigidly prescribed and standardised across the system – is not appropriate to HE, where the nature of knowledge is exploratory and open-ended and where diversity should be encouraged. Because HE’s knowledge domains are specialised and particular, they require the exercise of expert professional judgment to articulate specific learning outcomes, and to mediate and interpret their meanings in particular contexts and classrooms. Similarly, when it comes to assessment, specialised knowledge domains entail expert professional judgment to interpret what performances might count as evidence that adequate levels of understanding and learning have been achieved. That said, there is no denying that the broad specification of learning outcomes should serve as a useful HE planning tool, helping to clarify the purpose of learning to students, and contributing towards the achievement of curriculum alignment.

## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

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### INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

The following questions may be adapted for use in self-evaluating the quality of an institution's curriculum design and management system, or academic planning system:

1. Is there a curriculum management/ academic planning system in place for the planning, approval and administration of academic programmes? How does the system allocate responsibility and lines of accountability? How effective are the organisational structures for this process?
2. Does the institution have clearly defined policies and effective procedures for determining the need for a programme and for designing and approving programmes and their modules/ courses?
3. Do academic planning and programme approval link to the operationalisation of the institution/ academic unit's mission and goals; Teaching and Learning Plan/ Strategies (if in place); and agreed 'Programme and Qualification Mix' or PQM (in the case of public HEIs)?
4. How do institutional academic planning and programme approval take into account the requirements and sustained participation of legitimate external stakeholders? In the case of vocationally oriented programmes upholding a cooperative education approach: how are the roles and responsibilities of such an extended and joint planning committee structured and managed?
5. Prior to a new programme's approval, how does the institution consider issues of feasibility and the resource implications of running the programme?
6. How are institutional staffing policies and procedures used to ensure that there are suitable academic staff to teach the programmes on offer, particularly in respect of availability, qualifications and experience? How do the latter relate to the institution's policies and strategies for staff development?
7. How does the institution use recruitment, selection and student development to ensure that sufficient numbers of properly informed and adequately prepared students enter programmes, and that adequate support is available to students?
8. How is the institution's MIS used to record and disseminate information about the programme?
9. How does the institution employ management mechanisms (such as monitoring and the use of surveys) to ensure that the results of programme review and evaluation feed back into the planning process – at both institutional and programme levels?

## PROGRAMME LEVEL

The following questions may be adapted for use in self-evaluating the quality of a programme's design:

1. To what extent does the programme serve national and/or regional needs and goals?  
Does the programme's design cater for equity of access and for equity of outcome (i.e. of qualification output)?  
If a public HEI: do the qualifications offered on the programme fall under the institution's approved PQM?
2. Have the designers of the programme taken into account the requirements set out in the general qualification standards proposed in the HEQF (Ministry of Education: 2004), which replaced the NAP (2002), as well as (where applicable) any relevant generic and specific qualification standards? Does the qualification offered on the programme therefore articulate with other qualifications registered on the NQF?
3. To what extent does the programme meet disciplinary and academic requirements as well as being relevant to the needs of legitimate stakeholders (e.g. students; communities of scholarship; professional bodies; the institution; potential employers of its graduates; local communities)? Do stakeholders make an input in respect of programme design?
4. To what extent is the design of the programme coherent and aligned in terms of content, learning outcomes, teaching-learning and support activities, and assessment?
5. To what extent is the delivery of the programme feasible, taking its mode of delivery into account (e.g. open and distance learning modalities)?
6. What evidence can the institution present of its capacity to manage the programme adequately?



# EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS

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## INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

### **Evaluative Question 1:** Academic planning & curriculum management

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

An effective management structure is in place that identifies, at each level of the organisation, individuals and structures responsible for the planning, management and administration of programmes.

Procedures, time frames and lines of accountability, reporting and communication are clearly defined.

Usually, macro-planning and monitoring are managed centrally, with responsibility for design and implementation lying at the programme and course levels. As far as possible, institution-wide approval procedures should allow for innovation and flexibility at programme and course levels.

### **Evaluative Question 2:** Policies & procedures for design & approval

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The HEI has developed clearly defined policies and procedures and realistic time frames for the design and approval of its academic offerings, and provides guidelines from which academic staff and programme teams work.

The institution has a well planned course-/ module- and programmes-based system, in which the credit ratings, levels and status (e.g. core or elective) of its modules are clearly specified so that they articulate internally and externally.

All programmes in the institution are approved on the basis of transparent criteria, by an institutional authority<sup>11</sup> that is independent of the programme team. There is consistency of frameworks and standards across the institution.

### **Evaluative Question 3:** Operationalisation of mission & goals/ academic planning framework/ Teaching & Learning Plan and Strategy

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institutional mission and goals, academic planning framework and/or Teaching and Learning Plan have been operationalised into an academic plan and programme profile. This is well understood throughout the institution and is used as a criterion for the internal approval of new programmes.

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<sup>11</sup> This will vary, but a degree of independence is necessary. For example, a private HEI with a small staff must make appropriate arrangements.

## Evaluative Question 4: Consultation with/ participation of internal and external stakeholders

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### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

As appropriate, programme teams consult with internal and external stakeholders about the nature of the programmes, to ensure that graduates meet employability requirements and labour market needs (both short- and long-term). Internal and external stakeholders include: students; professional bodies; potential employers; government departments; and local communities.

Cooperative education programmes ensure formalised arrangements with industry partners for experiential learning and mentoring and monitoring of workplace-based assessments.

## Evaluative Question 5: Feasibility & resources

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### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

There is alignment of planning and budgeting. Programmes are not approved to run unless there is:

- Confirmation, based on evidence, that there are adequate financial, physical, human and administrative resources to run them by means of their planned delivery mode; and
- An adequately resourced and sustainable learning environment, e.g. access to adequate library and information technology (IT) services.

Time-tabling, venue allocation for delivery and assessment and learning resource production are worked out efficiently for all modules in a way that accommodates both the delivery method and the needs of targeted student groups.

## Evaluative Question 6: Staffing

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### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution has the capacity to recruit, select and develop a sufficient number of academic and support staff, with the necessary qualifications and expertise to teach and support all programmes, so that programme outcomes are achievable by students. The ratio of full- to part-time staff is appropriate.<sup>12</sup>

Scholarly activity/ research is a requirement for all academic staff, particularly those appointed to teach at degree level and above. This requirement is formally captured in a research policy.

Industry, or equivalent, experience may often be a consideration for vocationally oriented courses.

The institution provides for both the scholarly and professional development of its academic staff.

## Evaluative Question 7: Students

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### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution has the capacity to market its programmes, and provides suitable access management arrangements for the recruitment, selection and placement of sufficient numbers of suitable students on its programmes.

Where applicable, the institution has specified its diversity/ equity and 'size and shape' targets. These are translated into criteria for the approval of academic programmes. At the level of

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<sup>12</sup> This is of particular concern in the case of private HEIs that rely on part-time staff.

programme(s), provision is made for alternative/ flexible entry, and the curriculum is enriched to match students' levels of preparedness, e.g. opportunities for student support and development are available from undergraduate through to postgraduate programmes.

The institution has the capacity to assist students in workplace-based/ work-integrated placements, as appropriate for relevant programmes.

## Evaluative Question 8: Management Information System (MIS)

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The HEI has the demonstrated capacity, using an appropriate software system, to capture and continually update all necessary information about its students and programmes, including their registration and accreditation status. Relevant aspects of this information are regularly made available to staff, students and the public, e.g. with due regard for confidentiality, members of a programme team can access and extract student records and other information for the programme concerned.

The MIS allows for the monitoring of student performance, which makes possible timely educational interventions in individual cases, where deemed necessary.

## Evaluative Question 9: Mechanisms for improvement

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

An effective and integrated quality management system is in place. The quality management system includes mechanisms for monitoring and evaluating the impact of policies and plans and their implementation at all levels of programme delivery.

There is evidence that the results and recommendations of internal review and external evaluations of the institution and its programmes are fed into new planning cycles leading to curriculum improvement. An effective support system is in place for curriculum improvement.

## PROGRAMME LEVEL

### Evaluative Question 1: Responsiveness to national/ regional priorities, including equity<sup>13</sup>

#### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

##### National and/or regional responsiveness

A purpose or rationale for the programme explains how it will meet national/ regional labour market, development and/or other socio-cultural needs.

##### Institutional responsiveness

The programme contributes to the realisation of the institution's mission and goals.

##### Equity

The programme's design accommodates equity considerations. For example, the programme has realistic and explicit entry assumptions that contribute towards the attainment of 'representivity in enrolment' (NPHE, 2001: 3.2) and to the 'broadening of the social base of students' (NPHE, 2001: 2.4).

<sup>13</sup> This evaluative question refers to national and regional priorities – for example, equity – as set out in the *National Plan for Higher Education* (Ministry of Education, 2001), hereafter: NPHE (2001).

The programme's design caters for the learning needs of its target student population, in the interests of ensuring that all students have a fair chance of success. This is achieved through a range of possible strategies, such as: the offering of 'articulation certificates'; alternative access routes; the recognition of prior learning (RPL); foundation modules or credits; academic development; and extended and enriched curriculum opportunities.

**DoE approval (relevant to public HEIs)**

The qualifications offered on the programme are located in a CESM<sup>14</sup> cell approved by the DoE for the HEI concerned.

## Evaluative Question 2: Conformity to the HEQF<sup>15</sup> so as to articulate with the NQF

**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors****Conformity to the HEQF**

The design of the qualification(s) offered on the programme takes into account the general qualification standards proposed in the HEQF (Ministry of Education: 2004). Where both unit standards or generic qualification standards, e.g. the BSc, and specific qualification standards, e.g. the BSc (Geology), registered on the NQF apply, the qualification design also conforms to these.

It is advisable to consider hybrid forms of alignment when planning vocationally/ career-oriented programmes, particularly at NQF level 5. This means that, if an institution is opting for unit standards methodology in the design, then alignment to the level descriptors for that rung should promote articulation possibilities across the HE sector.

**Articulation**

Conformity to the HEQF should help ensure the articulation of the qualification with other related qualifications on the NQF. In the case of entry-level programmes, it is particularly important that there is demonstrated articulation between students' prior learning and that assumed to be in place on entry to the programme. This is so both for prior accredited learning (e.g. the Senior Certificate or further education and training certificate, or FETC) and for prior learning via RPL.

**Entry and exit points**

The programme offers clear learning and career pathways to students and, as far as possible, opportunities for access, exit-points and articulation with other programmes within and across institutions, without sacrificing the coherence and viability of the modules or courses leading to a particular qualification.

## Evaluative Question 3: Academic demands & relevance

**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors****Student need**

The programme's design, volume of credits, expected completion time and delivery methods are based on a detailed profile analysis of its target students. For example, the programme may cater for educationally disadvantaged students by allowing them to take reduced loads over

<sup>14</sup> CESM is the Classification of Educational Subject Matter system used by the DoE.

<sup>15</sup> At the time of publishing these resources the proposed HEQF (Ministry of Education: 2004) – which replaced the NAP (2002) – had not yet been finalised.

a longer period; it may provide early exit points for different types of achievers; it may offer flexible delivery arrangements for working, part-time, off-campus students; it may offer high achievers accelerated routes.

The programme offers all students a degree of curriculum choice and flexibility and is delivered via an appropriate media and technology mix.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Disciplinary and occupational demands**

The programme offers students a sound disciplinary knowledge base and sufficient theoretical and conceptual depth taught at the appropriate level to serve its educational purpose. (For example, if it is an undergraduate programme, its students will be adequately prepared to progress to postgraduate studies.) The programme outcomes include an appropriate balance of theoretical, practical and experiential knowledge and practitioner skills.

There is evidence that the content and theory taught on the programme are current and up to date with recent developments in the discipline/ field.

There is evidence that, where appropriate, staff members' research activities contribute to the depth and rigour of the programme's offerings.

#### **Contextualisation**

Where appropriate, the programme offers opportunities for the contextualisation of the knowledge and skills learnt. Contextualisation is achieved by using appropriate teaching methods, for example, through work-site placements, service learning, community service, project work and South African/ African perspectives in the curriculum.

#### **Requirements of external stakeholders**

The programme's design meets the requirements of legitimate external stakeholders such as professional bodies and potential employers and, where appropriate, undertakes a scientific and academic interpretation of expressed industry needs and identified competences.

#### **Marketable qualifications**

Where appropriate, evidence of the programme's marketability and credibility in the labour market can be shown.

#### **Research competence**

Where appropriate, the programme offers opportunities for students to develop research competence.

## **Evaluative Question 4: Curriculum alignment & coherence**

### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

#### **Purpose and exit-level outcomes**

For each qualification offered, the purpose of the programme, its overarching graduate competences and exit-level outcomes, and the associated assessment criteria, are clearly defined and communicated to students.

#### **Modular design**

The modules or courses comprising the programme are likely to realise its overarching purpose and graduate competences. Modules/ courses are adequately planned; for example, by specifying the following: title; level; credits; purpose; learning outcomes; list of key content areas; status on the programme (core or elective); rules of combination and prerequisites; and assessment strategy and methods. This information is clearly communicated to students to inform their choice of modules/ courses.

<sup>16</sup> The degree of flexibility possible will vary; for example, with the level of qualification.

For vocationally oriented programmes: care should be taken to measure accurately and incorporate the notional hours of experiential learning and workplace-based assessment requirements.

**Intellectual coherence**

The programme's design is fit for its purpose. The programme thus offers a coherent intellectual map of the field, sufficient sustained content and theoretical depth and/or interdisciplinary breadth, and opportunities for student choice.

**Assessment**

Assessment tasks and their assessment criteria are clearly understood by staff and students and aligned with the content taught, the teaching–learning activities and specified learning outcomes. At key exit points on the programme, students are required to demonstrate their learning achievements through integrated assessment methods that draw on a range of knowledge and skills learnt from across the courses/ modules of the programme.

For vocationally oriented programmes: consciously integrated assessment strategies enable students to achieve 'applied competence'.

## Evaluative Question 5: Feasibility

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**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The programme's means of delivery have been carefully considered and are supported by a feasible plan and budget.

The institution makes available the necessary financial, physical, infrastructural and administrative resources.

The institution provides an appropriate range of student support services – such as library, computer, IT and student counselling/ health services.

Time-tabling and venue allocation are carefully planned to accommodate the needs of targeted student groups.

Particularly where the programme is offered via mixed-mode or distance mode: the design and delivery of learning resources is properly resourced and managed.

## Evaluative Question 6: Management capacity

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**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Academic staff members typically work in programme teams coordinated by a programme convenor. This ensures that the programme is planned and taught as a coherent whole rather than as a series of discrete courses/ modules. MIS and administrative systems are in place to ensure the smooth running of the programme.

Staffing, teaching and assessment arrangements are well planned and carried out efficiently. Student enquiries and complaints are dealt with effectively and in a timely fashion. A quality management system ensures that the programme and its delivery are continuously updated and improved.

For vocationally oriented programmes: academic planning involves industry partners and other relevant stakeholders, especially where cooperative educational principles obtain.

## SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND REVIEW

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The suggestions that follow are not intended to be used as a checklist. They are offered rather to assist and guide institutions on what may be appropriate sources of data that constitute legitimate forms of evidence. This list will obviously need to be adjusted depending on the nature and context of the institution and/or programme under consideration and the purpose of the evaluation being undertaken. Suggested data sources linked to HEQC criteria can be found in the HEQC documents relating to institutional audits and programme accreditation.

### INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

1. Institutional mission statement;
2. Approved PQM (in the case of public HEIs);
3. Organogram illustrating the structures and lines of responsibility for academic planning and approval;
4. Documentation on policy, procedures and guidelines to academic staff for the planning and design of programmes;
5. Documentation on consultation with internal and external stakeholders around programme development;
6. Documentation on financial planning and budgeting for programmes;
7. Documentation on policies and plans for the appointment, induction and development of academic staff;
8. Documentation on policies for student admissions and student development;
9. Examples of MIS data on programmes;
10. Academic handbooks or calendars;
11. Other promotional material on academic offerings; and
12. Policy documentation on the QA of programmes.

### PROGRAMME LEVEL

1. Documentation on the registration and accreditation status of the programme;
2. Programme handbook, course outlines and other information made available to students;
3. Organogram illustrating the internal and external approval paths for the programme and the result obtained at each point of the process;
4. Evidence to show that the purpose and aims of the programme are congruent with the HEI's mission (and PQM in the case of public HEIs);



5. Evidence to show that the requirements of relevant external stakeholders have been taken into account, including inputs from students;
6. Diagram showing the programme structure, the modules comprising the programme, their titles, levels, credit ratings etc. and the exit qualifications from the programme;
7. Brief set of learning outcomes, assessment criteria and content areas for each core/ compulsory module/ course offered on the programme;
8. Where appropriate, brief description of contextualisation strategies used on the programme;
9. Brief description of the method of delivery of the programme and of the resources available to support this, including indicative learning materials, as well as, where appropriate, a statement of student readiness;
10. Brief description of student support or development offered by the programme;
11. Brief description of integrated assessment strategies to be used on the programme;
12. Where applicable, a programme budget;
13. List of staff who teach on the programme and provide students with academic support, plus staff's abbreviated curriculum vitae (CV) and, where applicable, an indication of how staff research activities contribute to the programme. Where relevant, the industry, or equivalent, experience of staff should be noted;
14. Numbers and profile of students enrolled for each level/ year/ qualification on the programme and analyses of cohort throughput rate;
15. Where relevant, numbers and profile of students placed in industry for compulsory workplace-based/ work-integrated learning;
16. Numbers and profile of students who find employment after completion of the programme;
17. Examples from the student record system kept by the programme administrator;
18. Description and documentation on the internal QA arrangements for reviewing and improving the programme; and
19. Reference to relevant institutional policies where necessary: e.g. policies on admissions, language, learning and teaching, assessment, equity, community engagement and RPL.

## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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BSc	Bachelor of Science
CESM	Classification of Educational Subject Matter
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DoE	Department of Education
FETC	Further Education and Training Certificate
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
IT	Information Technology
ITL	Improving Teaching & Learning
MIS	Management Information System
NAP	New Academic Policy
NCHE	National Commission on Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
OBE	Outcomes-based Education
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
QA	Quality Assurance
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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**academic planning** refers to the activities undertaken by an HEI to plan, design, approve and resource its academic offerings – i.e. its programmes, modules and qualifications.

**curriculum** has both narrow and broader definitions. Narrow definitions are limited to formal descriptions of either academic offerings of specific programmes or the whole range of programmes on offer. Broader definitions might encompass both the intentional plan(s) and design(s) for learning across an institution and what is actually accomplished and experienced by students and teachers.

**curriculum alignment** refers to the principle of ensuring that the purpose of a programme (or module) is supported by the content selection, learning outcomes, teaching–learning methods and assessment practices used to deliver it.

**programme** A programme is defined as follows in the HEQF (Ministry of Education, 2004: 7):

A programme is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification. Programmes may be discipline-based, professional, career-focused, or trans-, inter-or multi-disciplinary in nature. A programme has recognized entry and exit points. All taught higher education programmes should have core and elective elements. This requirement is optional for research-based programmes. The internal organization of programmes is otherwise not prescribed by this document.<sup>17</sup>

It should be noted that the DoE is here proposing a 1:1 correspondence between a programme and a qualification. That is to say, a particular programme should lead to one and only one qualification, while a particular qualification should be attained through a single route only, namely a specific programme.

### Terms for constituent parts of programmes

In all cases in these Resources, the term ‘course’ can be replaced with the term ‘module’. While most HEIs in South Africa have adopted a modular curriculum structure, it was decided, in compiling these Resources, to retain the term ‘course’ as it is more inclusive and remains in common use among academics. The term ‘subject’ is sometimes used, particularly with reference to parts of vocationally oriented programmes.

**qualification** A qualification is the formal recognition and certification of learning achievement awarded by an accredited institution. In the outcomes-based approach intrinsic to the NQF, a *qualification* signifies and formally certifies the demonstrated achievement by a learner of a planned and purposeful combination of learning outcomes, at a specified level of performance.

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<sup>17</sup> That is, the HEQF.

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# 2

## ITL Resource No. 2 Programme and Course Review

Each of the seven Improving Teaching & Learning Resources can be read and used individually, although there are cross-references as some are closely related. However, it is important to read the *Introduction*, as it deals with the purpose of the Resources and how they relate to the Higher Education Quality Committee's quality assurance mandate and its quality promotion and capacity development activities.

### In this Resource...

- **Focus Area**
- **Rationale**
- **Discussion**
- **Evaluative Questions**
- **Evaluative Questions and Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**
- **Suggested Data Sources for Self-evaluation and Review**
- **Abbreviations and Acronyms**
- **Glossary of Terms** (course/ module review; curriculum alignment; formative; programme; programme evaluation; programme review; quality management of academic review; summative)
- **References and Suggested Reading**

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## FOREWORD

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The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) prioritised quality issues in teaching and learning very early on in the development of its quality assurance systems. Mandated by legislation to conduct institutional audits and programme accreditation and to promote quality and quality assurance, the HEQC initiated a project in 2002 aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

The project on teaching and learning was intended to refocus attention on one of the core functions of higher education in an environment where the restructuring of higher education had given much attention to issues such as governance, financing and the 'size and shape' of the system. The project also reflected the importance of quality-related capacity development in the work of the HEQC, especially in a context where historical disadvantage impacts on the capacities of academic staff to plan and deliver good quality programmes and on the capacities of students to benefit from them. These issues needed to be addressed and to be brought to the centre of the debate about the purposes of a new quality assurance system for South Africa. Moreover, the project fitted in with international debates and developments in higher education, which were prioritising the learning experiences of students as well as giving increased attention to the professionalisation of higher education teaching and to staff development and support.

The HEQC set up the project in a way that would involve a number of role-players. It was important to draw on teaching and learning expertise in higher education as well as maximise the impact of those involved within higher education institutions. The Resources for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning should be seen therefore as the fruit of an extensive collaboration between the HEQC, a large number of experts and practitioners and a range of public and private higher education institutions.

It is hoped that the Resources will be adapted creatively for a number of purposes and used by higher education practitioners individually and in teams in the process of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to give effect to the transformation objectives in the restructuring of higher education, especially in relation to redress and equity and to the responsiveness of higher education to national goals and challenges.

The HEQC looks forward to further cooperation with key partners in higher education in effectively developing and using the Resources. We would like to acknowledge that funding for the project and this publication was made available by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation.

Dr Mala Singh  
Executive Director  
November 2004



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources are the product of an ongoing collaboration between the HEQC and a wide range of academics based in private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). These included several academics from other countries that assisted with the project or provided advice. The 14 regional workshops at which the draft Resources were introduced and discussed in 2003 were generously hosted by public HEIs.

## FOCUS AREA

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This ITL Resource on *Programme & Course Review* refers to the programme and course<sup>1</sup> levels of an institution's educational activities. However, the review of any programme or course should be conducted within its context – the institution-wide quality management system in which the effectiveness of an institution's academic provision is monitored and improved across the system.

All three aspects of review – quality management of academic review, programme review, and course review – are wrapped up together (like the layers of an onion), and cannot be easily unwrapped. For analytical purposes, however, we have dealt with them separately, moving from the macro to the meso to the micro levels of review:

- a) the quality management of academic review;
- b) programme review; and
- c) course review.

In this Resource the HEQC provides guidance to HEIs and to programme evaluators for the internal and external evaluation of programmes, for course review and for establishing a quality management system for academic review (i.e. to manage at institutional level the review of both courses and programmes). In Resource No. 6 on *Staff Development*, the HEQC provides guidelines for the evaluation of teaching. The intention in providing these resources for internal review and self-evaluation procedures is to assist HEIs to develop quality management systems that are likely to improve teaching and learning. The intention is neither to prescribe a quality management blueprint to HEIs, nor to suggest that the HEQC intends scrutinising all self-evaluative activities. While recognising that the evaluation of teaching and the internal review of courses are fundamental to the achievement and enhancement of curriculum quality, the HEQC intends to leave this level of activity largely to the HEIs themselves.

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<sup>1</sup> In all cases the use of the term 'course' in these Resources can be replaced with the term 'module'. The term 'subject' in its narrow sense sometimes refers to a course or module within a programme.

This Resource complements the HEQC's framework and criteria for programme accreditation, although the criteria are focused on achieving minimum standards and the Resources are aimed at supporting development that goes beyond the minimum.

This Resource relates closely to, and should be used in conjunction with, ITL Resource No. 1 on *Programme Planning, Design & Management*.

## RATIONALE

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Since teaching and learning are to be a primary focus of the HEQC's quality assurance (QA) activities in the first phase of its work, systems for the review and evaluation of the inputs, process, outcomes and impact of educational provision (courses and programmes) become a key concern. As the external QA agency for the country, the HEQC is mandated by government to accredit all programmes and, from time to time, to undertake national reviews or evaluations of targeted programme types. Both of these functions involve external evaluations of programmes but these will always be based on prior internal self-evaluations.

This Resource aims to assist institutions in setting up their quality management systems for internal review. Needless to say, perhaps, the system and criteria set up by the HEQC for summative external evaluation will have a 'wash back' effect on the systems and criteria that institutions establish for themselves internally. However, given that the purpose of the HEQC's QA system is the improvement of teaching and learning, it is crucial that those who are to be involved in any self-evaluation exercise are convinced of the potential value of such exercises for improving quality. It is also crucial that any particular self-evaluation exercise undertaken be owned by those involved. Furthermore, it is vital that the evaluations and their findings are meaningful to academics, as the agents of improvement in teaching and learning. And finally, because curriculum development (see Glossary of Terms for an explanation of this Resource's use of 'curriculum' in its widest sense) is an ongoing, recursive and highly contextualised activity, judgments and advice from external agencies and outsiders can serve only as a *stimulus* to what need to be continuous cycles of self-improvement, supported by cycles of evaluation and review.

It is important to note that the HEQC does not intend scrutinising teaching and learning activities below the level of the programme, unless there is good reason for it to do so. Rather, in its audit activities, the HEQC will scrutinise an institution's management of programmes, and its procedures for programme design, approval and review. The HEQC will also ascertain the extent to which review findings are used for staff development and curriculum improvement, including the improvement of student access and success. In so doing, the HEQC will be in a position to evaluate the overall effectiveness of an institution's quality management system.

With respect to the *accreditation* of particular programmes, the HEQC assumes that institutional programme reviews include evidence of how the courses comprising the programme are being quality assured by the provider's internal quality management system.

The HEQC's accreditation system is complex. It is based on three categories of programme, each with its own accreditation or re-accreditation arrangements:<sup>2</sup>

- 1. New Programmes:** those professional and non-professional programmes that have not existed before or have been significantly changed (more than 50% of content, change of mode or site of delivery, or major revisions to purpose) and have not yet completed their first accreditation cycle. From 2004 onwards all new programmes are required to meet the HEQC's minimum threshold standards for accreditation. New professional programmes are, in addition, required to meet the statutory licensing requirements of their relevant Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA). The meeting of these standards will be ascertained via two accreditation phases: a candidacy evaluation, which focuses on input criteria and a quality management plan for the programme; and a full outcomes evaluation, which requires evidence such as throughput rates, and an assessment of inputs, processes, outputs and impact.
- 2. Existing Professional Programmes:** those programmes that have interim registration status on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and/or those that have completed their first accreditation cycle, and fall under the statutory and licensing requirements of an ETQA other than the HEQC. From 2010 these will need to be re-accredited by their relevant ETQA, as recognised by the HEQC. The exact nature of the re-accreditation process will depend on the type of cooperation agreement entered into between the HEQC and the ETQA concerned. These processes are likely to follow the model of an initial internal review with a subsequent external evaluation under the auspices of the ETQA concerned.
- 3. Existing Non-professional Programmes:** those programmes that have interim registration status on the NQF and/or those that have completed their first accreditation cycle, and still fall under the jurisdiction of the HEQC. From 2010 these programmes will need to be re-accredited by the HEQC, based on a process of institutionally managed internal programme and course review validated by external evaluation.

From 2007 HEIs may apply to the HEQC for self-accreditation status that will allow them to re-accredit their own existing non-professional programmes. The HEQC will base its decision on evidence gathered from all three components of its national QA system – in institutional audit, national programme reviews and programme accreditation – plus an academic review plan submitted by the applying institution. This Resource therefore may be of particular relevance to those institutions wishing to demonstrate to the HEQC that they have developed quality management systems for academic review that are sufficiently robust to maintain and improve the quality of their education provision above the HEQC's minimum standards.

The Evaluative Questions and Suggested Good Practice Descriptors in this Resource are intended to be generally applicable to all these possible variations for the conducting of programme review and evaluation. Users will need to interpret the questions and descriptions flexibly, depending on purpose and context.

<sup>2</sup> See the HEQC's *Framework for Programme Accreditation* (2004c) and *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (2004b) for further details.

## DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. **Kathy Luckett**, the coordinator of the working group, was asked to write this section so as to reflect on issues that were discussed by the working group in the course of developing the first draft of the Resources.

Note that the views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

A programme (and its constituent courses) is a carefully structured educational intervention, designed to bring about learning in its students. The extent to which students do, in fact, achieve the intended learning outcomes is therefore a measure of the effectiveness of a programme or course. In order for students to achieve the intended learning outcomes, it is necessary for there to be 'curriculum alignment' in the design of the programme/course. This means that the educational intervention (content selection and teaching-learning activities) is carefully designed so as to take students from their current levels of development to levels where they can demonstrate, through appropriate assessment tasks, the attainment of the targeted learning outcomes. Therefore, in a programme review, it is essential that the voices of those who designed and taught the programme and its courses – and particularly their rationale for teaching as they did – be heard.

For the goal of continuous quality improvement to be met, programme review needs to be seen as a learning opportunity for academic staff – an opportunity to understand and reflect on their teaching practice and its consequences for learning. Teaching staff should be afforded a space to articulate the educational rationale and theory of learning that underpins their practice, to observe the impact of their teaching on learning, and to reflect on what the findings may mean for the improvement of their own practice.<sup>3</sup> Ideally this self-evaluative and improvement process should be based on sound educational principles and learning theory. It should also be conducted in a non-threatening community of educational practice in which peers (other staff on the programme and educational experts) share the findings and jointly pursue collective solutions to the problems identified.

Judgments about student achievement, the attainment of learning outcomes and curriculum alignment are difficult to make, and require professional expertise. Such judgments are usually best conducted by suitably qualified and experienced expert peers, familiar with the discipline(s) or profession, context and educational practices involved. Thus, course and programme review should be based on self-evaluation but validated by external peer review. Traditionally this has been done through a system of internal moderation and external examination. The HEQC supports this tradition of peer review, but believes that if it is to avoid operating as a reproductive and conservative influence and to serve as a means of QA and quality enhancement, it needs to become more rigorous, explicit, systematic and professional.

<sup>3</sup> This process can be understood as contributing to the development of 'reflective practitioners' (see Resource No. 6 on *Staff Development*).

Student learning is arguably the core business of the higher education (HE) endeavour, and students are key participants in the learning process. Therefore student opinion on courses and student or graduate opinion on programmes – gathered through student evaluations – is one of the most direct measures of teaching and learning quality. Concerns are often raised about the validity and reliability of student feedback data, hence our concern for triangulation of data. However, research would suggest that student evaluations correlate moderately well with levels of student learning and also with staff self-evaluations of their own teaching. Harvey and Knight (1996) suggest that student evaluation data should not be used as performance indicators or to make comparisons across courses, programmes and institutions but that, when limited to direct concerns around teaching quality and student services, student evaluations are an effective instrument for measuring quality.

Harvey and Knight (1996) suggest that the kinds of questions that should be addressed to students include the following:

- **The academic** – enthusiasm for the discipline/ field, rapport with students, clarity of explanation, availability to help with study problems;
- **The course** – clarity of goals, effective organisation, appropriate workload, appropriate level of difficulty, effectiveness of teaching methods, opportunities for group interaction, fairness of assessment; and
- **Student services and support** – provision of learning resources and facilities and equipment, quality of the learning environment, helpfulness of support staff, availability and quality of support services, quality of accommodation, cafeterias, etc.

Formulaic designs of student questionnaires are seldom effective as students soon lose confidence in them, thus failing to take them seriously. This problem can be dealt with in a number of ways. Firstly, students should receive feedback on what is being done to address the problems that they raise (see more on this below). Secondly, a variety of methods for collecting student feedback data, apart from questionnaires, should be used; such methods might include focus group interviews, student participation in the identification of the evaluation questions and e-mail prompts. And finally, academic staff ought to be involved in the design of the student evaluation so that it is tailored to their particular course, interests and concerns and related to a particular group of students. Many institutions deal with this by providing a bank of typical questions for students from which staff can select and adapt for their particular purposes.

Since programme and course reviews are key components of an institutional quality management system, procedures need to be in place to ensure that insights and learnings from such reviews are acted upon and that plans for improvement are implemented (i.e. that the 'quality loop' is closed). Closing the quality loop will include ensuring support and resources for the implementation of improvement plans. An institution should also provide a framework for academic staff regarding the method and frequency of reviews and offer support for ensuring the quality of the review method. As mentioned above, if stakeholders, particularly students, are to be encouraged to take the collection of data seriously, then it is desirable to provide feedback to them on what has been learned and on how problem areas/ issues will be addressed. With regard to academic review, this needs to be handled transparently and sensitively since it has the potential to impact negatively on the academic staff members concerned. When an institutional quality unit

(or equivalent) responsible for managing internal reviews gathers data from students and other stakeholders, those responsible for offering the programme or course need to have access to these data and be provided with the opportunity to respond to them. Only when student opinion data are triangulated with reports from those responsible for designing and offering the course, and ideally also with peer review reports, can a review or evaluation be considered reliable and valid.

While programme evaluation usually has a summative purpose, the review of courses or modules should ideally be conducted while the course or module is being taught. This allows the HEI to address problems or gaps identified, while students still have the opportunity to derive maximum benefit from the improvement. In such cases, course reviews would be formative in purpose and not hold any punitive consequences for the teaching staff concerned. As stressed above, if the goal of QA is improvement of teaching practice, then it is important that institutional managers establish quality management systems that ‘ring-fence’ formative or improvement-oriented review at the level of the course. This is not to say that the findings of formative course review cannot be used for summative purposes – for example, to demonstrate improvements during summative programme evaluation. It is simply to emphasise that those involved in formative review must have given their consent for the data to be used for summative purposes. The key findings of course reviews can be collated, sanitised and aggregated in order to inform a comprehensive review of the programme of which the course or module forms a part. Comprehensive programme evaluations are usually used for summative purposes, allowing decisions to be made about the future of the programme, its accreditation status and, in the case of a public HEI, its funding by the Department of Education (DoE).

A market-based conceptualisation of quality would suggest that the effectiveness and impact of a programme can be judged by measuring the satisfaction of its key stakeholders – i.e. students and graduates, the wider institution and employers. The results of opinion surveys, interviews, focus groups and so on, can also be included in a programme review; however, it should be noted that, apart from the opinions of students, who are participants in the teaching–learning process, such surveys should count as indirect rather than direct measures of the quality of teaching and learning.

A programme’s overall graduation and retention rates<sup>4</sup> provide a quantitative picture of its efficiency. Base-line statistics such as this provide a useful means of routine programme monitoring, i.e. they serve a summative as opposed to diagnostic or improvement-oriented purpose and can alert evaluators to areas for further scrutiny. In an evaluation report, quantitative data should ideally be accompanied by a brief interpretation and explanation. Where discrepancies and irregularities are uncovered, action should be planned and remedial strategies developed and implemented, and the impact of interventions monitored and eventually reviewed.

Many HEIs already have systems of departmental or school review. The HEQC wishes to promote the programme as the unit of analysis for its focus on the QA of teaching and learning. However, the HEQC also wishes to build on institutions’ existing practices,

<sup>4</sup> Throughput data are best analysed using cohort rather than head-count analyses. This is because head-count analysis only works where intake numbers are stable. Given the DoE’s emphasis on the need to widen access and attain greater representivity in student composition, student intakes are unlikely to remain stable.

provided they are sufficiently rigorous and systematic to assure and enhance the quality of teaching and learning. Owing to the vast number of programmes that a multi-purpose institution will have to review within the six year (re-)accreditation cycle mandated by the HEQC, and given the human and financial resource constraints within which many institutions have to work, it is likely that many institutions will continue to conduct their programme reviews via a clustered process, such as a faculty, school or departmental review, wherein a cluster of cognate programmes are reviewed and evaluated in a single process. This layered method of organising a review/ evaluation need not detract from programmes being used as the primary unit of review.



## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

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### QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC REVIEW

The following evaluative questions may be adapted for use in self-evaluating an institution's quality management system for programme and course review:

1. Does the institution have a comprehensive and clearly laid out policy for the QA of its academic offerings? How does the policy allocate responsibility for QA to academic line managers? How does the policy ensure that programmes and courses are reviewed according to a regular, but not onerous, cycle? How does the policy ensure that data gathered at course level are aggregated to feed into programme and/or school reviews? Does the policy provide guidelines on who has access to data and on how data may be used? What provision is in place for the regular review and refinement of the academic review system itself?
2. What guidelines, procedures and support does the institution offer academic managers and teaching staff to ensure the quality and rigour of the academic review process?
3. How does the evaluation method for programme review ensure that data are triangulated to provide a valid review?
4. How is feedback from course and programme reviews used to effect curriculum improvement?
5. How are the findings of review or evaluation made available to stakeholders, particularly students?
6. On the basis of review results, how does the institution provide support to develop further the educational expertise of its academic staff?
7. How does the institution use expert peer review to judge the quality of student learning, to moderate and validate the assessment of students and to evaluate the effectiveness of its curriculum?

### PROGRAMME REVIEW

The following questions may be adapted for use for both internal programme review and the external evaluation of programmes:

1. To what extent are students achieving the intended exit-level learning outcomes or graduate attributes, and demonstrating satisfactory levels of conceptual understanding and knowledge of the discipline or field? Are expert academic or professional peers (as appropriate) satisfied with the relevance and quality of learning achieved by students on the programme?
2. To what extent is the programme aligned<sup>5</sup> with the institution's curriculum development requirements?
3. To what extent are students and recent graduates generally satisfied with the programme as a whole, and with its relevance, delivery and assessment practices in particular?

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<sup>5</sup> See also the discussion of curriculum alignment in the Discussion section of ITL Resource No. 1.

4. To what extent are employers/ the professions/ the community (as appropriate) satisfied with the quality of graduates from the programme?
5. To what extent are members of the programme's teaching team satisfied with the institutional leadership and management of the programme? To what extent are they satisfied with the resources and facilities allocated to them to run the programme?
6. To what extent do the programme's student graduation and retention rates meet the DoE's benchmarks as stipulated in the *National Plan for Higher Education* (Ministry of Education, 2001: 2.3)?<sup>6</sup>
7. To what extent is the programme achieving 'equity of outcomes' or representivity in graduate output (NPHE, 2001: 3.2)?
8. How does the programme review/ evaluation contribute to a well-managed, comprehensive and effective institutional system of internal review and external evaluation?
9. How are feedback and the results of the programme review/ evaluation used to effect improvements to the programme's design and delivery and to develop further the educational expertise of academic staff?

## COURSE REVIEW

Below is a list of the kinds of questions that could be adapted for use for the internal review of academic courses or modules using self-review and peer review or student evaluation. Ideally, the academic staff involved in teaching the course should formulate or select their own evaluative questions and should not feel obliged to 'cover' all aspects of a course review each time they teach it. The evaluative questions listed below could also be adapted for student evaluations (suggestions follow in brackets where applicable). Course reviews should not be onerous to academic staff and should not aim to be comprehensive. They should rather be focused to capture data that can inform the specific, context-related concerns of the teaching staff, with a view to effecting manageable improvements that are owned by the staff concerned.

1. To what extent is the design of the course in alignment with the purpose of the programme and with other programme design elements? [To what extent did each course contribute to the overall purpose and coherence of the programme and to your attainment of the exit-level requirements?]
2. To what extent is the course design in keeping with the institution's curriculum structure requirements? [Was the course well organised and structured?]
3. Have specific learning outcomes and appropriate content selection for the course been defined and communicated to students? To what extent do the learning outcomes contain an appropriate mix of disciplinary and professional knowledge and skills? [Were the goals, learning outcomes and content of the course made clear to you? Do you think they are appropriate to your future career?]

<sup>6</sup> Hereafter: NPHE, 2001.

4. To what extent are the design of the course teaching methods, delivery methods and course materials based on a detailed knowledge of the profile of students enrolled for the course? [How effective were the teaching methods (specify) employed on the course?] [Were the course materials well organised and pitched at the right level for you?]
5. On what basis are teaching and learning methods determined? To what extent do they foster active learning by students?[What opportunities did the course provide for active learning, group interaction, etc.?]
6. To what extent is the course content current, relevant, academically justifiable and sufficiently demanding? [To what extent did you find the course content relevant, stimulating and pitched at the right level?]
7. To what extent is the assessment of students valid and fair? How is provision made for feedback from assessment to inform learning? [Did you find the assessment on the course fair? Did you receive adequate feedback so that you could understand where you had gone wrong? What opportunities were there for you to learn from your mistakes?]
8. To what extent is there curriculum alignment between the learning outcomes, the course content and the teaching–learning methods and assessment tasks? [To what extent do you believe that the teaching methods, course materials, assessment methodology and tasks and student support provided you with a fair chance to succeed on this course?]

# EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS

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## QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF ACADEMIC REVIEW

### **Evaluative Question 1:** Policy for the quality management of academic review

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

##### **Responsibility for quality management**

The institution has appointed a senior manager, usually supported by a quality committee or equivalent, to be responsible for the development and review of policy on quality management and QA and to oversee its implementation. Implementation of the quality management policy is built into the job descriptions of all line managers. The policy has been widely disseminated throughout the institution and is owned by those responsible for its implementation.

Programme Directors (or equivalent) are responsible for planning and conducting the review at programme level and for ensuring that reviews of courses comprising the programme are conducted and that the results are aggregated to inform the review of the programme as a whole. Quality promotion staff are available to advise and assist academic staff in the review process. Responsibility for course review is delegated to course convenors/ designers/ facilitators with the assistance of quality promotion staff. The policy requires Programme Directors or Heads of Departments/ Schools to take responsibility for ensuring that insights from reviews at both programme and course level are recorded, reported and reflected upon and that strengths are built upon and weaknesses addressed.

##### **Review cycles**

The policy provides guidelines regarding the frequency with which review should take place. (This frequency will vary for programme and course review, with courses being reviewed more frequently than programmes.) The review cycle takes account of the HEQC's six-yearly accreditation cycle. At programme level, there is at least one formative review process within a six-year cycle. Formative review of courses and modules takes place more frequently, on an ongoing basis.

##### **The triangulation of data**

The policy makes a distinction between raw data (for example, the results of student opinion/ perception surveys) and a review report wherein processed data from different sources are triangulated, analysed and reflected upon and fed into plans for improvement. The perspectives of those who teach and design the course are included in the triangulation process.

##### **The use of review data**

The policy protects individuals against the untriangulated use of data, not only by making a distinction between raw data and a review report, but also by identifying clear paths of responsibility for quality management and by providing guidelines on who has access to review data. The review process is fully documented and open to scrutiny. The policy stipulates that stakeholders, especially students, are informed about the way review findings have been used to inform development at both programme and course level. Where suggested changes cannot be made, stakeholders are informed of the reasons for this.

Review findings are regularly and systematically used to refine and improve the academic review system itself.

## Evaluative Question 2: Guidelines & support for academic review

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Quality promotion staff with expertise and theoretical understanding of HE and evaluation are available to advise and assist academics and academic managers in the review process. Training in evaluation is also available as part of a staff development programme.

Hardware/ software is available to assist academic staff in the design, processing and analysis of survey instruments.

Review is understood as part of an ongoing cycle involving the examination and interrogation of practice, and is not associated with sanctions or threats, provided that insights derived from evaluation are acted upon.

The ongoing professional development of academic staff and those who support them (e.g. quality promotion staff) is a priority for the institution.

## Evaluative Question 3: Review method

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

In any review, whether at programme or course level, data from a number of perspectives are triangulated in order to gain a holistic understanding. At programme level, the perspectives of students, those teaching on the programme, external examiners and, as appropriate, other stakeholders (e.g. professional bodies, employers), are sought. At course level, the perspectives of students, course/ module convenors and, ideally, peers are sought.

A variety of review instruments is used to collect data, depending on the size of the group whose perspective is sought and the nature of the questions being asked. These review instruments could include questionnaires comprising both closed- and open-ended questions, focus group interviews and individual interviews, as well as other, more informal, data collection tools, which allow data to be collected on an ongoing basis.

Analysis of data from varying sources is undertaken both quantitatively and qualitatively and is appropriate to the nature of the questions asked and the amount of data collected. The validity of conclusions drawn from review data is interrogated in the same way as conclusions drawn from research would be validated.

## Evaluative Question 4: Use of feedback for curriculum improvement

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The review process requires that areas of weakness are identified and addressed through the development of detailed plans for improvement. These plans are documented as part of the review report. The implementation of these plans is resourced and monitored by Programme Directors and/or Heads of Departments/ Schools. Further review/ evaluation takes place to check on the efficacy of improvements.

The review process also requires that strengths are examined in order to build on them. Plans to further develop areas of strength are monitored by programme managers.

## Evaluative Question 5: Dissemination of review findings

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The programme review report is made available to stakeholders in draft form for comment. In the case of students, the report is made available in a mediated form and is communicated

directly to the students on the programme or through their representatives. Stakeholders are invited to comment on the draft report and these comments are considered before the report is finalised and plans for improvement implemented.

At course level, course convenors provide feedback to class representatives and, where time permits, to entire classes. The course review report is available for perusal by students. Comments from students are considered in the finalising of the report.

## Evaluative Question 6: Staff development and support

### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Educational expertise is available to support academic staff in interpreting review findings and in making plans for improvement. Ideally such plans should be based on sound learning theory. Such support for academic staff is available in the form of individual consultations if necessary. Once plans for improvement have been developed, support is provided to ensure that those working on the curriculum have the necessary skills and understandings to carry through the improvement. The support provided is ongoing and usually informal, but may link to a formal staff development programme. The provision of support is planned as part of the review process.

## Evaluative Question 7: Peer review

### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

#### **The assessment of students at course level**

##### Internal examiners (or 'assessors' in SAQA terminology)

The academic staff who teach a course/ module are responsible for designing, running and marking both formative and summative student assessments, for recording the results and for giving feedback to students.

Traditionally, academic staff have been considered competent to assess students by virtue of their academic qualifications, but in future professional training in assessment should become a requirement e.g. the confirmation of a permanent post for new staff could be conditional on acquiring assessment expertise.

The institution makes provision for staff development in assessment, especially for new staff members.

##### Internal examiners (or 'internal moderators' in SAQA terminology)

For summative assessment on a course, and especially where more than one marker is involved, it is recommended that at least 50% of the final marks are moderated via a system of internal moderation (i.e. the checking of the reliability of the marking). Traditionally this has been done after the marking is completed, by another academic, who did not teach on the course, and usually from the same department. But for large classes it is acceptable and more efficient for the marking team, led by the course convenor, to work together and compare and moderate one another's marking as the marking proceeds.

#### **The assessment of students at exit qualifications**

##### External examiners (or 'external moderators' in SAQA terminology)

It is recommended that for summative assessment for exit qualifications external examiners are appointed to examine at least 60% of the credits at the exit level at which a qualification is awarded (e.g. for summative assessment of a Bachelor's degree at level 7 of the NQF, 72 credits are externally examined).

The institution has clear criteria for the appointment of external examiners. For example: external examiners are independent experts in their fields with qualifications at least one level above the qualification being examined (except of course for Doctoral level), and should be changed every three years to ensure the integrity of the examiner-moderator relationship. External examiners are approved by Senate and responsible to Senate.

The institution provides documentation on the curriculum and all relevant assessments and guidelines or a format to assist external examiners in the completion of their reports. Completed external examiner reports are returned to the academic concerned and also copied to the Programme Director or Head of Department/ School. Where problems are highlighted, these are discussed with the academic concerned and the academic manager ensures that agreed improvements are effected.

External examiners have the right to adjust marks and are required to approve the final marks list for the qualification concerned. Ideally they also comment on:

- The validity of the assessment instruments in relation to the specified learning outcomes (ideally prior to their implementation) and assessment criteria;
- The quality of student learning and the standard of student attainment across the spectrum of results;
- The reliability of the marking process;
- The quality of feedback given to students; and
- Any concerns or irregularities with respect to the observation of institutional/ professional regulations.

Remuneration for external examiners is commensurate with the extent of their duties.

#### **The validation of a programme's assessment strategies**

##### Programme evaluators

Programme evaluators are the discipline/ professional experts who form part of an external programme evaluation team. They may be appointed by either the institution, the HEQC or another ETQA such as a professional body.

The institution or evaluating agency provides guidelines or a format outlining evaluators' functions and clear criteria for their appointment. For example: evaluators are independent, recognised experts in their fields and have qualifications or expertise and experience in curriculum and assessment.

The functions of programme evaluators include:

- Evaluating the curriculum design, knowledge base and assessment strategy for the programme as a whole, in relation to its purpose, exit-level outcomes and relevant generic qualification standard;
- Judging the appropriateness and validity of integrated assessments and the standard of samples of student performance on these;
- Reviewing external examiners' reports on courses within the programme for the period under review and ensuring that their recommendations have been considered and acted upon;
- Commenting on the overall progression and graduation rates for the programme in relation to its purpose and student intake;
- Checking that institutional and professional regulations and procedures for assessment have been adhered to;



- Making recommendations for the improvement of the programme to the relevant academic and academic managers; and
- If appointed by the HEQC: making recommendations on accreditation status to the HEQC's Accreditation Committee.

Remuneration for programme evaluators is commensurate with the extent of their duties.

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- Evaluating the curriculum design, knowledge base and assessment strategy for the programme as a whole, in relation to its purpose, exit-level outcomes and relevant generic qualification standard;
- Judging the appropriateness and validity of integrated assessments and the standard of samples of student performance on these;
- Reviewing external examiners' reports on courses within the programme for the period under review and ensuring that their recommendations have been considered and acted upon;
- Commenting on the overall progression and graduation rates for the programme in relation to its purpose and student intake;
- Checking that institutional and professional regulations and procedures for assessment have been adhered to;
- Making recommendations for the improvement of the programme to the relevant academic and academic managers; and
- If appointed by the HEQC: making recommendations on accreditation status to the HEQC's Accreditation Committee.

Remuneration for programme evaluators is commensurate with the extent of their duties.

## PROGRAMME REVIEW

### Evaluative Question 1: Effectiveness: quality of student learning

#### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

External examiners' reports provide a range of evidence:

- That assessed student work is properly sampled (particularly on integrated assessments at qualification exit points from the programme);
- That qualifying students are attaining the full range of specified exit-level learning outcomes; and
- That students are demonstrating appropriate levels of conceptual understanding and disciplinary or professional knowledge.

Samples of student performances are judged by expert peers (external examiners or programme evaluators), to meet disciplinary/ professional standards. Such judgments take account of the proposed level descriptor in the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (2004)<sup>7</sup> for the level of the qualification awarded and, where applicable, also take account of the relevant generic qualification standard registered on the NQF.

For key assessments the distribution of scores across the cohort is appropriate.

<sup>7</sup> *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework: Draft for Discussion* (Ministry of Education: 2004) – hereafter, HEQF, 2004 – which replaced the *New Academic Policy*, or NAP (2002). Note that at the time of publishing these Resources the HEQF had not yet been finalised.

## Evaluative Question 2: Effectiveness: curriculum alignment

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Scrutiny of curriculum and assessment documentation (by expert peers, e.g. external examiners) confirms that there is alignment between programme content, teaching and learning methods, entry requirements, levels of student preparedness, exit-level outcomes and assessment methods and criteria. These linkages are clearly communicated in a timely fashion to students on the programme.

## Evaluative Question 3: Student feedback

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Student/ graduate opinion surveys conducted on the programme's core modules or on the programme as a whole indicate that the majority of students are satisfied with the programme in general and with its delivery and assessment practices in particular. Where student dissatisfaction has been expressed, there is evidence to show that the teaching staff concerned have interpreted this, resulting in efforts to address or improve the situation.

## Evaluative Question 4: External stakeholder feedback

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Opinion surveys of external stakeholders of the programme are conducted where appropriate and feasible. These indicate that stakeholders are satisfied with the programme's curriculum and with the competence of its graduates. Where stakeholder dissatisfaction has been expressed, there is evidence to show that efforts have been made to address/ improve the problems identified.

(For universities of technology: independent advisory boards/ committees could play a central role in providing external stakeholder feedback.)

## Evaluative Question 5: Programme team feedback

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

There is evidence to show that staff who teach on the programme are satisfied with the leadership and management of the programme provided by their department/ school/ faculty.

The programme team members are also satisfied with the teaching resources, facilities and support and development provided for them by the institution/ faculty/ school/ department.

## Evaluative Question 6: Efficiency: graduation & retention rates

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Programme managers report on their graduation (and retention) rates for the programme overall. Taking the nature of their student intake into account, programme managers have developed plans and strategies for enabling the programme to meet the DoE's graduation and retention benchmarks in the medium-term (e.g. graduation rates for three-year programmes should be 25% of the programme's total enrolment, according to the NPHE, 2001: 2.3).

## Evaluative Question 7: Equity: representivity in graduate output

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The programme can justify its race and gender profile in relation to the historical profile of its field and in relation to institutional equity targets. There is evidence to show increasing representivity on the programme and that the composition of the qualifying class increasingly resembles that of the entering class (i.e. increased representivity in intake leads to increased representivity in graduate output).

## Evaluative Question 8: System of programme review

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution has established a quality management system for all its programmes, which is based on the triangulation of data gathered from a range of sources, such as: programme evaluators' reports; external examiners' reports on the assessment of students; student opinion data; external stakeholder opinion (as appropriate); and, most importantly, self-reflection by programme teams and by teaching staff on their teaching practice. The HEI has demonstrated the capacity to evaluate and strengthen its own QA procedures.

## Evaluative Question 9: Implementation of improvement plans

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution's quality management system for programme review involves clear reporting lines and accountability, which ensures that review results are reported up the management system and followed up with monitored improvement plans. These plans are based on sound education theory and supported by resource provision and staff development. Review and evaluation results are explicitly fed into the next planning cycle.

There are effective and transparent procedures for closing down a course or programme, where accreditation has been withdrawn by the HEQC or the HEI closes down the course on some other grounds.

## COURSE REVIEW

## Evaluative Question 1: Alignment with the programme

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

It is evident that the specific learning outcomes and content of the course contribute to students' attainment of the programme's exit-level qualification(s).

The contribution of the course to the programme in terms of the development of a knowledge base and academic or professional skills and their sequencing is evident.

The relationships and rules of combination between this course and other courses on the programme are clear.

## Evaluative Question 2: Conformity to institutional curriculum development requirements

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### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The course/ module meets the institution's curriculum planning and design requirements such as module size, credit ratings, rules of combination, entry requirements, assessment regulations, etc.

## Evaluative Question 3: Specific learning outcomes

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### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Learning outcomes and content for the course are specified and communicated in public documents such as programme handbooks, course outlines and academic calendars.

The learning outcomes are appropriate for the level of the course, for its content and for its function in the programme as a whole.

The learning outcomes include the development of disciplinary and professional skills as well as the development of an appropriate knowledge and conceptual base.

## Evaluative Question 4: Appropriateness for student profile

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### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Course designers have a good understanding of the profile of the target group of students (e.g. in terms of students' prior learning experiences, levels of language proficiency, content knowledge, academic skills and current learning environment).

The choice of teaching–learning methods, course materials, media, technology, delivery methods, estimated number of notional study hours, pacing and sequencing are made primarily on the basis of the student profile and student learning needs, and are varied and flexible to accommodate a diversity of students.

## Evaluative Question 5: Teaching–learning methods

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### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Teaching–learning methods are carefully considered and theoretically justified. They are appropriate to the subject matter, student profile and delivery method. There is evidence of innovation in teaching–learning methods and deliberate attempts to encourage and develop deep (as opposed to surface) approaches to learning in students.

## Evaluative Question 6: Course content

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### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The content selected for the course provides sufficient depth and breadth to contribute to the purpose of the course and programme.

The course content is academically acceptable and up to date and provides students with an adequate conceptual framework and knowledge base.

The quantity and complexity of the content is appropriate to the level of the course and does not unnecessarily burden students or duplicate content in other (required) courses.

## Evaluative Question 7: Assessment of students

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Assessment tasks and criteria are aligned with the course learning outcomes and content.

The course provides opportunities for formative assessment with detailed feedback to students.

## Evaluative Question 8: Curriculum alignment

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The course design and its implementation ensure that the course content, teaching and learning content and methods and materials, and student support provide students with a fair chance of attaining the learning outcomes specified for the course and of demonstrating this through assessment.

## SUGGESTED SOURCES OF DATA FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND REVIEW

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These suggestions are not intended to be used as a checklist. They are offered rather to assist and guide institutions on what may be appropriate sources of data that constitute legitimate forms of evidence. This list will obviously need to be adjusted depending on the nature and context of the programme or course review under consideration.

### PROGRAMME REVIEW

1. Institutional quality management policy and teaching and learning plan;
2. Documentation on the registration and accreditation status of the programme and its qualifications;
3. Organogram showing the programme structure, the courses/ modules comprising the programme, their titles, levels and credit rating and the exit qualifications from the programme;
4. Programme handbook, course outlines and other information made available to students;
5. Curriculum and assessment documentation to demonstrate extent of curriculum alignment; these should include all exit-level learning outcomes, integrated assessment tasks and criteria and a sample of assessed student work;
6. Reports from programme evaluators and external examiners on summative assessment practices (particularly for exit qualifications), which comment on the quality of student achievement and also on the extent of curriculum alignment;
7. Graduation rates for the programme as a whole, preferably using cohort analyses;
8. Retention rates for years 1 and 2;
9. Performance profiles (i.e. distribution of scores across cohort) for key modules or assessment events;
10. Graduation and retention rates by race and gender groupings;
11. Analysed results of student opinion surveys;
12. Analysed results of external stakeholder opinion surveys (as appropriate);
13. Analysed results of programme team opinion surveys and self-evaluations;
14. Evidence of educational research and development (including publications);
15. Description of the internal quality management system for programme and course review and evaluation, including examples of data-gathering instruments and completed course review reports;
16. Improvement plans and, where relevant, evidence of their implementation;
17. Internal programme review reports; and
18. External programme evaluation reports.

## COURSE REVIEW

1. Organogram showing the programme structure, the courses/ modules comprising the programme, their titles, levels and credit-rating, and the programme's exit qualifications;
2. Programme handbook, course outlines and other information made available to students;
3. Curriculum and assessment documentation to demonstrate the extent of curriculum alignment;
4. Student profile providing race and gender breakdown;
5. Relevant reports from internal and external examiners;
6. Course throughput rates;
7. Analysed results of student opinion data; and
8. Self-evaluation report (including an improvement plan) by the course convenor.

## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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CHE	Council on Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
ITL	Improving Teaching & Learning
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality Assurance



## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

**course/ module review** refers to the internal self-evaluation procedures that an HEI undertakes to monitor and reflect on the outcomes of the education it provides through its courses/ modules. The findings of course reviews should feed into the reviews of the programmes of which they form a part.

**curriculum alignment** refers to the principle of ensuring that the purpose of a programme (or module) is supported by the content selection, learning outcomes, teaching–learning methods and assessment practices used to deliver it.

**formative** evaluative activities are those undertaken to inform improvement, in this case of teaching and learning and the curriculum.

**programme** A programme is defined as follows in the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (HEQF, Ministry of Education, 2004: 7):

A programme is a purposeful and structured set of learning experiences that leads to a qualification. Programmes may be discipline-based, professional, career-focused, or trans-, inter-or multi-disciplinary in nature. A programme has recognized entry and exit points. All taught higher education programmes should have core and elective elements. This requirement is optional for research-based programmes. The internal organization of programme is otherwise not prescribed by this document.<sup>8</sup>

It should be noted that the DoE is here proposing a 1:1 correspondence between a programme and a qualification. That is to say, a particular programme should lead to one and only one qualification, while a particular qualification should be attained through a single route only, namely a specific programme.

### Terms for constituent parts of programmes

In all cases in these Resources, the use of the term ‘course’ can be replaced with the term ‘module’. While most HEIs in South Africa have adopted a modular curriculum structure, it was decided, in compiling these Resources, to retain the term ‘course’ as it is more inclusive and remains in common use among academics. The term ‘subject’ is sometimes used, particularly with reference to parts of vocationally oriented programmes.

**programme evaluation** refers to the external QA procedures undertaken by an external agency (e.g. expert peers, the HEQC or delegated partner ETQA) to make an independent assessment of a programme’s outcomes and impact and/or to validate the findings of an internal programme review.

**programme review** refers to the internal self-evaluation procedures that an HEI undertakes to monitor and reflect on the outcomes and impact of its academic programmes. The findings of programme reviews should feed into the institutional quality management system, where decisions are taken and action for improvement planned and resourced. For example, the findings from a targeted sample of programme review processes could provide critical planning information, especially in the contexts of fundamental restructuring or mergers.

**quality management of academic review** refers to the internal quality management system that an HEI establishes to monitor, review and improve its programmes and courses.

**summative** evaluative activities are those undertaken to inform a judgment or summary decision, in this case on the effectiveness of a programme.

<sup>8</sup> That is, the HEQF.

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# 3

## ITL Resource No. 3

### Access and Admissions

Each of the seven Improving Teaching & Learning Resources can be read and used individually, although there are cross-references as some are closely related. However, it is important to read the *Introduction*, as it deals with the purpose of the Resources and how they relate to the Higher Education Quality Committee's quality assurance mandate and its quality promotion and capacity development activities.

#### In this Resource...

- **Focus Area**
- **Key Concept** (access; enrolment; admissions management; selection and placement)
- **Rationale**
- **Discussion**
- **Evaluative Questions**
- **Evaluative Questions and Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**
- **Suggested Data Sources for Self-evaluation and Review**
- **Abbreviations and Acronyms**
- **Glossary of Terms** (access; admissions management; enrolment; matriculation endorsement; matriculation exemption; selection and placement)
- **References and Suggested Reading**

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## FOREWORD

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The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) prioritised quality issues in teaching and learning very early on in the development of its quality assurance systems. Mandated by legislation to conduct institutional audits and programme accreditation and to promote quality and quality assurance, the HEQC initiated a project in 2002 aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

The project on teaching and learning was intended to refocus attention on one of the core functions of higher education in an environment where the restructuring of higher education had given much attention to issues such as governance, financing and the 'size and shape' of the system. The project also reflected the importance of quality-related capacity development in the work of the HEQC, especially in a context where historical disadvantage impacts on the capacities of academic staff to plan and deliver good quality programmes and on the capacities of students to benefit from them. These issues needed to be addressed and to be brought to the centre of the debate about the purposes of a new quality assurance system for South Africa. Moreover, the project fitted in with international debates and developments in higher education, which were prioritising the learning experiences of students as well as giving increased attention to the professionalisation of higher education teaching and to staff development and support.

The HEQC set up the project in a way that would involve a number of role-players. It was important to draw on teaching and learning expertise in higher education as well as to maximise the impact of those involved within higher education institutions. The Resources for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning should be seen therefore as the fruit of an extensive collaboration between the HEQC, a large number of experts and practitioners and a range of public and private higher education institutions.

It is hoped that the Resources will be adapted creatively for a number of purposes and used by higher education practitioners individually and in teams in the process of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to give effect to the transformation objectives in the restructuring of higher education, especially in relation to redress and equity and to the responsiveness of higher education to national goals and challenges.

The HEQC looks forward to further cooperation with key partners in higher education in effectively developing and using the Resources. We would like to acknowledge that funding for the project and this publication was made available by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation.

Dr Mala Singh  
Executive Director  
November 2004

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources are the product of an ongoing collaboration between the HEQC and a wide range of academics based in private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). These included several academics from other countries that assisted with the project or provided advice. The 14 regional workshops at which the draft Resources were introduced and discussed in 2003 were generously hosted by public HEIs.

## FOCUS AREA

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This ITL Resource on *Access & Admissions* deals with institutional policy and practice relating to access management, in respect of the admission, selection and placement of students. These policies and practices are crucial in determining an institution's 'size' (the number of students it enrolls), its student composition (the kinds of students it targets and enrolls) and its 'shape' (the types of programmes into which students are placed). Clearly, admissions policies also impact at the programme level, but this Resource does not deal directly with entry requirements for specific programmes; that aspect of quality is assured through the HEQC's procedures for programme accreditation and re-accreditation. This Resource relates closely to, and should be used in conjunction with, ITL Resource No. 4 on *Student Development & Support*, which deals with curriculum and learning environment issues aimed at ensuring that access leads to academic success.

## KEY CONCEPTS

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The following concepts are used to describe the different dimensions of institutional admissions policy and practice, which form part of an access management strategy:

### Access

The widening of higher education (HE) access is an equity-driven concern and relates to the strategies and procedures that an institution undertakes to make its educational services accessible to a diversity of students. This usually involves adjusting traditional entry requirements. It also involves developing flexible entry requirements and selection mechanisms, such as assessment for purposes of the recognition of prior learning (RPL), institutional- or programme-specific entry tests or alternative admissions procedures, and mature age exemptions. The widening of access further involves intensive curriculum development, and often staff development as well, both to ensure that HE curricula are responsive to the learning needs of a diverse student intake and to enhance retention and

graduation rates. (The provision of curriculum enrichment opportunities and academic development is dealt with in detail in Resource No. 4 on *Student Development & Support*). The challenge of widening access and participation is to ensure that those to whom access is granted have a fair chance of academic success.

In the *National Plan for Higher Education* (Ministry of Education, 2001a),<sup>1</sup> the Department of Education (DoE) has set equity targets for the HE system as a whole, including, for example, the need to move towards race and gender representivity in enrolment and to address skewed representation in science, engineering and technology (SET), business and commerce, and postgraduate programmes in particular. The NPHE also emphasises the need to ensure that representivity in enrolment leads to representivity in graduate output (NPHE, 2001: 3.2). While enrolment statistics for individual institutions are unlikely to be able to mirror the DoE's national system targets, institutions are expected to set their own enrolment targets, which include equity targets, taking national enrolment targets into account.

## Enrolment

Enrolment refers to the regulation and management of admissions, usually at national level. For example, in the NPHE (2001: 2.2), the DoE has set national enrolment targets in terms of 'size' (a participation rate in HE of the 20–24 year age group of 20% to be achieved over the next 10–15 years), and 'shape' (enrolments to be 40% in the humanities, 30% in business and commerce and 30% in SET over the next 10–15 years). However, institutional enrolment targets and results will be affected by a range of factors over which institutions do not always exercise control; examples include historical, geographical and socio-economic contexts, supply and demand factors, competition from other institutions, institutional missions and approved 'Programme and Qualification Mix' (PQM) plans.

## Admissions management

This refers to the policies and procedures that an institution sets up to manage the admission, selection and placement of students. Admissions management includes the systems, structures, staff and services that an institution establishes to recruit students, process applications, select and place students on particular programmes, and integrate academic acceptance with adequate student support and financial and housing services, and so on.

## Selection and placement

This is the heart of any admissions policy and involves the specific criteria and procedures that an HEI uses to select applicants and to place them in a particular programme (e.g. foundation or extended curriculum, as appropriate) of study.

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<sup>1</sup> Hereafter: NPHE (2001).

## RATIONALE

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In developed countries during the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, public HE was seen as a vehicle for offering individuals equality of opportunity and the possibility of social mobility. The extent to which this goal has been achieved is debatable. However, in the South African post-apartheid context there is a strong imperative for public HEIs to commit themselves to furthering social justice through widening access and increasing representivity. The HEQC has identified transformation as underpinning its conceptualisation of quality, and a critical element of this is the part played by HE in equity and redress. Likewise, the promotion of 'equity of access and outcomes' and the 'redress of past inequalities through ensuring that student, graduate and staff profiles reflect the demographic composition of South African society' is one of the DoE's strategic objectives for the transformation of the HE system (see NPHE, 2001, and *The Transformation and Reconstruction of the Higher Education System*, DoE, 2002g).

In the NPHE (2001: 3.2), the DoE makes explicit its position on access and equity. As noted above, the DoE suggests that the current participation rate of 15% of the 20–24 year old cohort is too low and that, as a middle income country, South Africa should achieve a participation rate of at least 20% over the next 10–15 years. The participation of African and Coloured students in HE was estimated in 2002 as being at 12% (see DoE, 2002g: 3.1.1). One significant contributing factor is the weak output of the schooling system. For example, in the 2002 Senior Certificate results, 68.9% of all who wrote the examination gained a Senior Certificate, while only 24.5% of these obtained matriculation with endorsement (the official entry requirement for universities). The latter is estimated to be less than 10% of the Grade 9 school cohort (SAUVCA–CTP, 2003: 147). Although between 1993 and 2000 the proportion of African students in the HE system increased from 40% to 60%, such statistics hide the fact that the majority of African students are enrolled in distance education humanities courses and teacher training programmes. The proportion of African students in SET and business and commerce programmes remains low (Badat, 2004: 21). In the NPHE, the DoE urges institutions (particularly those where Black students constitute less than 50% of the total enrolment) to establish targets and strategies for achieving the national benchmarks in order to move towards equity in the demographic composition of their student bodies.

With respect to gender, it is estimated that, in 2000, 53% of all students in universities and what were formerly designated as technikons (now universities of technology) were female. But, as is the case for African students, females are seriously under-represented in 'hard' areas such as SET and business and commerce and are also under-represented in postgraduate studies (Cloete and Bunting, 2000: 17). The DoE is therefore also concerned that equity targets ensure that Black and women students are selected and placed in those programmes where they are currently under-represented (see DoE, 2002g: 3.1.2).

The concept of 'disadvantage' should be defined by class as well as race and gender. This suggests that it is inadequate simply to target Black and women students for access, but that institutions should also aim to admit students who have attended disadvantaged schools (an indicator of lower class status). This can be done by identifying rural and township schools and by using alternative admission routes to admit a certain quota of students from such schools.

The term ‘underprepared students’ is widely used, but this concept should be used together with that of ‘underprepared institutions’. Both concepts should be employed to examine dimensions of underpreparedness other than the academic, such as cultural and social.

## DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. **Kathy Luckett**, the coordinator of the working group, was asked to write this section so as to reflect on issues that were discussed by the working group in the course of developing the first draft of the Resources.

Note that the views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

Clearly, an institution’s admissions policy is an obvious place to look for evidence for or indicators of the realisation of the national transformatory goals and values outlined above. However, the challenge for HEIs in South Africa is not simply to open access, but to do so in ways that are responsible, financially feasible and academically sustainable. The widening of access inevitably requires additional resources to be spent on students who are underprepared for HE study. Institutions have to weigh up these national demands for equity with the need to act responsibly towards the student (who may incur debts and not succeed at HE studies), towards the state (that may subsidise and provide financial aid for the student) and towards its teaching staff (who are required to carry additional teaching demands). HEIs also have to balance social justice demands with other goals and purposes of HE, such as the need to produce internationally recognised research and high quality graduates.

Some of the tensions around access are recognised by the DoE in the NPHE, where the Department acknowledges that it will be difficult to significantly increase the annual intake of non-traditional students in the short- to medium-term (2001: 22), because of the chronic mismatch between output from the schooling system and HE entry requirements, for universities in particular. Rather, the DoE wants in the medium-term to focus on improving the efficiency of the HE system in terms of improving graduation and retention rates, particularly the disproportionately high Black student failure and drop-out rates. The DoE sets a national target to improve graduation rates over the next 10–15 years to 25% of the total enrolment for three-year programmes. Given that Black student failure and drop-out rates are disproportionately high and that SET and business/ commerce programmes generally have even higher failure rates, there is a potential tension between the widening of access and attaining a better ‘shape’, and the achievement of greater efficiency. However, past practice would suggest that the most effective solution to this problem is to *support* the widening of access with comprehensive, sustained, high quality curriculum interventions, which develop students’ general academic and cognitive skills, their language competence and their capacity for self-directed learning, in the context of



mainstream learning; thus ensuring such students' eventual success in HE (see Resource No. 4 on *Student Development & Support*).

Finally, it should be noted that, given the different histories of HEIs in South Africa and their consequent differences in student intake and composition, issues of access and admissions are realised in very different institutional contexts. The complexity and challenge of access issues will be compounded in the context of merged institutions (see below).

## THE CURRENT ADMISSIONS POLICY CONTEXT

The Higher Education Act (1997)<sup>2</sup> does not specify a minimum admissions requirement for HE study; but it does require that 'the admissions policy of a public higher education institution must provide for the redress of past inequalities'. While providing for the continuation of current admissions arrangements to public HEIs, as administered by the Matriculation Board of the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA)<sup>3</sup> and by the Committee of Technikon Principals (CTP), the HE Act re-affirms the right of public HEIs to determine their own admissions policies subject to the provisions of the Act. This includes the right to determine entrance requirements for particular programmes, student numbers for particular programmes and the manner of their selection. Public HEIs are obliged to publish their admissions policies. The HE Act does not attempt to set a legislative framework for admission to private HEIs; in the case of the latter, it is assumed that when applying for registration (with the registrar of private HEIs), information concerning admissions requirements must be furnished.

Currently, admissions requirements are as follows:

### Admission to Universities of Technology<sup>4</sup>

Admissions requirements for study at universities of technology are determined in the Joint Statute for Technikons by the CTP. Currently, a learner must be in possession of a Senior Certificate to be eligible to enrol for diploma study at a university of technology. Admissions requirements for study at universities of technology can also be a National Certificate N3 with passes in official languages and passes of a minimum of 40% in at least four subjects, or a National Certificate N4 with passes in at least four appropriate subjects attained with 50% or more provided that there is proof of communicative competence in the institution's medium of instruction. These requirements will be amended once the Further Education and Training Certificate (FETC) qualification is finalised.

The statute also makes provision for admission of students in respect of work experience, age and maturity, as well as for those students with foreign qualifications (in particular from the Southern African Development Community, or SADC) region. Universities of technology are also empowered to set additional admissions requirements for specific programmes. For example, programmes that involve the study of mathematics and science often have such additional requirements. Contrary to the situation at universities, universities of technology do not distinguish between admissions requirements for diploma and degree study. This is because the admissions requirement for the Bachelor of Technology (BTech) degree is currently an appropriate National Diploma (NDip) or equivalent.

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter: HE Act (1997).

<sup>3</sup> The statutory responsibilities of the Matriculation Board expired at the end of 2004.

<sup>4</sup> Formerly designated as technikons.

## Admission to Universities:

To register for degree study at a public university in South Africa, a student needs to be in possession of a Senior Certificate with a matriculation endorsement or a certificate of complete or conditional matriculation exemption. The ministerially approved regulations published in terms of the provisions of Section 74 of the HE Act (1997), as amended, set out the criteria and rules under which the various types of certificates of endorsement, complete and conditional exemption may be granted. The administration of this admissions policy is undertaken, on behalf of the universities, by the Matriculation Board of SAUVCA. The rules governing both endorsement and exemption status are extremely complex, especially in terms of the required combinations of Grade 12 subjects. Some universities also offer initial diplomas, e.g. in the case of teacher education. For these programmes, students in possession of only a Senior Certificate may be admitted to a university.

Universities are also allowed to set additional admissions requirements – that is, over and above the minimum mentioned above – for specific programmes. This is established practice for professional degrees, particularly for the health professions. In most cases this has been due to infrastructural limitations on places and to agreements between the universities and the professional board/ council in question. In those programmes where mathematics and science feature strongly, it is common practice for universities to specify minimum Higher Grade Senior Certificate performance levels in these subjects. More recently, as universities have developed more focused programmes in response to demands for greater relevance and responsiveness, this practice has become increasingly widespread. A growing number of universities now also specify additional minimum requirements for language.

During the 1990s, exceptions to this admissions policy were allowed. Indeed, the number of students admitted by exception is on the increase owing to the lack of fit between current policy, the government's strong equity agenda and the reality that the number of students exiting the schooling system with matriculation endorsement or exemption is on the decline. The Joint Statute of the Universities allows the Matriculation Board to issue a certificate of conditional exemption 'to a person who, in the opinion of the senate of a university, has demonstrated, in a selection process approved by that senate, that he or she is suitable for admission to bachelor's degree studies, which certificate shall be valid for admission to that university only'. This practice, known as Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption,<sup>5</sup> has been used with increasing frequency in the past few years as universities have responded to falling student numbers and the inadequate matriculated output from the schooling system. The granting of Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption plus the provision of a foundation programme could be viewed as a form of RPL, in that the university concerned admits students who do not meet the statutory admissions requirements, provides them with a form of appropriate prior learning (the foundation programme) and then assesses and recognises this prior learning as the equivalent of a Senior Certificate with endorsement i.e. exemption.

<sup>5</sup> In the case of private HEIs, it is usually the management or academic board of the institution that would make decisions about admissions and alternative admissions requirements.

Also under the Senate Discretionary Conditional Exemption concession, some universities have introduced institution-specific entrance tests for prospective students. In most cases, all students with a Senior Certificate below a certain aggregate are required to write these tests. The results are normally used to assist university administrators in making alternative admissions and placement decisions. This development is due largely to the now widely accepted fact that the Senior Certificate is only a reliable predictor of academic performance for those students within the top range of scores. Admissions based solely on Senior Certificate results for those within the lower range of scores are therefore believed to exclude unfairly many students with academic potential.

## RECENT POLICY INITIATIVES THAT WILL IMPACT ON ADMISSIONS POLICIES

Below, we discuss more recent policy initiatives that will have an impact on institutional admissions policies.

### South African Qualifications Authority

SAQA's requirement that all qualification specifications for registration on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) include the recognition of prior learning (RPL) as a means of entry to the programme leading to the specified qualification poses a challenge to HEIs. Recognising prior learning (or current competence) is promoted as a strategy for increasing access to non-traditional, mature students. The DoE suggests in the NPHE (2001) that increasing access for workers, mature learners and disabled learners is an important goal in its own right. However, currently in HE, with the exception of a few successful innovations, the goal of implementing RPL remains unrealised on any significant scale. This is due both to the contested nature of some of the assumptions on which RPL is based and to the high levels of resources and assessment expertise that it entails. If HEIs are to take up the RPL challenge responsibly, they will need to integrate RPL into their access and curriculum development policies and strategies. They will also need to develop RPL selection instruments and assessment protocols based on the specification of entry requirements in terms of generic learning outcomes. Furthermore, institutions will need to set aside dedicated human and financial resources for counselling, educational interventions and labour-intensive assessment procedures. These are all necessary if applicants are to be enabled to develop protocols such as learning portfolios, in which they articulate prior experiential learning (usually tacit and context-dependent) in recognisable, explicit and abstract academic discourse. The HEQC devolves responsibility for the quality assurance (QA) of RPL to HEIs, provided that they furnish sufficient evidence of having established effective quality management systems in that area.

SAQA has also challenged traditional assumptions about school-leaving requirements. In its *FETC Policy Document* (April, 2001), SAQA has proposed the abolition of the Higher/ Standard/ Lower Grade distinction made in the current Senior Certificate examination and recommended that a simple pass in the FETC be the statutory minimum requirement for admission to all institutions in the HE sector. SAQA also regards the endorsement/ exemption requirement on the Senior Certificate for admission to universities as an obstacle to widening access.

## The Higher Education Qualifications Framework

In 2001 the Council on Higher Education (CHE) produced *A New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications Discussion Document* (released by the DoE in 2002 and known as the 'NAP' document), which proposed how the NQF could accommodate a structured qualification sub-system for HE which would supersede existing HE regulations.<sup>6</sup> A key objective was to facilitate vertical, diagonal and horizontal progression. One proposal advanced in the NAP was to adopt a 'nested approach' to standards-setting in an attempt to protect the centre of the nest (the actual programme that gets delivered) from undue bureaucratic interference, and to retain for academics the authority to design, teach, assess and evaluate their own programmes. In July 2004, the DoE published *The Higher Education Qualifications Framework*<sup>7</sup> with a view to arriving at a final decision. The HEQF accepts the 'nested' approach and supports the proposal that the NQF will have 10 levels (with HE on levels 5–10), each defined by broad level descriptors in terms of applied competence and autonomy of learning. The designation of each qualification type is also stated.

## The Funding of Public Higher Education: A New Framework<sup>8</sup>

The DoE has indicated in its new funding framework that it will allocate a portion of 'earmarked funding' for 'foundation programmes and teaching development'. For at least the first five years of the operation of the new funding framework, this will amount to approximately 15% additional funding in terms of full-time equivalent (FTE) enrolment on foundation programmes. This will apply to first-time entering contact students (DoE, 2002b: 25). Foundation programme students will be funded at subsidy prices equivalent to those for standard undergraduate cells. Institutions will have to bid for their share of this earmarked funding through the three-year rolling plan process. It is assumed that by 'foundation programmes' the DoE means discrete, add-on programmes pegged at level 5. It is not clear what these proposals mean for the funding of integrated models of academic development, but it seems unlikely that there will be additional funding for students enrolled in this form of academic and curriculum development.

At a general level the new framework for funding involves a shift to the allocation of 50% of teaching funding on the basis of output (50% remains for input, i.e. students registered). This steering of the system towards greater efficiency has already been mentioned above; the NPHE set a national target for improving graduation rates to 25% of the enrolment for three-year programmes. However, it is unlikely that these output goals can be met without the implementation of academic development measures. Strategies for improving access and equity, and the quantity and quality of graduate output, should not be seen in opposition, but rather as a relationship that must be managed by providing adequate resources to support the curriculum interventions required for historically and educationally disadvantaged students to succeed.

<sup>6</sup> Ministry of Education Reports 116 (1995), 150 (1997) and 151 (2001) and the Revised Qualification Framework for Educators in Schooling (2000).

<sup>7</sup> Hereafter: HEQF (2004). Note that, at the time of publishing these Resources, the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework: Draft for discussion* (Ministry of Education: 2004) had not yet been finalised.

<sup>8</sup> 15 November 2002.

## Proposals for the Establishment of a National Higher Education Information and Applications Service for South Africa<sup>9</sup>

The DoE's National Higher Education Information and Applications Service (NHEIAS) proposals recommend the establishment of a national centralised information and applications service for all first-entry students wishing to study at undergraduate level at any South African public HEI. It is recommended in the proposals that institutions retain their right to set admissions criteria and the number of places available for specific programmes and that the NHEIAS generate offers to applicants on this basis. The objective of these proposals appears to be the rationalisation of the admissions process, in the interests of national planning and efficiency gains and ensuring that all students have access to the same range of choices.

## Institutional Restructuring

The DoE's restructuring of the HE landscape through institutional mergers and in particular through the creation of 'comprehensive' institutions, means that most institutions are having to redevelop their admissions policies and redesign their curricula. While the merger process provides new opportunities for improving access and admissions policies and practices, it also requires guidance from the DoE in terms of the finalisation of outstanding policy documents such as the HEQF and review of the NQF.

## Proposals for a Further Education and Training Certificate

The DoE intends to phase in the new FETC from 2006 to replace the Senior Certificate as the level 4 exit qualification from 2008. The National Curriculum Statement Grades 10-12 (Oct 2002) suggests that there will be 3 FETCs:

1. FETC (General) – the schooling pathway;
2. FETC (General Vocational) – the FET colleges pathway; and
3. FETC (TOP) – the trade, occupational and professional pathway.

The proposed FETC is a 130 credit whole qualification pegged at level 4 on the NQF and will be awarded on the basis of a minimum of 60 credits achieved in the 30%–39% band and 70 credits in the 40%–49% band. There will be no Higher/ Standard/ Lower Grade distinctions, and five grading bands. It is anticipated that the FETC will be the equivalent of the current Senior Certificate without matriculation endorsement (SAUVCA–CTP, 2003). While this may be an adequate level of attainment for a school-leaving certificate, given that disparities in the quality of provision of schooling provision will remain in the medium term, there is concern in the HE sector that the proposed FETC will not serve as an adequate threshold for entry to HE. SAUVCA has suggested a need to establish minimum thresholds for HE entry, especially levels of numeracy and literacy, and to run further admissions and placement tests alongside the FETC for entry to HE. Even if such a dual testing system is developed, this will not, in the medium term, do away with the need for alternative access routes into HE for students from disadvantaged educational backgrounds.

<sup>9</sup> Department of Education, 2002.

## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

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The following questions may be adapted for self-evaluating the quality of an institution's access and admissions policy and practice. The questions are clustered according to the three dimensions of an admissions policy, namely: access, admissions management, and selection and placement.

### ACCESS

1. Does the institution set explicit equity-driven enrolment targets? How do the institution's enrolment targets cater for optimum size, student composition and 'shape' issues (i.e. what kinds of students get placed in what types of programmes)?
2. Does the institution have a well-motivated and comprehensive admissions and access policy approved by Senate and Council? To what extent is the admissions policy informed by the institution's mission, its enrolment targets, its approved PQM (for public HEIs), the demand for access and its socio-economic context?

### ADMISSIONS MANAGEMENT

1. How is the admissions policy managed and implemented? To what extent does the policy involve the adoption of a holistic approach to the management of admissions and access?
2. How are admissions policies publicised across the institution? Is there consistency in the application of admissions policies?
3. How does the institution proactively liaise with potential pools of students in its local communities? How does it proactively disseminate information on what the institution can offer?
4. To what extent are applicants' enquiries promptly and effectively dealt with? To what extent are applications systematically and transparently processed according to explicit admissions policy and procedures?
5. How does the institution, in its recruitment and admissions procedures, provide applicants with the following: guidance about a range of flexible entry routes; broad curriculum and career guidance; and assistance with respect to second choices, re-routing and the like?
6. How does the institution cater for applicants who meet its admissions requirements but are not offered places?
7. To what extent are selection and placement trends at both institutional and programme level monitored via a sound management information system (MIS)? Are findings fed back into the admissions system to inform and improve admissions policy and selection and placement procedures?

## SELECTION AND PLACEMENT

1. To what extent are the institution's academic planning and admissions requirements based on defensible selection criteria? Has the institution developed mechanisms for flexible entry routes that are not based solely on school-leaving results? If so, how are such mechanisms validated?
2. To what extent has the institution developed a range of differentiated access options, at the entry level, into which students can be placed appropriately, ensuring that there is a good fit between levels of preparedness and the demands of the curriculum?



## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS

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### ACCESS

#### Evaluative Question 1: Equity of access

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##### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Enrolment targets to address equity concerns are set by the institution. Access routes and a range of flexible entry routes are designed to support these targets. Management information shows that progress is being made towards realising these targets across faculties, programmes and levels.

#### Evaluative Question 2: Alignment between admissions policy & strategic & academic planning

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##### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution uses an approved and publicised admissions policy. The admissions policy is aligned with the institution's mission, enrolment targets, strategic plan and PQM. The policy also takes account of the demand for access and the institution's socio-economic context. It includes realistic plans to meet specified size and shape enrolment targets within set time frames. These are clearly spelt out in terms of enrolment targets for both 'regular' and 'flexible' entry routes.

The institution's capacity to contribute towards the attainment of the policy goals of the NPHE (2001, 2.2; 2.4-2.6) is fully exploited.

### ADMISSIONS MANAGEMENT

#### Evaluative Question 1: Policy & management structures

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##### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

There is clarity on the roles, functions and reporting lines of those responsible for developing and implementing admissions policy. For example, the institution has a clearly defined admissions policy development structure, which is driven by a senior executive officer, directly accountable for the admissions policy. The implementation of the policy is also driven by a senior manager, with structures clearly accountable to him/her.

The policy and organisational structures enable the integration and coordination of functions that impact directly on student admissions. In particular, functional links are established and maintained between structures/ divisions such as: the institutional admissions committee; academic development programmes; alternative assessment services (e.g. RPL, alternative admissions); the student data/ records system; faculty administrations; faculty admission and re-admission committees; academic planning; financial aid and student housing; and student representatives or organisations.

This means that an offer of a place to a particular applicant includes the allocation of accommodation and, where applicable and possible, an offer of financial aid, ensuring that students are settled efficiently on arrival at the institution.



## Evaluative Question 2. Internal dissemination & consistency of application

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The admissions policy is accessible to all who need it, e.g. it is posted on the institution's website. Admissions Officers, Faculty Managers and other staff dealing with admissions are well acquainted with the institutional admissions policy and procedures. The policy stipulations are applied consistently across the institution.

## Evaluative Question 3: Recruitment & dissemination of admissions information

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Information on the institution's educational opportunities, admissions regulations and application procedures (both regular and flexible) are disseminated to prospective students in good time for students to make appropriate decisions. A variety of accessible, student-centred dissemination strategies is employed to enhance the attainment of the institution's size and shape targets, e.g. websites, resource packs for students who present themselves for the first time at registration etc.

The disseminated information is accurate and comprehensive and avoids making unrealistic promises.

## Evaluative Question 4: Effectiveness, efficiency & transparency

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution provides efficient and accurate responses to applicants' enquiries. Admissions officers are in a position to pronounce on the status (e.g. rejected, waitlisted, accepted) of an application at any given moment. The MIS used allows constant data update and simultaneous access by all related offices.

All decisions taken in relation to prospective students' admissions are clearly and openly accounted for in terms of the provisions of the policy.

The Admissions Office, or related divisions, is equipped to serve the needs of a diversity of applicants.

Clear and effective communication lines between admissions officers and programme managers are maintained throughout the admissions cycle.

Where an institution has positioned itself to enrol a significant number of students from SADC countries and beyond, a specialised unit is in place to deal with the logistics of enrolling foreign/ international students.

## Evaluative Question 5: Flexibility of entry routes & advisory services

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution has identified specialised personnel to deal with applicants' queries about career options, curriculum choices and second choice re-routing. These services are proactive and efforts are made to alert potential students to any flexible/ alternative entry routes provided by the institution.

## Evaluative Question 6: Management of unplaced students

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Cases of applicants meeting minimum admissions requirements but not being placed in a programme are investigated, with a view to identifying the factors inhibiting access. Inter-institutional links are established and strategies are in place to re-route such applications.

Cases of applicants being offered a place but not taking it up are also investigated. The reasons for such applicants' failure to register are fed into the admissions review process.

The institution can provide evidence to demonstrate that its admissions policy and recruitment strategies ensure a good match of demand and supply of educational provision, with minimal wastage.

## Evaluative Question 7: Monitoring & improvement

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

An applications MIS, linked to a student MIS, is in place and allows selection, placement, registration and student progression to be recorded and traced through to graduation. This enables equity targets to be monitored across faculties and programmes and the results of the admissions policy to be researched and fed back into future deliberations and improved enrolment and admissions strategies.

## SELECTION & PLACEMENT

### Evaluative Question 1: Defensible selection criteria & placement processes

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

National admissions criteria, as set out by statute, professional bodies etc. are acknowledged and adhered to.

Selection criteria and mechanisms for flexible entry routes and the widening of access are well motivated, researched and evaluated.

Where appropriate, these include credible mechanisms and student support for the implementation of RPL/ recognition of current competence.

### Evaluative Question 2: Differentiated access options & responsible placements

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The results of admissions mechanisms are used judiciously to place students in appropriate programmes/ curricula (e.g. foundation/ bridging programmes, enriched/ extended curricula).

The institution aims to ensure that students admitted via flexible/ alternative selection mechanisms have a fair chance of academic success.

## SUGGESTED DATA SOURCES FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND REVIEW

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These suggestions are not intended to be used as a checklist. They are offered rather to assist and guide HEIs on what may be considered appropriate sources of data and evidence. This list will obviously need to be adjusted depending on the nature and context of the institution under consideration.

1. Institutional mission, strategic plans, three-year rolling plans and approved PQM (for public HEIs);
2. Student enrolment equity targets and reports on the monitoring of these targets;
3. Evidence of the extent to which student enrolment equity targets have been realised;
4. Enrolment, graduation and retention rates;
5. Admissions policy documentation, including policy on flexible/ alternative admissions, RPL, re-admission etc.;
6. Terms of reference or standing orders for the admissions committee or equivalent;
7. Organogram illustrating admissions organisational structure and reporting lines;
8. Prospectus, application forms, resource packs and other documentation sent to prospective applicants, with a covering rationale;
9. Promotional material: examples of flyers, websites, media clips and other forms of recruitment undertaken;
10. Documentation on career and curriculum guidance prepared for students;
11. Examples of selection assessment instruments;
12. Documentation and enrolment statistics on institutional provision of flexible entry routes including subsequent curriculum enrichment, e.g. student development programmes/ extended curricula etc.;
13. Student feedback on admissions procedures;
14. Reports on the findings of admissions research and evaluation; and
15. Institutional internal and external review reports.

## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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BTech	Bachelor of Technology
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CTP	Committee of Technikon Principals
DoE	Department of Education
FET	Further Education and Training
FETC	Further Education and Training Certificate
FTE	Full-time Equivalent
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
ITL	Improving Teaching & Learning
MIS	Management Information System
NDip	National Diploma
NHEIAS	National Higher Education Information and Applications Service
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
QA	Quality Assurance
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SAFCERT	South African Certification Council
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAUVCA	South African University Vice-Chancellors Association
SET	Science, Engineering and Technology
TOP	Trade, Occupational and Professional

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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**access** The widening of access to higher education is an equity-driven concern and relates to the strategies and procedures that an institution undertakes to make its educational services accessible to a diversity of students.

**admissions management** refers to the policies and procedures that an institution sets up to manage the admissions, selection and placement of students.

**enrolment** refers to regulation and management of admissions usually at national level.

**matriculation endorsement** is an endorsement to a Senior Certificate issued by SAFCERT in accordance with the regulations recommended by SAUVCA via the Matriculation Board, approved by the Minister of Education and published in the Government Gazette.

**matriculation exemption** refers to a certificate of complete or conditional exemption from the matriculation endorsement requirement issued by the Matriculation Board on behalf of SAUVCA to candidates who satisfied regulations for complete or conditional exemption as published in the Government Gazette.

**selection and placement** involves the specific criteria and procedures that a provider uses to select applicants and to place them in a particular programme of study.

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# 4

## ITL Resource No. 4 Student Development and Support

Each of the seven Improving Teaching & Learning Resources can be read and used individually, although there are cross-references as some are closely related. However, it is important to read the Introduction, as it deals with the purpose of the Resources and how they relate to the Higher Education Quality Committee's quality assurance mandate and its quality promotion and capacity development activities.

### In this Resource...

- **Focus Area**
- **Rationale**
- **Discussion**
- **Evaluative Questions**
- **Evaluative Questions and Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**
- **Suggested Data Sources for Self-evaluation and Review**
- **Abbreviations and Acronyms**
- **Glossary of Terms** (student academic development; student development; student support)
- **References and Suggested Reading**

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## FOREWORD

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The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) prioritised quality issues in teaching and learning very early on in the development of its quality assurance systems. Mandated by legislation to conduct institutional audits and programme accreditation and to promote quality and quality assurance, the HEQC initiated a project in 2002 aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

The project on teaching and learning was intended to refocus attention on one of the core functions of higher education in an environment where the restructuring of higher education had given much attention to issues such as governance, financing and the 'size and shape' of the system. The project also reflected the importance of quality-related capacity development in the work of the HEQC, especially in a context where historical disadvantage impacts on the capacities of academic staff to plan and deliver good quality programmes and on the capacities of students to benefit from them. These issues needed to be addressed and to be brought to the centre of the debate about the purposes of a new quality assurance system for South Africa. Moreover, the project fitted in with international debates and developments in higher education, which were prioritising the learning experiences of students as well as giving increased attention to the professionalisation of higher education teaching and to staff development and support.

The HEQC set up the project in a way that would involve a number of role-players. It was important to draw on teaching and learning expertise in higher education as well as maximise the impact of those involved within higher education institutions. The Resources for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning should be seen therefore as the fruit of an extensive collaboration between the HEQC, a large number of experts and practitioners and a range of public and private higher education institutions.

It is hoped that the Resources will be adapted creatively for a number of purposes and used by higher education practitioners individually and in teams in the process of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to give effect to the transformation objectives in the restructuring of higher education, especially in relation to redress and equity and to the responsiveness of higher education to national goals and challenges.

The HEQC looks forward to further cooperation with key partners in higher education in effectively developing and using the Resources. We would like to acknowledge that funding for the project and this publication was made available by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation.

Dr Mala Singh  
Executive Director  
November 2004

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The Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources are the product of collaboration between the HEQC and a wide range of academics based in private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). These included several academics from other countries who assisted with the project or provided advice. The 14 regional workshops at which the draft Resources were introduced and discussed in 2003 were generously hosted by public HEIs.

## FOCUS AREA

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This ITL Resource on *Student Development & Support* applies at the institutional level largely to policy, planning and resource allocation (the first moment of the quality cycle). This Resource also applies at the level of implementation and monitoring (the second and third moments of the quality cycle) to programmes, modules/ courses<sup>1</sup> and service units. It relates closely to, and should be used in conjunction with, Resource No. 1 on *Programme Planning & Design*, Resource No. 3 on *Access & Admissions* and Resource No. 6 on *Staff Development*.

A constructivist view of learning understands new knowledge as arising from a structured relationship between the external cultural environment and the mind of the student. While such a view would suggest that student learning is primarily influenced by structured teaching–learning interactions, it would acknowledge that access to learning resources that support teaching, as well as other social and personal factors in the learning environment, also influence the quality of a student's learning. Therefore the enhancement of student learning would entail attention to not only the academic but also the support and development functions in the institution. Given the currency of such understandings of the nature of student learning, it is not surprising that, in seeking to create the conditions for learning, institutions are increasingly adopting an integrated and holistic approach. In compiling this Resource, it was therefore decided to include both student development and support and student academic development. All aspects of institutional, curriculum and support service organisation and delivery that impact on the quality of the student experience are pertinent to this area of focus.

The deliberate linking of aspects of institutional life that are often treated as disparate serves to focus on the student and the integrated nature of the student experience. However, given that these functions and responsibilities are often distinct in institutional structures and processes, it was decided to devise separate evaluative questions for student development and support on the one hand and for student academic development on the other. Depending on their histories and contexts, different HEIs will adopt or develop different models for structuring the provision of student development and support services and

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<sup>1</sup> In all cases the use of the term 'course' in these Resources can be replaced with the term 'module'. The term 'subject' in its narrow sense sometimes refers to a course or module within a programme.

student academic development. Smaller institutions, such as private HEIs, are particularly challenged in providing an acceptable level of support and development; they need to find creative ways of making the best possible use of scarce resources in order to develop and sustain these structures and links.

Traditionally, student academic development initiatives have been part of institutional strategies to widen access, diversify student profiles and cater for students who enter the institution academically underprepared. Academic development programmes and curriculum innovations have therefore tended to be clustered around the entry and pre-entry levels and designed to cater for disadvantaged or underprepared students. However, it is recommended that the scope of academic development be expanded to include curriculum development initiatives at all levels of higher education (HE), including postgraduate levels, and that, as appropriate, academic development should target all students for the development of specified graduate skills and/or to improve the quality of learning across an institution.

The term 'underprepared students' is widely used, but this concept should be used together with that of 'underprepared institutions'. Both concepts should be employed to examine dimensions of underpreparedness other than the academic, such as cultural and social.

## RATIONALE

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Together with the production and dissemination of knowledge, student learning/ development is the central purpose and core business of HE. Across the globe, the massification of HE means that it is no longer an elite system with more or less homogeneous enrolments. As student bodies become increasingly diverse, so HEIs need to respond by adapting their curricula and teaching and learning practices to the needs of their students. Furthermore, in South Africa, the public HE landscape is being deliberately restructured to reflect more accurately the demographics of the country's population. The Department of Education (DoE) is concerned to increase the participation of Blacks and women in HE, particularly in the areas of science, engineering and technology (SET) and business and commerce. Overall, the DoE aims to increase the participation rate in HE of the 20–24 year cohort to 20% within the next 10–15 years (*National Plan for Higher Education*, Ministry of Education, 2001: 2.2). In addition, an increase in the participation of mature and working students is encouraged.

Moreover, if South Africa is to produce sufficient numbers of graduates with the skills required by a modern economy, the number of postgraduate enrolments will need to increase. This means that student development and support at postgraduate levels also demand attention. While addressing the social imperative for greater access and equity, the DoE aims simultaneously to improve the efficiency of the HE system by increasing graduation rates as well as the number of students completing postgraduate qualifications. Although the number of students in the system from under-represented groups has increased significantly since 1990, there has not been a significant increase in the retention and graduation rates of historically under-represented groups, especially at postgraduate level (Badat, 2004).

Most South African HEIs are challenged to deal with increasingly diverse student profiles. This is manifested not only in terms of race, gender and social class, but also in terms of educational background, levels of preparedness, language, ethnicity, religion and nationality (as increasing numbers of students from the Southern African Development Community, or SADC, enrol at South African campuses), and age and maturity (as more mature, part-time and working students and students from rural areas enter the system). As discussed above, South African HE is under pressure to respond simultaneously to national drives for greater equity and greater efficiency. The tension between equity and diversity on the one hand and efficiency on the other is likely to be resolved only if HEIs create appropriate learning environments in which students feel welcomed and supported. HEIs need to develop theory-based, well-resourced curriculum strategies, aimed at enabling first generation students to learn to control academic discourses and master their attendant cognitive practices.

## DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. **Kathy Luckett**, the coordinator of the working group, was asked to write this section so as to reflect on issues discussed by the working group in the course of developing the first draft of the Resources.

The views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

The multilingual nature of South African society can be viewed as both a resource for and a challenge to student development. The rich and diverse cultural heritage of students should be recognised and celebrated in campus life, while the need to produce graduates proficient in an international language has to be seriously addressed.<sup>2</sup> To this end, HEIs should consider carefully the development and implementation of institutional language policies in which regional languages are at least recognised as languages of administration and campus life, and in which the academic study and development of South African languages, and their use as regional languages and as languages of learning, are promoted through the formal curriculum. In addition, institutional language policies should include measures to support the development of the institution's language of learning and the development of academic literacy and discourse.

In order to avoid a deficit model of second language speakers of English and to promote critical – as opposed to reproductive – academic literacy, the following principles are presented for debate and consideration for institutional strategies to deal with multilingualism and academic and institutional underpreparedness:

1. All students come to HE with primary discourses (everyday ways of speaking and thinking acquired through their families and communities) that are inappropriate for the secondary academic discourses that they will have to acquire to function in HE.
2. Because education is a process of enculturation as well as cognitive development, the learning of secondary discourses is always filtered through primary discourses and may conflict with or threaten a student's 'enduring sense of self'. A campus culture that affirms and respects students' primary discourses and cultures will minimise such conflicts and encourage learning and development.
3. The learning of languages and discourses for academic purposes is labour-intensive and time-consuming. Research shows that 'quick-fix', 'add-on' remedial courses have little value, particularly because few students are able to transfer what is learnt to the mainstream curriculum. Relevance and contextualisation are crucial for language learning, and recurrent, meaningful and authentic practice is also required. This suggests that language proficiency development is best achieved if it is integrated with mainstream curriculum content and real, discipline-specific tasks. The design

<sup>2</sup> With respect to English language proficiency, a common experience is that South African students typically demonstrate high levels of oral fluency in everyday English but weak reading and writing skills in formal academic registers.

and teaching of such integrated programmes usually requires the collaboration of both discipline and language development specialists. Mainstream subjects/ courses that lend themselves to academic development should be identified and included in credit-bearing academic development/ foundation programmes, in which content is reworked to provide a vehicle for the explicit teaching of the epistemology and cognitive practices, skills, discourse and genres associated with the target discipline or profession.

4. Initially, students' language competence needs to shift from everyday usage to controlling specialised academic discourses. This requires intensive mediation and scaffolding in which students have opportunities to interact with experts in the target discourse who can model the discourse and make explicit its cognitive, epistemic and discursive demands. Such a socio-cultural, constructivist approach to learning would suggest that academic experts 'lend' their conceptual frameworks to students; successful mediation enables students to build their own appropriate cognitive structures so that they can continue to learn independently thereafter. This process of mediation also requires a relationship of trust and recurring individual feedback. (With regard to distance education, it is possible to achieve this level of mediation through carefully prepared texts and integrated assessment tasks and reflection exercises.) Effective student support and the provision of timely and detailed individual feedback are strongly recommended.
5. Once students have gained control of specialised academic discourses and developed appropriate cognitive structures and knowledge bases, they need to develop the capacity to critique different forms of knowledge and to critically frame competing discourses. This demands the development of meta-cognition and meta-awareness, which requires the active re-organisation of students' cultural and cognitive frameworks. Such an approach entails a teaching-learning interaction in which the epistemologies of different types of knowledge and discourses are made explicit and open to question.

High quality provision of academic development in the South African context demands engagement with principles such as these. It is the contention of the working group that developed these Resources that the application of such principles underpins some of the more successful academic development interventions pioneered in South Africa to date.

## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

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The following questions may be adapted for use in self-evaluating the quality of student development and support services and student academic development provision, at an HEI.

### GENERIC

1. How does the HEI build an institutional culture that is student-centred and where all members of a diverse student body can learn and develop optimally?
2. Is there institutional policy (or are there guidelines) in place that conceptualises and promotes student support and academic development in an integrated manner? How are student support and academic development reflected and inserted into tuition/programme and curriculum development policies and strategies? What structures are in place to give effect to these policies?
3. What system does the institution have in place for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of its student support services and student development programmes and for improving these?

### STUDENT DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT

1. What student development and support services does the institution provide and how well are these resourced and managed? How have the student support services been adapted to serve a diversity of students?
2. How student-centred and efficient are the institution's student administrative services? How have the student administrative services been adapted to serve a diversity of students?

### STUDENT ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

1. What models of student/ academic development has the institution adopted? Why were these models adopted?
2. How do faculties, schools or departments implement institutional policy and models of student development in their academic programmes and teaching-learning activities? What types of curriculum innovation are being implemented to promote student academic development? How does the institution ensure that this is integral to/ integrated with students' mainstream studies?
3. How does the institution make provision for a multilingual society? How do faculties, schools or departments implement institutional language policy? How do they ensure that students whose home language is not the language of learning have adequate opportunities to develop academic literacy in the language of learning?
4. How is student performance monitored and how are students at risk of failure identified? Is timely educational intervention provided for such students?



5. What staff development opportunities does the institution provide to enable teaching staff to improve their curriculum development and teaching practice in order to cater for a diversity of student learning needs? In particular, how are teaching staff encouraged and rewarded for specific curriculum innovations that address the needs of educationally disadvantaged students, and the needs of students for whom the institutional language of learning is a second (or even third) language?

## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS

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### GENERIC

#### Evaluative Question 1: Institutional culture & diversity

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##### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution strives to create an enabling environment conducive to meaningful learning in which the power relationships between those who teach and those who learn do not constitute a stumbling block or source of alienation for students.

The institutional culture and staffing profiles mirror the diversity of the HEI's student population and promote an ethos of reciprocity, service and tolerance. Institutional culture is supportive of academically underprepared students, women, minorities, students from SADC countries, other international students, HIV-positive students, disabled students, mature or working/ part-time students and other under-represented groups.

The institution's administration, communication, support services and curricula reflect and value diversity. For example, if working/ part-time students are targeted, then recognition of prior learning (RPL) and student development programmes should be provided to enable mature students to re-enter HE after extended periods away from study; childcare facilities should be available; and curriculum and administrative structures should be sufficiently flexible to accommodate such students' circumstances.

#### Evaluative Question 2: Policies/ guidelines for student development & support

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##### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

An institutional policy (or guidelines) provides a rationale for and outlines the institution's intention to offer programmes and services that will afford all students adequate academic, environmental and personal support, in the interests of ensuring that they have a fair chance of achieving academic success.

The policy provides principles and values to guide the provision of a comprehensive range of student development and support services responsive to the diversity of the student population, and strategies for managing the implementation of such services in an integrated manner.

The policy includes a clear statement on language, including the language of learning appropriate to a multilingual society.

Strategies and outcomes of the policy are clear and measurable. The implementation of the policy is the responsibility of a dedicated senior manager.

Information about the student support and development policy and its services and programmes is widely disseminated throughout the institution.

### Evaluative Question 3: Monitoring & improvement

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**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution monitors and evaluates its student development and support services at regular intervals to ensure that academic staff, academic development staff and students are satisfied that these services meet the needs of the student body and are widely used.

Subsequent student development planning takes account of this feedback. Where there are indications that a programme or service does not fulfil its aims, student development strategies are reassessed and improved.

## STUDENT DEVELOPMENT & SUPPORT

### Evaluative Question 1: Comprehensiveness & accessibility of student support services

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**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution provides a comprehensive range of student development and support services, which meet its students' needs, enhance their educational experience and the learning environment, and cater for a diverse student body. Examples of recommended services include: financial aid; residences; library and laboratory services; sports and recreational facilities; orientation and leadership programmes; career guidance; curriculum guidance; gender support groups; health and counselling services, including support for students with HIV/AIDS or disabilities; and computer and IT training and services.

Services are available at the three important phases of a student's career: on first entering the institution; to promote retention during a student's stay; and to ease the move from HE into the world of work. There is evidence to show that these services are well resourced and well managed.

Most students are aware of these services and find them accessible.

### Evaluative Question 2: Administrative services

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**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Core administrative services such as enquiries, admissions, progression, fees, workplace-based/ work-integrated placements (where required) and graduation are carried out efficiently and effectively within a student-centred ethos.

Specific measures have been taken to ensure that the administrative services can deal with a diverse student population, e.g. through employing administrative staff from under-represented groups, through establishing an international office, through providing after-hours services for working students, etc.

Administrative procedures are clearly communicated to students and are perceived by students to be transparent and fair. Administrative services are supported by an integrated management information system (MIS), which is efficient, accessible, comprehensive and user-friendly.

## STUDENT ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT

### Evaluative Question 1: Models of academic development

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution's models of academic development are appropriate and responsive to the needs of its students. The institution can provide a well argued rationale for its academic development strategies in terms of its equity targets, its student profile, its students' prior learning, students' levels of language proficiency, and the general academic skills and specific disciplinary skills demands of its curricula.

### Evaluative Question 2: Curriculum development

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

##### **Curriculum development**

The institution encourages and resources curriculum development initiatives that are responsive to the needs of its student body. Such initiatives – including additional enrichment programmes and integrated Teaching and Learning Strategies – develop language proficiency, academic skills and academic literacy, and enhance linguistic, cognitive and epistemological access to specific academic discourses and their practices.

##### **Availability and accessibility**

Appropriate and comprehensive academic development programmes with integrated curriculum strategies are provided to cater for the range of students at the institution. The availability and scope of academic development initiatives and programmes are clearly communicated to the student body. There are clear procedures for referral to these programmes and services. Such programmes and services may include: certificate programmes; foundation and bridging programmes; language development courses; integrated academic literacy initiatives; tutorial support; peer support; writing development services; computer literacy development within mainstream disciplines; and postgraduate research development programmes.

##### **Foundation/ bridging programmes**

Well conceptualised and theorised foundation/ bridging programmes exist in all faculties. The requisite skills and literacies – such as numeracy, reading and writing academic texts, computer literacy, and library and research skills – are taught within disciplinary content in an integrated manner.

##### **Selection criteria**

The placement of students in academic development programmes is carried out transparently and is based on clearly communicated selection criteria. Alternative, validated selection mechanisms, such as RPL or alternative entrance tests, exist to widen access and ensure students are appropriately placed.

##### **Integration**

Whether the curriculum is restructured to cater for student academic development through 'stand-alone' programmes or through extended or enriched curricula, such initiatives are part of or well integrated with the mainstream academic programmes of the institution. Academic development programme coordinators and/or tutors work together with mainstream programme teams in order to assist teaching staff to share feedback on student learning problems, and to develop innovative theory-based curricula that make the epistemic, cognitive and discourse demands of their disciplines explicit.

## Evaluative Question 3: Multilingualism & language development

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution's language and language development policies and strategies are supportive of multilingualism. Wherever possible, students' home languages and cultures are affirmed and built upon. Opportunities for the development of proficiency in the institution's language of learning are available in all faculties and are integrated with mainstream curriculum content. Curriculum design at programme and subject/ course level includes integrated academic literacy strategies that enable students to acquire the cognitive and discursive skills to function as members of specific disciplinary or professional communities. Where necessary, strategies for particular individuals or small groups of students are employed, always within the context of relevant discipline-specific tasks.

## Evaluative Question 4: Monitoring student performance

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

#### Systems

At institutional, faculty and programme levels, there are systems for monitoring student performance in order to ensure timely identification of students who are at risk of failing in particular subjects/ courses/ programmes.

#### Follow-up/ advising

There are strategies for advising students about ways to improve their chances of success and for referring them to appropriate academic development programmes.

#### Re-admissions

Rules for re-admission are clear, defensible and sensitively applied. Wherever possible, students are advised about alternative routes to obtaining a qualification or training.

#### Systems of appeal

The institution has a system for appeal against summative and formative assessment and exclusion processes. The appeals procedures are explicit, fair and effective.

## Evaluative Question 5: Staff development

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution provides educational expertise and resources to facilitate curriculum development initiatives. Staff development is provided to enhance academics' and tutors' skills in working with students from diverse backgrounds at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels across the curriculum, including underprepared students and those for whom the institution's language of learning is a second (or even third etc.) language. Staff development should also include programmes that build capacity in educational practices at HE.

A formal staff development programme is available. It takes into account the need to prepare teaching staff to develop curricula and learning materials that are responsive to student diversity. Tutor/ mentor development and training are also accredited through this programme.

The achievement of excellence in teaching and curriculum development is recognised and rewarded through the institution's promotion criteria and awards system.

## SUGGESTED SOURCES OF DATA FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND REVIEW

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These suggestions are not intended to be used as a checklist. They are offered rather to assist and guide HEIs on what may be appropriate sources of data. This list will obviously need to be adjusted depending on the nature and context of the institution or faculty, school, department or programme under consideration.

### INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

1. Institutional mission statement;
2. Documentation on policies and procedures for student admissions, access and student development;
3. Documentation on policies and procedures for multilingualism/ language, student development and support services, and academic development;
4. Policy documents on the quality assurance (QA) of services and programmes; and
5. Documentation on policies for the appointment, induction and training of student development and student support staff.

### FACULTY, SCHOOL, DEPARTMENTAL OR PROGRAMME LEVEL

1. Documentation on planning and budgeting for academic development programmes and curriculum innovation;
2. Curriculum documentation relating to curriculum innovation for academic development;
3. Documentation on the promotion of support services and student development programmes for students;
4. Student performance tracking systems; and
5. Relevant evaluation and review reports and improvement plans.

## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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CHE	Council on Higher Education
DoE	Department of Education
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HIV/AIDS	Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome
IT	Information Technology
ITL	Improving Teaching & Learning
MIS	Management Information System
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SADC	Southern African Development Community
SET	Science, Engineering and Technology

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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***student academic development*** refers to the curriculum strategies employed at the teaching–learning interface to enhance the quality of learning and the academic performance of students. In South Africa, ‘student academic development’ sometimes has the alternative meaning of ‘academic development’ or ‘educational development’, referring specifically to institutional responses to the needs of underprepared students. It is important to recognise that all of these terms most centrally refer to curriculum development (in its widest sense, including the design of content and forms of delivery and staff development). Student academic development therefore refers to *both* specific ‘stand-alone’ or ‘add-on’ or extended or enriched programmes (e.g. bridging, recruitment, preparation or foundation programmes aimed at the specific needs of a particular group of students), *and* curriculum development initiatives in the mainstream academic curriculum at all levels of HE (i.e. NQF levels 5–10, and with the possible inclusion of those at level 4).

***student development*** refers to those extra-curricular campus activities designed for quality of life and for personal and social development, such as leadership development; sport; gender support groups; and student political, cultural, religious and social societies; as well as appropriate forms of communication and support for off-campus students.

***student support*** refers to those services that support students in their day-to-day lives on campus as well as those services that support them in their academic work. This includes, among others, services such as financial aid; bursary and loan schemes; residences; student counselling; library services and resources; IT provision; health services; support for students with HIV/AIDS, and so on.



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# 5

## ITL Resource No. 5 The Assessment of Student Learning

Each of the seven Improving Teaching & Learning Resources can be read and used individually, although there are cross-references as some are closely related. However, it is important to read the Introduction, as it deals with the purpose of the Resources and how they relate to the Higher Education Quality Committee's quality assurance mandate and its quality promotion and capacity development activities.

### In this Resource...

- **Focus Area**
- **Rationale**
- **Discussion**
- **Evaluative Questions**
- **Evaluative Questions and Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**
- **Suggested Data Sources for Self-evaluation and Review**
- **Abbreviations and Acronyms**
- **Glossary of Terms** (assessment of student learning; criterion-referenced assessment; diagnostic assessment; formative assessment; norm-referenced assessment; recognition of prior learning (RPL); reliability; summative assessment; validity)
- **References and Suggested Reading**

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## FOREWORD

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The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) prioritised quality issues in teaching and learning very early on in the development of its quality assurance systems. Mandated by legislation to conduct institutional audits and programme accreditation and to promote quality and quality assurance, the HEQC initiated a project in 2002 aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

The project on teaching and learning was intended to refocus attention on one of the core functions of higher education in an environment where the restructuring of higher education had given much attention to issues such as governance, financing and the 'size and shape' of the system. The project also reflected the importance of quality-related capacity development in the work of the HEQC, especially in a context where historical disadvantage impacts on the capacities of academic staff to plan and deliver good quality programmes and on the capacities of students to benefit from them. These issues needed to be addressed and to be brought to the centre of the debate about the purposes of a new quality assurance system for South Africa. Moreover, the project fitted in with international debates and developments in higher education, which were prioritising the learning experiences of students as well as giving increased attention to the professionalisation of higher education teaching and to staff development and support.

The HEQC set up the project in a way that would involve a number of role-players. It was important to draw on teaching and learning expertise in higher education as well as maximise the impact of those involved within higher education institutions. The Resources for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning should be seen therefore as the fruit of an extensive collaboration between the HEQC, a large number of experts and practitioners and a range of public and private higher education institutions.

It is hoped that the Resources will be adapted creatively for a number of purposes and used by higher education practitioners individually and in teams in the process of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to give effect to the transformation objectives in the restructuring of higher education, especially in relation to redress and equity and to the responsiveness of higher education to national goals and challenges.

The HEQC looks forward to further cooperation with key partners in higher education in effectively developing and using the Resources. We would like to acknowledge that funding for the project and this publication was made available by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation.

Dr Mala Singh  
Executive Director  
November 2004

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources are the product of collaboration between the HEQC and a wide range of academics based in private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). These included several academics from other countries who assisted with the project or provided advice. The 14 regional workshops at which the draft Resources were introduced and discussed in 2003 were generously hosted by public HEIs.

## FOCUS AREA

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This ITL Resource on *The Assessment of Student Learning* applies to institutional, programme and course<sup>1</sup> levels of assessment practice. Assessment policies and systems are usually determined at institutional or faculty level, while their implementation and the extent of their effectiveness need to be evaluated at programme and course level. This Resource is closely related to, and should be used in conjunction with, Resource No. 1 on *Programme Planning, Design & Management* and Resource No. 2 on *Programme & Course Review*.

The assessment of student learning is understood to mean the practice of designing formal tasks for students to complete and then of making inferences from and estimating the worth of their performances on these tasks. Assessment can also be understood to be a form of research that aims to find out what students know, understand and can do. In terms of outcomes-based approaches, assessment is a process during which evidence of performance is gathered and evaluated against agreed criteria. As with the principle of triangulating research methods, so with assessment: one has a better likelihood of ascertaining what students can do if a range of different assessment (research) methods is employed and if the 'research instruments' are fit for their purpose.

Assessment considerations should feature strongly in overall academic planning. Smaller institutions, such as private HEIs, need to pay particular attention to planning and resource allocation in relation to the quality management of assessment. However, for all institutions, the development of appropriate assessment policies and systems has significant implications in respect of planning for the efficient and effective use of resources. In the case of some HEIs, this realisation has led to the review of the institution's overall curriculum structure.

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<sup>1</sup> In all cases the use of the term 'course' in these Resources can be replaced with the term 'module'. The term 'subject' in its narrow sense sometimes refe

## RATIONALE

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In South Africa the goal of a transformed higher education (HE) system is sought by means of a variety of strategies. Significant among these are measures to widen access, improve throughput and completion rates and produce graduates with the knowledge and skills considered relevant to the needs of a developing society and economy (see the *National Plan for Higher Education*: Ministry of Education, 2001). Assuring the quality of the assessment of student learning is central to the achievement of these aims for three reasons:

1. Assessment has the potential to determine whether more equitable access (student input) is being realised in the form of more equitable achievement (student output). Historically, assessment practices have often acted as barriers to student progress. In order to strengthen public confidence and promote the credibility of assessment in HE, its principles, methods and procedures need to be both robust and transparent and its assessors accountable.
2. Although the curriculum may target disciplinary and professional knowledge and skills, appropriate to the goals of individual, social and economic transformation, if assessment procedures fail to prioritise and test for these competences, students are unlikely to achieve these intended learning outcomes.
3. It is well documented that assessment has a critical influence on the quality of teaching and learning (the 'wash back' effect) and so can be used as a powerful point of leverage for change and improvement in education. Thus measures to assure high quality assessment of student learning that also activate its potential to improve teaching and learning should be a priority in the face of the challenges currently posed to HE. The quality of assessment is widely considered to be a key indicator of the 'health' of teaching and learning in HEIs. HEQC criteria for institutional audit and programme accreditation give prominence to the quality management of assessment systems and practice. The need for capacity development among teaching staff in this area is also widely acknowledged.

Furthermore, the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) has assigned to the HEQC – as the Education and Training Quality Assurer (ETQA) for the higher education and training (HET) band – formal functions with respect to the quality assurance (QA) of assessment in the HE system:

1. In terms of the ETQA Regulations (1998), the HEQC is responsible for ensuring the integrity, validity and reliability of assessment in the HET system. Via the combination of institutional audit and programme accreditation that constitutes the HEQC's QA system, it will ensure that it fulfils this responsibility.
2. However, the HEQC recognises the right of the Senates of public HEIs to retain operational responsibility for the assessment of their students in terms of the Higher Education Act of 1997.
3. The HEQC therefore delegates responsibility for assuring and maintaining the integrity, validity and reliability of assessment to its constituent HEIs, both public and private, under certain conditions. For example, the HEQC devolves responsibility for the QA of assessor training to HEIs, provided that they periodically provide sufficient evidence of having established effective quality management systems in that area. As part of the implementation of its integrated national QA system, the HEQC will, during institutional

audits, be asking HEIs to demonstrate the effectiveness of their assessment policies and systems. Similarly, in its accreditation and re-accreditation processes,<sup>2</sup> the HEQC will scrutinise assessment practices at programme level.

## DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. **Kathy Luckett**, the coordinator of the working group, was asked to write this section so as to reflect on issues discussed by the working group in the course of developing the first draft of the Resources. Liz Sahigh, of the Academic Development Centre at Rhodes University, also contributed to this section.

The views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

Assessment is arguably the teaching–learning practice where academic staff most directly exert power over students. There is an increasing awareness on the part of institutions of the benefits – particularly in assessing large groups – of involving students in some assessments through self-assessment and peer assessment. (It is important to note that what is considered a large group varies from one discipline to another.)

Students need to be strategic about being assessed since it is also the educational event that holds the highest stakes for them in terms of their achievement. As such, assessment should afford students sufficient opportunities for individual feedback on their progress. Assessment should be authentic, in that it promotes the practice of directly assessing students on credible intellectual tasks, as opposed to making inferences about students' abilities through indirect assessment. Furthermore, authentic assessment tasks help students to focus on demonstrating their ability to discern critical knowledge and to act effectively in situations that make sense in their future professional contexts.

Given the above, measures to quality assure the accountability, transparency and rigour of assessment practices are critical, as are measures to ensure that teaching staff are competent to carry out their assessment responsibilities professionally.

However, the development of fair, valid and efficient assessment provision in HE requires a more comprehensive role for assessment than has traditionally been the norm. The purposes for which assessment is used need to be extended beyond the summative (the measuring, recording and reporting of end-point achievement) and the diagnostic (indicating aptitude and preparedness for a course of study). Assessment should also be used for developmental or formative purposes, namely to inform and strengthen learning

<sup>2</sup> See the HEQC's *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (2004a), particularly Criteria 11-14, and the *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (2004b).

and teaching. Assessment should therefore be recognised as an essential and integral part of teaching and learning. The realisation of such a role for assessment in HE is dependent on a concerted effort to professionalise the assessment practices of academic staff, which includes encouraging theoretically informed discussion and research. Assessment practice in HE needs to be de-mystified and made more explicit, accountable and transparent. This could be done, for example, by developing guides for students on assessment.

On the other hand, an emphasis on assessment, reinforced by the modularisation of the curriculum, can lead to *over-assessment* and the consequent over-burdening of staff and students alike. This tendency can be countered by a judicious and strategic use of assessment for clearly defined purposes. For example, summative assessment can be spread across a module, using a range of methods such as projects and assignments to alleviate the heavy weighting and high stakes traditionally attached to examinations at the end of the module. The use of structured and supported peer- and self-assessment for formative purposes lightens the marking burden on staff and enables students to gain a better grasp of the meaning of the assessment criteria. The development of a 'good fit' between the purpose of assessment, the nature of the content and skills being assessed, and the assessment method selected, is crucial to achieving validity in assessment. 'Good fit' usually requires a diversification of assessment methods and practices within a course, which in turn can alleviate the burden of over-assessment and accommodate a wider range of learning and teaching styles.

Our emphasis on the principle of curriculum alignment<sup>3</sup> suggests that assessment methods and tasks should be aligned with the content and skills taught during the course. In other words, care should be taken to ensure that assessment tasks do indeed test for the learning outcomes that were specified for the course. This involves making explicit the learning outcomes and levels of knowledge, understanding and skills one intends students to achieve and then designing assessment instruments that will effectively test students' attainment of these outcomes. More specific 'assessment criteria' can be designed for each assessment task.

In the Suggested Good Practice Descriptors below, we advocate an approach to assessment that is appropriate to HE; this can be described as a 'weak' – as opposed to behaviourist – approach (see the *Introduction* to the ITL Resources, for further discussion). The approach advocated allows educators to use their professional judgment to interpret the meaning of specific learning outcomes and assessment criteria in their teaching practice in ways that are sensitive to disciplines and contexts. Student performance is understood as indirect evidence of students' cognitive development or learning that has taken place. In other words, from a student's set of performances the assessor makes an inference about levels of competence or learning attained; and, crucially, the two concepts – performance and competence – are kept separate and not elided. This approach allows students to demonstrate their learning (competence) in creative and unanticipated ways (performance). It is important to make provision for and to reward students who perform unexpectedly and creatively, as well as to provide a guide to expected performance by means of pre-specified learning outcomes and assessment criteria.

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<sup>3</sup> See Resource No. 1 on *Programme Planning, Design & Management* and Resource No. 2 on *Programme & Course Review*.



Some in HE are sceptical about SAQA's insistence on the assessment of generic skills or 'critical cross-field outcomes' (see the *Introduction* to the ITL Resources, for further discussion) because there is no consensus that generic skills exist independently of specific knowledge domains and contexts of practice. Given this lack of consensus, we advocate the development of explicit academic and professional skills as well as a sound knowledge and theoretical base in the disciplines. It is the concept of 'knowing in action' or 'praxis' in specific disciplinary or professional contexts that perhaps better expresses our understanding of the application of knowledge and skills. This concept suggests that 'generic skills' will mean different things in the different disciplinary and professional contexts in which they are embedded. Furthermore, disciplinary or professional experts within communities of practice are required to determine the significance of students' performances in these contexts.

## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

The following questions may be adapted for use in self-evaluating the quality of an institution, faculty or programme's assessment of student learning.

1. Does the institution have an assessment policy and effective procedures for guaranteeing its implementation? To what extent do the policy and procedures ensure academic and professional standards in the design, approval, implementation and review of assessment strategies for subject/ courses/ programmes and for the qualifications awarded?
2. How does the institution moderate and validate its assessment procedures and results, in order to ensure their validity and reliability and the integrity of the qualifications it awards? To what extent are the views of the students and other key stakeholders solicited?
3. How is the institution dealing with SAQA's challenge to recognise prior learning?
4. To what extent are the academic staff who are responsible for official decisions on assessment appropriately trained and experienced and competent to assess? What staff development opportunities does the institution offer its teaching staff in order to improve and professionalise assessment practice?
5. To what extent are institutional/ faculty/ professional rules and regulations governing assessment adhered to? To what extent is assessment conducted securely and with rigour and fairness?
6. To what extent are the principles, procedures and practices of assessment explicit, valid and reliable?
7. To what extent are assessment decisions recorded and documented securely, accurately and systematically over time?
8. To what extent are the assessment methods and tasks aligned to the learning outcomes, content and teaching–learning activities of the programme/ subject/ course/ module?
9. To what extent are the purposes for which assessment is used explicit and appropriate? To what extent are assessment data and results used for developmental purposes – to adjust teaching and assessment practices and to improve the curriculum?

# EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS

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## Evaluative Question 1: Policy and procedures

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

There is an institutional policy on assessment, which makes explicit the values, theories or philosophy of assessment on which it is based.

The policy aims to ensure the development of valid, reliable and transparent assessment practices in keeping with academic and professional standards.

The policy also provides for the effective validation of assessment practices.

There are procedures through which faculties and departments/ schools are accountable for the implementation of the institutional assessment policy.

The policy includes guidelines or regulations for the following: formative assessment; the provision of feedback to students; the weighting of class marks (continuous assessment) and examinations; security procedures; disciplinary and appeals procedures; regulations for marking; grading; aegrotats; supplementary examinations; condoned passes; duly performed (DP) requirements; plagiarism etc.

There are structures at institutional, faculty and department/ school level to implement, monitor and review the assessment policy. Assessment decisions made by the committees/ boards at these levels are validated by external expert peers.

Academic managers are committed to the implementation of the institutional assessment policy, and teaching staff and students are aware of the responsibilities and rights that it accords them.

## Evaluative Question 2: Moderation system

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

#### **The assessment of students at course level**

Internal examiners (or 'assessors' in SAQA terminology)

The academic staff who teach a subject/ course/ module are responsible for designing, running and marking both formative and summative student assessments, for recording the results and for giving feedback to students.

The institution makes provision, including time release, for staff development in assessment, especially for new staff members.

Internal examiners (or 'internal moderators' in SAQA terminology)

Internal moderation is conducted to provide a reliability check on the marking process and to provide developmental feedback to staff on their assessment practice.

For summative assessment, and especially where more than one marker is involved, there is effective sampling (for example, 50% of the final marks are moderated) via an appropriate internal system that includes checking the reliability of the marking.

**Note:** Traditionally such internal examining has been done (after the marking is completed) by another academic, who did not teach on the course, usually from the same department. But for large classes it has often been found to be effective for the marking team, led by the course convenor, to work together and compare and moderate one another's marking as the marking proceeds.

**The assessment of students at exit qualifications**External examiners (or 'external moderators' in SAQA terminology)

It is recommended that for summative assessment for exit qualifications, external examiners be appointed to examine at least 60% of the credits at the exit level at which a qualification is awarded (e.g. for summative assessment of the Bachelor's degree at level 7 on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), 72 credits are externally examined).

The institution has clear criteria for the appointment of external examiners. Ideally, they are recommended by the examining department, and are independent experts in their fields with qualifications at least one level above the qualification being examined (except of course for Doctoral level), and are changed every three years. Reciprocal arrangements should be avoided. External examiners are approved by Senate and are responsible to Senate.

The institution provides documentation on the curriculum and all relevant assessments and guidelines or a format to assist external examiners in the completion of their reports. Completed external examiners' reports are returned to the academic concerned and also copied to the Programme Director/ Coordinator or Head of Department/ School. Where problems are raised, these are discussed with the academic concerned and the academic manager ensures that agreed improvements are effected.

External examiners have the right to adjust marks and they are required to approve the final marks list for the qualification concerned. Ideally external examiners should also comment on:

- The validity of the assessment instruments in relation to the selected content and the specified learning outcomes, ideally prior to their implementation (there should be a suitable range of different assessment methods to ensure that all outcomes are validly assessed);
- The quality of student learning and the standard of student attainment across the spectrum of results in relation to the learning outcomes, international academic/ professional standards and relevant generic qualification standards;
- The reliability of the marking process;
- The quality of feedback given to students; and
- Any concerns or irregularities with respect to the observation of institutional/ professional regulations.

Remuneration for external examiners is commensurate with the scope and level of their duties.

**The validation of a programme's assessment strategies**Programme evaluators (or 'verifiers' in SAQA terminology)

Programme evaluators are the disciplinary/ professional experts who form part of an external programme evaluation team. They may be appointed by either the institution, the HEQC or another ETQA (e.g. a professional body).

The evaluating agency provides guidelines or a format outlining their functions and clear criteria for their appointment (e.g. as for external examiners, but they should also have qualifications and/or expertise and experience in curriculum and assessment).

The functions of programme evaluators should include:

- Evaluating the curriculum design, knowledge base and assessment strategy for the programme as a whole, in relation to its purpose, exit-level outcomes and relevant generic qualification standard;
- Judging the appropriateness and validity of integrated assessments and the standard of samples of student performance on these;
- Reviewing external examiners' reports on courses comprising the programme for the period under review and ensuring that their recommendations have been considered and acted upon;

- Commenting on the overall progression and throughput rates for the programme in relation to its purpose and student intake;
- Checking that institutional and professional regulations and procedures for assessment have been adhered to;
- Making recommendations for the improvement of the programme to the relevant academics and academic manager(s); and
- If appointed by the HEQC: making recommendations and advising on accreditation status to the HEQC's Accreditation Committee.

Remuneration for programme evaluators is commensurate with the scope and level of their duties.

### **The assessment of postgraduate research**

Exit-level outcomes and assessment criteria or an explicit description of the quality of research achievement required, plus thesis production and layout requirements, time frames and examination rules are clearly communicated to students on commencement of their studies. Ideally, the institution has a postgraduate management strategy, which clarifies the student/ supervisor relationship and describes minimal roles and expectations.

Internal and external examiners are appointed according to acceptable criteria; e.g. at least one examiner external to the institution is appointed per dissertation/ thesis. Examiners are appointed on the basis of qualifications, experience and expert knowledge in the research area, and independence.

The institution provides clear guidelines to external examiners on the standard/ quality of research achievement required, on the nature of their task and on institutional examining regulations. The requirements for examination reports are clearly documented for examiners. External examiners report directly to the Senate (or its sub-committees), or equivalent, of the institution.

There are clear guidelines on how assessment judgments, corrections and further work are communicated to students and monitored by their supervisors. Without undermining the principle of assessment by academic judgment, assessment decisions are made transparently and students are afforded reasonable access to information (e.g. examiners' reports). There are appeal mechanisms for students and opportunities for them to defend their theses, e.g. through an oral defence.

Higher degree committees or similar structures consider examiners' reports qualitatively and make considered decisions about examination results.

## **Evaluative Question 3: The assessment of current competence/ recognition of prior learning (RPL)**

### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution has procedures for assessing and recognising prior learning. This includes procedures for the selection of potential RPL candidates and personnel and structures to support them through the RPL process. This process involves the identification, documentation, assessment, evaluation and transcription of prior learning against specified learning outcomes, so that such learning can articulate with admissions requirements to target programmes and be recognised for entry, exemption or accreditation purposes.

The assessment instruments developed for RPL are designed and implemented in accordance with the institution's policies on fair and transparent assessment.

## Evaluative Question 4: Assessment training

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution has an appropriate staff development strategy capable of improving its assessment practice. The institution makes provision for accredited training/ education in assessment theory and practice at both basic and advanced levels. Novice academic staff are encouraged to take the basic level and those with responsibility for assessment above the course level (e.g. Programme Directors and external examiners) are encouraged to take the advanced level. There are adequate opportunities and incentives for staff to undergo this training.

The institution ensures that the necessary assessment expertise is located within the appropriate staffing layers; for example, in each department/ school.

## Evaluative Question 5: Rigour & security of the assessment system

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

#### **Adherence to regulations**

Regulations ensure the robustness of assessment procedures, particularly with regard to limiting opportunities for plagiarism. Breaches of assessment regulations are dealt with effectively. Institutional/ faculty/ professional regulations governing assessment are published and clearly communicated to students and relevant stakeholders. There is evidence that such regulations are widely adhered to.

#### **Students' rights and responsibilities**

Students are provided with information and guidance on their rights and responsibilities regarding assessment processes e.g. definitions of and regulations on plagiarism; penalties; terms of appeal; supplementary examinations etc.

Students have the right of reasonable access to assessment information.

Student appeals procedures are explicit, fair, effective and handled in a timely fashion.

## Evaluative Question 6: Explicitness, validity & reliability of assessment practices

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

#### **Explicitness**

Qualification specifications meet the institutions' requirements for graduating, as well as those of SAQA, the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (HEQF)<sup>4</sup> and/or professional requirements.

The level of challenge of assessment is appropriate to the level at which the qualification is pegged.

The learning outcomes and content selection for a programme/ course and how they are linked to assessment criteria and judgements are clearly stated and communicated to students.

Learning activities enable the realisation of the required assessment performances, and both are aligned with specified learning outcomes.

There is evidence that this is common assessment practice across the institution.

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<sup>4</sup> Note that *The Higher Qualifications Framework: Draft for Discussion* (Ministry of Education: 2004), which replaced the New Academic Policy, or NAP (DoE, 2002), had not yet been finalised at the time of publishing these Resources.

**Validity**

Assessment procedures are effective in measuring student attainment of the intended learning outcomes.

A range of assessment tasks and methods is employed to ensure that all types of learning outcomes (knowledge and skills) are validly assessed.

There is at least one integrated assessment procedure for each qualification, which is a valid test of the key purposes of the programme. (Integrated assessment can involve the assessing of the products and the processes of learning and the use and application of knowledge and skills in real world contexts.)

**Interpretation of assessment performance**

There are published, clear and consistent guidelines/ regulations for: marking and grading of results; aggregations of marks and grades; progression and final awards; compensation and/or condonement; and the publication of results in good time. These guarantee the integrity of the qualifications awarded.

Interpretation of results, especially for student feedback, is qualitative as well as quantitative.

There is an appropriate mix of criterion- and norm-referenced assessment.

**Reliability**

There is a system for maximising the accuracy, consistency and credibility of results, regardless of who is assessing or how many different people are assessing.

There is concurrence between assessors and external examiners on the nature and quality of the learning achieved.

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**Evaluative Question 7: Recording of assessment results**

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**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Student records are well organised, accurate, reliable and secure.

Assessment data are accessible to academic managers, administrators, teaching staff and students, as appropriate.

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**Evaluative Question 8: The use of assessment data for a range of explicit purposes, which include learning**

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**Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Institutional policies and practices recognise assessment as a key motivator of learning and an integral part of the teaching and learning process. At the programme and subject/ course/ module level, assessment is systematically and purposefully used to generate data for summative purposes (grading, ranking, selection, predicting) and additionally for formative and diagnostic purposes, such as providing feedback in a timely fashion to inform teaching and learning and to improve curriculum and assessment practice itself.

Assessment data are also used to examine student performance trends and to inform institutional academic planning.

## SUGGESTED SOURCES OF DATA FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND REVIEW

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These suggestions are not intended to be used as a checklist. They are offered rather to assist and guide HEIs on what may be considered appropriate sources of data and evidence. This list will obviously need to be adjusted depending on the nature and context of the institution under consideration.

1. Institutional assessment policies, procedures and regulations, including those for RPL;
2. Guides for external examiners/ programme evaluators;
3. External examiner/ programme evaluators' reports;
4. Correspondence with external examiners/ programme evaluators;
5. Staff development strategy on assessment;
6. Faculty handbooks;
7. Programme and subject/ course/ module templates;
8. Descriptions of assessment strategies and related student hand-outs
9. Assessment instruments (tasks) with any accompanying explanatory/ supporting documents provided to students;
10. Examples of students' work with feedback, as well as marked examination and assignment scripts;
11. Mark sheets and marking guides;
12. Self-evaluation and plans for improvement from academics;
13. Student opinion surveys that include direct or indirect comment on assessment; and
14. Student database.



## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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CHE	Council on Higher Education
DP	Duly Performed
ETQA	Education and Training Quality Assurer
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
HET	Higher Education and Training
ITL	Improving Teaching & Learning
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
QA	Quality Assurance
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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**assessment of student learning** is the practice of designing formal tasks for students to complete and then of making inferences from and estimating the worth of their performances on these tasks.

**criterion-referenced assessment** refers to the practice whereby student performance is judged against pre-specified criteria or standards.

**diagnostic assessment** is used to predict academic potential (often used in placement testing)

**formative assessment** is used to improve learning through the provision of feedback to students on their progress; it serves needs intrinsic to the educational process.

**norm-referenced assessment** refers to the practice whereby student performance is compared with that of peers in the same class or cohort; it is associated with the averaging of scores and with attempts to obtain a bell-shaped curve of mark distributions.

**recognition of prior learning (RPL)** is a means of recognising what individuals already know and can do. RPL is based on the premise that people learn both inside and outside formal learning structures (including learning from work and life experience), and that this learning can be worthy of recognition and credit in formal educational contexts. RPL is used extensively in HEI situations where applicants are seeking admission to a course, advanced standing for a course or credits towards a qualification. RPL can also be used by those seeking entry to a particular field of employment, promotion or self-employment.

**reliability** concerns issues of consistency in assessment: for example, would the same results be achieved on another occasion? Have assessor factors influenced the results in any way? How far can the results of this performance be generalised to other performances? And so on.

**summative assessment** is used to certify the attainment of a certain level of education and to make educational decisions; it is formalised assessment used to serve needs extrinsic to the educational process.

**validity** concerns the accuracy and appropriateness of methods of assessment and the dependability of the inferences made on the basis of assessment results. An emphasis on validity seeks to answer questions such as: are we assessing the right things and are we assessing the things right?

**Note:** In assessment design, there is usually a trade-off between achieving validity and reliability; and between norm-referenced and criterion-referenced approaches.

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# 6

## ITL Resource No. 6

### 6A: Staff Development and

### 6B: The Self-Evaluation of Teaching

Each of the seven Improving Teaching & Learning Resources can be read and used individually, although there are cross-references as some are closely related. However, it is important to read the Introduction, as it deals with the purpose of the Resources and how they relate to the Higher Education Quality Committee's quality assurance mandate and its quality promotion and capacity development activities.

#### In this Resource...

- Focus Area
- Rationale
- Discussion
- Evaluative Questions
- Evaluative Questions and Suggested Good Practice Descriptors
- Suggested Data Sources for Self-evaluation and Review
- Abbreviations and Acronyms
- Glossary of Terms (action research; capacity building; educating; professionalisation; reflective practitioner; training)
- References and Suggested Reading

**Note:** Section 6A on *Staff Development* applies to staff development operations at institutional level. However, because the effectiveness of staff development for teaching is most evident at the subject/ course/ module level (i.e. at the staff-student interface), section 6B on the *Self-evaluation of Teaching* refers to the review and improvement of teaching at subject/ course level.

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## FOREWORD

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The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) prioritised quality issues in teaching and learning very early on in the development of its quality assurance systems. Mandated by legislation to conduct institutional audits and programme accreditation and to promote quality and quality assurance, the HEQC initiated a project in 2002 aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

The project on teaching and learning was intended to refocus attention on one of the core functions of higher education in an environment where the restructuring of higher education had given much attention to issues such as governance, financing and the 'size and shape' of the system. The project also reflected the importance of quality-related capacity development in the work of the HEQC, especially in a context where historical disadvantage impacts on the capacities of academic staff to plan and deliver good quality programmes and on the capacities of students to benefit from them. These issues needed to be addressed and to be brought to the centre of the debate about the purposes of a new quality assurance system for South Africa. Moreover, the project fitted in with international debates and developments in higher education, which were prioritising the learning experiences of students as well as giving increased attention to the professionalisation of higher education teaching and to staff development and support.

The HEQC set up the project in a way that would involve a number of role-players. It was important to draw on teaching and learning expertise in higher education as well as maximise the impact of those involved within higher education institutions. The Resources for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning should be seen therefore as the fruit of an extensive collaboration between the HEQC, a large number of experts and practitioners and a range of public and private higher education institutions.

It is hoped that the Resources will be adapted creatively for a number of purposes and used by higher education practitioners individually and in teams in the process of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to give effect to the transformation objectives in the restructuring of higher education, especially in relation to redress and equity and to the responsiveness of higher education to national goals and challenges.

The HEQC looks forward to further cooperation with key partners in higher education in effectively developing and using the Resources. We would like to acknowledge that funding for the project and this publication was made available by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation.

Dr Mala Singh  
Executive Director  
November 2004

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources are the product of collaboration between the HEQC and a wide range of academics based in private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). These included several academics from other countries who assisted with the project or provided advice. The 14 regional workshops at which the draft Resources were introduced and discussed in 2003 were generously hosted by public HEIs.

### 6a) Staff Development

## FOCUS AREA

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This ITL Resource on *Staff Development* applies to staff development operations at institutional level. 'Staff development' in this Resource is understood to refer to the professionalisation and development of academic staff and academic development staff. That is to say, the focus is on those who teach. However, it is important that staff development be approached holistically. It should be noted too that, in the higher education (HE) context, academic development, and student development and support services, remain under-resourced areas requiring development. For the purpose of this Resource then, staff development is understood as an umbrella term for developing the capacity of HE staff – and in particular those who teach – to fulfil their professional roles effectively. This includes training, educating, capacity building and individual consultation.

This Resource uses the following terminology and understandings:

- 'Training' refers to the acquisition of occupational or job-related skills;
- 'Educating' refers to the (usually formal) process of learning and understanding education theory and practice; and
- 'Capacity building' refers to the informal development of targeted skills and knowledge.

Staff development has traditionally been conducted on an informal basis, but increasingly a mixed model is being adopted in which informal approaches are complemented with formal programmes of professional development. On the subject of formal versus informal programmes, it is also important to acknowledge the fact that increasing numbers of academic staff work on a contractual (and often part-time) basis and that this is the norm in many private HEIs. It is unlikely that staff who are paid by the hour to teach will be motivated voluntarily to attend staff development workshops or programmes. Furthermore, it is likely that institutions will be less inclined to invest in the development of such staff. It is thus all the more vital that institutions be prepared to provide incentives for part-time, contract staff to invest time and energy in developing themselves as professional educators. In such circumstances, one strategy may be a series of short, informal capacity building workshops, to complement support for studying for formal postgraduate qualifications in HE.

## RATIONALE

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Globally, changes in the environment in which HEIs operate have led to pressures to change approaches to teaching and learning and to the ways in which these are managed. The trends in changing teaching and learning practice include, among others:

- A shift in emphasis from content- and teacher-centred teaching and instructional delivery, to student- and concept-centred learning;
- A shift in emphasis from a supply-driven, discipline-based curriculum to a demand-driven more interdisciplinary and contextualised curriculum with integrated outcomes related to performance and problem-solving; and
- A shift from exclusive academic control over the curriculum to stakeholder participation in curriculum negotiations.

Furthermore, the challenges of teaching the ‘non-traditional or new student’, and the development of educational research and new understandings about teaching and learning, have resulted in traditional teaching practices and approaches being criticised as inadequate. In addition, technology has revolutionised teaching and learning; and academic staff members now face the challenge of introducing effective ways of engaging technology for learning.

If academics are to become knowledgeable about new educational theories and methods and apply them effectively to their changing teaching contexts, the provision of staff development for teaching is critical. HE academics now require knowledge and skills in curriculum planning and design, multi-method delivery, software and learning resource development, mentoring and teamwork, as well as a knowledge of learning theory. It is a rare individual who can successfully develop these skills in a voluntary, amateurish manner. The idea that HE academics require no preparation or training as educators is fast becoming an anachronism.

In the First World, during the last two decades, the training of HE academics as educators has become common practice. Such training is compulsory for tenure nationally in Norway; it has become common institutional practice in Holland and Australia; and in the United States of America (USA) the Preparing Future Faculty movement is gaining momentum. In the United Kingdom (UK) the establishment of the Institute of Learning and Teaching (ILT) in 1999<sup>1</sup> as an accrediting body for entry into the profession of HE teaching has resulted in a significant increase in staff development training programmes and enrolments. The establishment of the UK’s ILT was part of an integrated national strategy by the HE Funding Councils to improve quality in HE, which has included the establishment of a Learning and Teaching Support Network and the funding of 24 ‘subject centres’ to establish discipline-specific communities of good teaching practice. Many British institutions now link their objectives for staff development and training to their human resource and institutional learning and teaching strategies. Another noteworthy trend in HE is the increased practice of continuing educator professional development.

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<sup>1</sup> Now the Higher Education Academy.



In addition, there is general recognition of the need to strengthen the skills of leadership, staff management and performance management at all levels in HEIs. A relatively recent development is research and a burgeoning literature on specifically academic management and leadership and organisational development.

Given the trends discussed above, staff development should provide opportunities for:

- training;
- education or capacity building in teaching practice (which includes curriculum design and development, and assessment);
- HE studies and research;
- academic management and leadership;
- organisational development (including quality assurance or QA); and
- information technology (IT) upgrading.

In post-1994 South Africa, the transformation of the HE system demands a professional corps of academic staff and academic development and support staff, who can meet the learning needs of their students and respond appropriately to the demands of the new policy environment. In order to realise new and ambitious policies, policy-makers have been keenly aware of the need to build the capacity of academic staff. *The White Paper on Higher Education* (Department of Education, DoE, 1997: 33-34) and other policy and discussion documents, such as *A New Academic Policy for Programmes and Qualifications in Higher Education* (2002: 119),<sup>2</sup> highlight the urgency of professionalising educators in HEIs. The HEQC has likewise identified staff development as one of the key focus areas for enhancing the quality of teaching and learning in the South African HE system (see *Criteria for Institutional Audits*, Criteria Nos. 9 and 10, 2004a: 13; and the *Criteria for Programme Accreditation*, Criterion 3, 2004b: 9).

Staff development is primarily an institutional responsibility and is operationalised within an institutional context. However, it is increasingly influenced by national policies and global trends. Institutions respond to these demands and take up national policies in different ways depending on their missions, contexts, institutional culture, resources, and so on. Nevertheless, given that institutional performance is ultimately dependent on staff effectiveness, all South African HEIs should provide resources and incentives for their staff to meet their own professional goals and to contribute to the realisation of institutional missions. Staff development should be an integral part of an institution's human resource development strategy and practice rather than an isolated, optional activity. Furthermore, the development of academic staff should be at the centre of any attempt to respond to the challenges currently facing HE professionals.

<sup>2</sup> Note that the DoE's *New Academic Policy*, or NAP (2002) has been replaced by the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework* (Ministry of Education, 2004), although the latter had not yet been finalised at the time of publishing these Resources.

## DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. **Kathy Luckett**, the coordinator of the working group, was asked to write this section so as to reflect on issues discussed by the working group in the course of developing the first draft of the Resources.

The views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

Traditionally, the professions have held a strong service value orientation. They have been based on an unspoken social contract that professionals exercise specialist knowledge and expertise disinterestedly and for the common good. In exchange, society has granted the professions the power of self-regulation; and it has therefore been assumed that reflection and self-improvement are integral to being a professional. However, in the last two decades there has been a shift in authority from academics (as professionals) to 'employers' (governments, managers and business) and to 'consumers' (students). The reason for this appears to be a loss of trust and the crumbling of the social contract between the academy and society, largely as a result of the academy's loss of its monopoly on knowledge production and the undermining of its service ethic by market values (Barnett, 1997). The current dominance of 'managerialism' in HE and the focus on the market-related extrinsic 'goods' of HE have led to an identity crisis for many academics who do not identify with the externally imposed extrinsic 'goods' HE is supposed to produce, and who consequently experience an undermining of their authority and status. It is the contention of the working group that this situation may well be due to lack of public debate about the purposes and values of HE, which now tend to be given top-down from governments and managers.

We would argue that it is important for academics to reclaim their professionalism; and that one way to do so may be to revive a commitment to learning (about teaching and learning) as a professional value and an intrinsic 'good' of HE. In his well-known *Scholarship Reconsidered* (1990), Boyer argues for four types of scholarship: discovery, integration, application and teaching. As has been argued in the *Introduction*, 'teaching' here should not be understood to mean simply the transmission of knowledge but, rather, the challenge of transforming the student. This endeavour is worthy of scholarship and, we would argue, needs to be afforded greater respect and support in the academic community. A commitment to the scholarship of teaching could be pursued deliberately by academics who, as professional educators, take control of their teaching practice and seek to reflect, research, build theory and improve practice, supported by communities of good teaching practice. Such educators would be in a position to use QA measures to improve their teaching and learning, provided they were given the institutional and deliberative space in which to do so.

In the *Introduction* to the ITL Resources, it was suggested that teaching be defined as planned efforts to bring about or facilitate learning in others. It was also argued that teaching does not automatically result in learning; that is to say, there is no direct cause

and effect relationship between the two activities. If the link between teaching and learning is uncertain and unpredictable, then it follows that any attempt to define good teaching will be limited; good teaching practice cannot be reduced to a formula or set of generalisable laws. If good teaching practice were formulaic, then professional development would mean simply the handing over to future practitioners of a body of rigorous theoretical knowledge, which could then be applied instrumentally to clearly formulated problems in the field. However, educational theory is never 'pure' in the classic scientific sense, and it can only be validated in specific educational practices. The 'classroom' – with its unpredictable human subjects and any number of uncontrollable variables – is the educational 'laboratory'; there is no other.

The advancement of educational knowledge therefore depends on linking the findings of research (theory) with its effectiveness in action (practice), and on building theory from effective practice; and it is thus always bound up with specific contexts and contingent, here-and-now judgments. For these reasons, educators can never be sure beforehand of 'getting it right', because the exercise of professional expertise is always more than the routine application of established theory. The application of educational knowledge to practice always entails self-conscious analysis and interpretation of a specific situation; and the practitioner must re-interpret his/her professional expertise in each new situation. Educational knowledge is therefore developed within and alongside professional practice.<sup>3</sup>

This understanding of the scholarship of teaching and its practice underpins the decision by the working group not to produce an HEQC Resource specifically on good teaching practice (see the *Introduction* to the ITL Resources). In the first place, it was feared that such an endeavour would be misguided; given the particularly context- and discipline-dependent nature of teaching, it would be impossible to relate to the sheer diversity of teaching contexts that exist in South Africa. Secondly, it was feared that a Resource specifically focusing on good teaching practice might be used to develop prescriptive, top-down accountability approaches to the QA of teaching, which would go against the understanding employed in these Resources of the nature of teaching and learning itself.

That being said, good teaching is not just an individual responsibility. Rather, good teaching is also dependent on environmental, institutional and structural factors such as resourcing; staffing; workloads; venues; libraries; time-tabling; leadership and management; incentives; and human resource policies and practices. It is suggested that institutional factors such as these – which affect teaching practice and either encourage or discourage the conditions for transformative learning to occur – are appropriate for an external QA agency to scrutinise, because, being beyond the control of the individual academic, they may militate against creative and innovative teaching practice and also against professional development for teaching. A key issue in this regard is the low status of teaching in research universities in particular. It is here that leadership is required to raise the profile of teaching and the scholarship of teaching and to ensure that it is adequately recognised and rewarded through institutional employment policies and practices such as appointments, tenure, promotion, incentives and appraisal.

<sup>3</sup> These ideas have been popularised in Schon's influential books, *The Reflective Practitioner* (1983) and *Educating the Reflective Practitioner* (1987).

A further factor militating against professional development for teaching is the mental models that academics have of teaching and of themselves as teachers. Because the majority of academics have never received any professional training in teaching there is a tendency to rely on common-sense beliefs about and habitual practices for teaching. For example, if an academic believes that teaching involves the imparting of information to students, then s/he will understand professional development to mean learning ways of doing so more efficiently and effectively. It could be argued that it is only once academics understand their role to be the facilitation of learning, and preferably learning that is transformative, that ongoing professional development and an interest in the scholarship of teaching begin to make sense. Thus, it is suggested that the starting point for staff development should be the individual academic's own teaching practice and reflection on that practice, preferably from within a supportive group of peers.

This raises the issue of models or approaches to staff development. As Graham Webb argues in his book, *Understanding Staff Development* (1996), approaches to staff development are fundamentally an ontological and epistemological matter. However, without entering into these debates here, it can be argued that there are at least three approaches commonly practised in South Africa today:

1. The first is the skills development, competence-based approach that is promoted by the Department of Labour, the sector education and training authorities (SETAs) and SAQA. While this approach works well for the development of given technical skills such as IT, database management and conducting library searches, we would suggest that, given the nature of teaching as discussed above, such an approach is inappropriate for developing the scholarship of teaching.
2. The second approach, which might be termed the development approach, is usually the one adopted in the implementation of Teaching and Learning Strategies, advocated in the *Introduction* to the ITL Resources. While Webb (1996) critiques this approach for exhibiting 'Enlightenment optimism', we suggest that, provided the development is understood to be open-ended, contested and susceptible to capture by particular interests or ideologies, it remains a useful approach. It is useful because it is usually based on a top-down management strategy that 'gets everyone on board', provides motivation and incentives and is able to deal with the environmental and institutional factors related to teaching discussed above. The development approach is usually most effective when strategies for changing teaching practice are initiated from the top but implemented at departmental or school level by teams of academics. However, if change is to be transformative rather than reproductive, such teams will need educational or academic development specialists to work closely with them to provide the educational theory and critique necessary to challenge old assumptions (and to do so tactfully!). This makes the model an expensive, labour-intensive one; and its success can never be guaranteed.
3. The development approach to staff development is often complemented by the 'action research – reflective practitioner' model, which advocates setting up action research groups within which individuals can reflect critically and improve their own practice. Action research is defined as:

**a form of collective self-reflective enquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out. (Kemmis and McTaggart, in Webb, 1996: 67)**

Action research understands the research process itself to involve social change. Thus practitioners plan, implement, document, analyse and reflect on changes to their practice with a view to continuous self-improvement. The findings of action research are fed directly back into practice in an iterative change process. This model of staff development offers academics the possibility of developing an evidence-based, critical view of their teaching practice. One advantage of an action research approach is that it is a bottom-up approach, which can be owned by academics and puts the responsibility for and power to change in the hands of individual practitioners. In so doing, the approach also acknowledges the complex, contextualised nature of teaching and of professional work in general. The weaknesses of this model include the fact that it is often difficult for individuals to sustain a continuous cycle of enquiry, reflection, planning and action, unless they are supported by a team and by the institutional leadership and environment. Furthermore, experience does not equal learning, and reflection on experience is not always sufficiently informed and critical to result in sustained improvement of practice. Again, this model works best when there are dedicated educational specialists who can facilitate groups of reflective practitioners and help them to ensure that their practice is adequately informed by educational or learning theory and *vice versa*. The model of self-evaluating teaching in a 'safe space' proposed in Resource 6B (below) is based on this 'action-research-reflective practitioner' model and attempts to put the QA of teaching at the service of 'reflective practitioner' development.

In concluding this discussion of approaches to staff development, we suggest that the three approaches presented above are not mutually exclusive, and that they can be used in complementary ways depending on the purpose and nature of the professional development required. In fact we would argue that, in the HE context, the improvement of teaching can be well served by a judicious combination of the development and action research-reflective practitioner approaches. This would entail institutional management's creating the conditions for action research to improve teaching practice. Management would need to initiate, support and resource the process, while the detail of how this gets done and control of the process would need to remain in the hands of small groups of academic 'reflective practitioners', supported by educational specialists.

Having considered approaches to staff development, we now turn to local practice. Despite the existence of small pockets of good practice, initiatives to professionalise teaching in South African HE are still at an early stage of development. The staff development movement in South Africa may be weakened by the lack of a professional association for HE practitioners to drive it. Initiatives to date have been taken, not by academics themselves but by staff development and academic development practitioners; and by human resource development officers. In many cases these various practitioners work from different premises. Two initiatives that have been undertaken are described below.

First, as part of the SAQA drive to generate standards for the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), a group of mostly staff developers formed a higher education and training (HET) 'standards-generating body' (SGB) that managed to develop a unit standards-based Postgraduate Certificate for Higher Education and Training (PGCHET), which is currently registered on the NQF. This qualification is at Honours level 7 (level 8 in the newly proposed interdependent NQF) and comprises 120 credits. The purpose of this qualification is stated as follows:

**The PGCHET is a postgraduate qualification intended to provide professional development and recognition for HET practitioners who lack formal HET teaching qualifications. It will enable persons with high levels of discipline-related qualifications to qualify themselves for specific roles/ obligations as practitioners in HET. It is directed at persons with HET teaching experience at NQF levels 5 and above and persons wishing to specialise in HET as a field of study. The target group, therefore, includes in-service academic staff at HET institutions and academic staff registered for HET learnerships in terms of the Skills Development Act.**

The PGCHET offers the following unit standard options:

**Core Unit Standards (100 credits):**

- HET 01: Analyse Higher Education and Training mission, context and legislation (10 credits)
- HET 02: Design, develop and implement assessment of learning in Higher Education and Training (20 credits)
- HET 03: Mediate and facilitate learning in Higher Education and Training (20 credits)
- HET 04: Mentor and advise learners in Higher Education and Training (10 credits)
- HET 05: Conduct research into Higher Education and Training practice (10 credits)
- HET 06: Interpret and design learning programmes and modules for Higher Education and Training (20 credits)
- HET 07: Manage learning facilitation in Higher Education and Training (10 credits)

(The core unit standards are compulsory.)

**Elective Unit Standards (20 credits):**

- HET 08: Manage a Higher Education and Training learning programme (10 credits)
- HET 09: Design and develop web-based learning (WBL) (10 credits)
- HET 10: Design and implement experiential learning in a workplace (10 credits)
- HET 11: Supervise research in Higher Education and Training (10 credits)
- HET 12: Moderate assessment (10 credits)

A second South African initiative is that of the Higher Education Staff Development Initiative (HESDI), which was established in 2000 by human resource development and academic development practitioners to promote the professionalisation of academic and support staff in HE. HESDI is currently working with the Education Training and Development Practices

(ETDP) SETA to establish learnerships and skills programmes in HE. Learnerships for administrators, and laboratory and educational technicians, are being developed, as well as a learnership for academics, leading to a SAQA registered qualification. This means that institutions will be able to claim back from the Skills Levy Fund for training offered to employees in this way.

Whether these initiatives will result in greater take-up of professional development by institutions and particularly by individual academics remains to be seen. Across the country there currently exist at least a dozen formal academic staff development programmes, as well as several non-credit-bearing induction programmes for new staff, at both universities and universities of technology (former technikons). Most of the formal programmes lead to a range of NQF registered qualifications: postgraduate certificates, postgraduate diplomas and coursework Master's degrees. These programmes have generally been developed independently by HE development specialists to suit particular institutional contexts. Some programmes are based on the 'reflective practitioner' model, while others adopt a competence and skills development approach. Many of the programmes pre-date the development of the SAQA qualification standards and go beyond the postgraduate certificate or diploma level, while others conform loosely to the specifications of the PGCHET. Incentives for academic staff to enrol for such programmes include remission of fees, recognition of the qualification for promotion or reward, annual distinguished teaching awards and, in some cases, the fact that an HE teaching qualification is a requirement for confirming tenure for new staff. However, with a few exceptions, numbers enrolling for these programmes remain small, except where it has become a compulsory requirement for new academic staff. Some of these programmes in HE serve a second stream of academic and academic development staff who wish to go beyond improving their practice and pursue the scholarship of teaching as a serious research focus. For this group, some of these HE programmes, usually located in Faculties of Education, offer full Master's and Doctoral research degrees.

Informal staff development activities in South African HE are less well documented, but we assume that most institutions currently make some provision for informal training and capacity building activities for their staff. Such activities tend to be better attended than the more demanding formal programmes as they usually require short-term commitments and deal with targeted skills or issues.



## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

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The following questions may be adapted for self-evaluating the quality of the policy and practice of staff development in HEIs:

1. Does the institution have an institutional staff development policy/ plan/ guidelines that is aligned with its own mission as well as with national policy frameworks?
2. How are staff recruitment strategies and selection and promotion criteria aligned with the institution's staff development policy and equity targets?
3. How does the institution provide career development for all academic staff from the commencement of their employment until resignation or retirement?
4. How does the institution integrate its staff development strategies with broader staff performance and appraisal systems?
5. How does the institution promote the scholarship of teaching? To what extent does the institution recognise the scholarship of teaching as a valid academic career path? How does the institution provide the necessary expertise, resources and structures for the development of teaching staff?
6. How does the institution monitor, review and improve its staff development provision?
7. What procedures are in place for the staff appraisal or performance management system to feed into the review and improvement of staff development and into institutional quality improvement plans?



## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS

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### STAFF DEVELOPMENT

#### **Evaluative Question 1:** Institutional policies, guidelines or plans on staff development

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##### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution has a coherent staff development policy, which is aligned with its mission and goals and Teaching and Learning Strategy. The policy is based on a staff needs analysis that also takes into account relevant market, social and national developments. For example, the staff development policy/ plan is in keeping with the following national legislation:

- The *National Plan for Higher Education* – the policy takes cognisance of the requirement for ‘improved staff equity’ (Ministry of Education, 2001: 3.3).
- The Employment Equity Act (Act No. 55 of 1998, Republic of South Africa) – the policy takes cognisance of an ‘equity plan’ to recruit staff from designated groups and to provide professional development activities in order to attain equity in the institution’s staff profile.
- The Skills Development Act (Act No. 97, 1998, Republic of South Africa) – the policy conforms to these requirements; e.g. a Skills Development Facilitator is appointed who integrates the academic staff development plan with a broader institutional training and development plan.

The staff development policy is supported by academic leadership and is widely disseminated and adhered to across the institution.

The institution has set aside adequate resources and time in staff workloads for the implementation of its staff development policy/ plan.

#### **Evaluative Question 2:** Alignment of recruitment strategies, & selection & promotion criteria

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##### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Staff recruitment and selection strategies and criteria are systematically aligned with the staff development and human resource policies.

Attributes and competences other than formal qualifications – such as personality, values, commitment etc. – are considered in the recruitment strategy.

There are explicit procedures for staff mobility and development, linked to performance and equity targets. All of these components are made clear to prospective and current staff and are applied transparently.

The recognition and reward of excellence in teaching are deliberately promoted and receive the same priority and status as excellence in research. *Ad hominem* promotion criteria reward performance in research, teaching and academic management equally.

### Evaluative Question 3: Comprehensive career development provision

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

There is a systematic staff/ career development programme directed towards the realisation of organisational and individual objectives. This is based on an analysis of key developmental and training needs such as the scholarship of teaching and management and leadership development. Staff development provision consists of an appropriate mix of formal NQF registered programmes and informal workshops, development initiatives etc. for continuing professional development, usually designed in response to identified needs, as well as individual consultation. The staff development programme is explicitly linked to procedures for staff rewards, promotions, mobility and development. Overall there is evidence that the staff development programme and activities have a positive influence on the satisfaction of staff and on their performance.

The institution invests in innovative and comprehensive forms of staff development provision and support, for example:

#### **Staff orientation/induction**

The institution provides a comprehensive induction/ orientation programme for new staff members.

#### **Internship and mentorship for new academics**

There is an organised programme of training and development for academic staff members on probation. Ongoing support of junior staff is provided through mentorship by senior colleagues with educational expertise.

#### **Skills programmes and learnerships**

Provision is made for IT and other necessary skills upgrading. Skills programmes may be supported by the ETDP SETA and could be offered for different teaching roles e.g. junior academics, tutors, mentors, demonstrators and student assistants.

#### **Research training and development**

Young staff members are encouraged and supported to complete higher research degrees.

#### **Development of academic leadership**

Training programmes for Heads of Departments, Deans etc. are offered.

#### **Development of HE educational expertise**

Ongoing support for the development of expertise in HE is provided for academics, staff developers, academic development staff, quality promotion staff etc.

### Evaluative Question 4: Integration of staff development with performance/ developmental systems

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The staff development plan is operationalised within an institutional performance management system. The plan could also be informed by a 'skills audit' (an institutional audit of staff education and training needs).

The staff development plan is aligned with Teaching and Learning Strategies and curriculum development plans in order to ensure relevance to teaching practice.

The staff development plan is implemented in a working environment that is conducive to carrying out good teaching practice, that enhances an employee's work climate and that enables the holistic development of staff.

Professional development activities are integrated into the job descriptions and workloads of academic staff.

There are procedures in place to manage poor performance; training and support are provided to underperforming staff.

### **Evaluative Question 5: Promotion of the scholarship of teaching & resources for staff development**

#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

HE studies is recognised as an important sub-discipline worthy of academic study and research.

Accredited programmes in HE are offered, which lead to qualifications registered on the NQF. Such programmes are designed to provide academic staff with opportunities to apply educational theory to their own practice and to develop their own teaching specialisations.

The programmes are offered by suitably qualified and credible experts in HE studies.

Research into teaching practice is encouraged, e.g. the institution provides staff with release time, funding and access to educational expertise in order to conduct research into teaching practice.

The quality management and/or staff development and appraisal systems support the development of teaching portfolios to promote self-reflection on teaching practice in an unthreatening climate (see 6B below).

The institution recognises the scholarship of teaching as a valid career path, which is built into its appointment, tenure, promotion and appraisal systems. The institution provides incentives and awards for good teaching practice and research on teaching, e.g. a distinguished teacher's award, which has research on teaching as a key criterion.

The institution provides financial support for research into teaching, and bursaries or remission of fees for study towards teaching qualifications.

### **Evaluative Question 6: Monitoring, review & improvement of staff development provision**

#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The staff development policy is monitored using a range of data sources, such as the evaluation of staff profiles, self-evaluation by academics and the evaluation of staff development courses and programmes.

Review of the staff development plan is also informed by external factors such as new national policies.

The institution has a system in place to make necessary changes to the staff development plan in response to the feedback obtained through evaluation.

### **Evaluative Question 7: Staff appraisal/ performance management feeds into review and improvement of the staff development plan**

#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

There are well designed policies and procedures in place for staff appraisal. These include guidelines on who should carry out appraisals, confidentiality of the appraisals and the

cascading of goals (from organisational, faculty and departmental level to programme teams and individuals).

Staff members are given the opportunity to first self-evaluate their own performance against negotiated goals/ outcomes (this includes the self-evaluation of teaching).

Weaknesses in staff performance are identified and dealt with sensitively by line managers. Further staff development activities are negotiated with the staff member concerned and provided by the institution.

The overall results of staff appraisals inform staff development plans and reviews.

Improvement plans are acted upon and properly resourced and monitored.

## 6b) The Self-evaluation of Teaching

### FOCUS AREA

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In this ITL Resource on *The Self-evaluation of Teaching*, the term ‘self-evaluation’ is understood to mean the review of teaching practice, which is conducted by the teacher or academic concerned, in order to examine what s/he does in a rigorous fashion and with the express intention of improving practice.

### RATIONALE

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It is suggested that, as part of staff development, institutions should provide ‘safe spaces’ for their teaching staff to undertake formative reviews of their own teaching practice (i.e. the self-evaluation of teaching – as opposed to that of programmes and courses,<sup>4</sup> see Resource No. 2). The self-evaluation of teaching should have no threats or sanctions attached to it and should not be used directly for summative purposes. In this way self-evaluation can be used to develop ‘reflective practitioners’ and, through the action research method, can be an important means of gaining immediate improvements in the teaching practice of individual academics. As mentioned above, for this model to work, it is important that individual academics be supported by a team and by the institutional leadership and environment; and it is helpful if dedicated educational specialists are available to facilitate reflective practitioner groups. It is also crucial that the academics concerned own the self-evaluation process, findings and improvement measures. This is why, in these Resources, the self-evaluation of teaching has been separated from course review, and included in this Resource on *Staff Development*.

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<sup>4</sup> In all cases the use of the term ‘course’ in these Resources can be replaced with the term ‘module’. The term ‘subject’ in its narrow sense sometimes refers to a course or module within a programme.

## DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. The discussion below was written by Professor Chrissie Boughey, a member of the working group. Also see: Boughey, C. (2001) 'Evaluation as a Means of Assuring Quality in Teaching and Learning: Policing or Development?'.

The views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

In a multicultural, multilingual country, with a history of inequity, such as South Africa, an understanding of staff development for teaching as the provision of a set of 'across-the-board', generic teaching skills could improve the quality of teaching – up to a point. However, given the highly contextualised nature of teaching and learning, and the very diverse contexts in which HE academics work (see the Discussion in 6A above), such an understanding would be unlikely to promote excellence and ownership. A 'one-size-fits-all' approach to staff development for teaching is unlikely to enable HE academics to meet the diverse needs of students from differing linguistic, social and cultural backgrounds, without even taking into account variations in institutional teaching environments such as infrastructure and resources.

Thus, the provision of basic generic courses on teaching skills in HE need to be complemented by initiatives to encourage HE academics to become 'reflective practitioners', able to observe and reflect upon the extent to which their teaching is 'fit for its purpose' in a given context. As a result of such processes of observation and theory-based reflection in a supportive educational community, 'reflective practitioners' are able to adapt and improve what they do in an ongoing way. The self-evaluation of teaching is key to reflective practice, since it is the means whereby educators observe and gather data on their practice in order to facilitate reflection and improvement. If observation and reflection on teaching are to be rigorous, self-evaluation needs to interrogate the assumptions (particularly about learning) on which teaching is based, as well as teaching strategies/ approaches themselves. This is particularly important in South Africa, where assumptions about what students ought to know are often invalid because of the poor quality of the learning experiences that have previously been made available to them.

Although self-evaluation as a part of reflective practice has the potential significantly to enhance the quality of teaching, it can be problematic because of the (perceived) dangers inherent in academics revealing what might be considered to be poor or ineffective practice. If self-evaluation is to be used to identify areas where practice does not meet the demands of particular teaching contexts, academics need to be assured that the identification of problem areas will not have negative consequences. An environment needs to be created in which it is 'safe' for academics to observe, reflect and deliberate upon their practice openly and honestly within an informed and supportive group.

The self-evaluation of teaching requires academics to elicit perceptions from a number of different perspectives (i.e. to triangulate data sources). Ideally, students' perceptions of the quality of teaching need to be balanced with the perceptions of peers. A peer, in this case, might be a colleague, a member of a staff development or quality promotion unit, an external examiner or any other peer who can act as 'critical friend' and whose perceptions are based on some educational expertise. The academic's own perceptions of the extent to which his/her teaching enables learning to happen also need to be taken into account, along with perspectives derived from educational theory and research. If student perceptions alone are allowed to dominate, then evaluation runs the risk of becoming simply an exercise in gauging client satisfaction.

When the self-evaluation of teaching is part of reflective practice, it can enhance the scholarship of teaching; this is because self-evaluation promotes the critique of practice that is often facilitated by conversations about teaching among peers and by reference to educational theory and literature. Self-evaluation and reflection on HE practice, which is written up in a teaching portfolio or published, should be recognised and rewarded in the same way as are other forms of research.

In a quality management system, findings from the self-evaluation of teaching and subsequent plans for improvement should feed into a staff appraisal system. In this way the self-evaluation of teaching becomes a non-threatening way of identifying problems that need to be addressed and of setting future professional development goals.

## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

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The following questions may be adapted for use in self-evaluating the quality of procedures an institution puts in place to promote the self-evaluation of teaching as an aspect of staff development:

1. How does the institution promote the self-evaluation of teaching as a means of enhancing reflective practice?
2. How does the institution ensure that self-evaluation of teaching takes place within a 'safe' space?
3. To what extent is support available for the self-evaluation of teaching?
4. How is the self-evaluation of teaching recognised and rewarded?
5. How does the self-evaluation of teaching form part of a more comprehensive staff appraisal system?
6. What evidence can the institution present to demonstrate its use of self-evaluation to improve the quality of teaching?



# EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS

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## THE SELF-EVALUATION OF TEACHING

### **Evaluative Question 1:** The promotion of the self-evaluation of teaching

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The HEI has a policy/ set of guidelines on staff development that encourages academic staff to evaluate their own teaching on an ongoing basis; the policy/ guidelines are aligned with the institution's vision/ mission statement and/or Teaching and Learning Strategy.

The self-evaluation of teaching is also encouraged through the institutional reward system (usually via the submission of teaching portfolios for peer review). The policy/ guidelines and reward system are actively managed and implemented through institutional structures and through the promotion of a 'culture' of reflection on teaching.

### **Evaluative Question 2:** Provision of a 'safe' space

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Policy/ guidelines exist and ensure that data elicited from student or other perspectives cannot be used without the permission of the academic concerned.

The policy/ guidelines state that data from a single perspective are not deemed to be an evaluation without being balanced with perceptions from other perspectives.

The policy states that problems identified through self-evaluation will not have negative consequences for the staff member concerned, provided that such problems are addressed.

Self-evaluation as part of reflective practice is documented by means of a teaching portfolio, which is open to scrutiny by peers.

### **Evaluative Question 3:** Support for the self-evaluation of teaching

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Educational expertise and support, in the form of consultation or by means of an ongoing staff development programme, are available to assist staff in the design and analysis of appropriate self-evaluation instruments. This support is then extended to allow staff to reflect on the results of self-evaluation and to address problem areas.

### **Evaluative Question 4:** The recognition & reward of teaching excellence

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

A teaching portfolio or other reflective document is required for probation purposes and/or for promotion on the basis of teaching achievement.

Teaching portfolios are peer reviewed against a set of criteria that explore the extent to which evidence-based reflection enhances teaching. This evidence is produced through the self-evaluation of teaching.

Assessments of portfolios are then considered by academic staffing committees or other reward and promotion structures.

## Evaluative Question 5: Links with staff appraisal

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution has in place a comprehensive staff appraisal system. This may involve the use of appropriate, trained staff to assist academic staff in setting goals for themselves, including those related to the development of teaching. Teaching portfolios based on the self-evaluation of teaching are used as a tool to monitor the realisation of these goals. The iterative process of goal achievement is documented by means of teaching portfolios.

## Evaluative Question 6: Improved teaching practice

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### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution can demonstrate via a sample of teaching portfolios and other QA data that the self-evaluation of teaching does lead to improvements in teaching practice.

## SUGGESTED SOURCES OF DATA FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND REVIEW

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These suggestions are not intended to be used as a checklist. They are offered rather to assist and guide HEIs on what may be appropriate sources of data. This list will obviously need to be adjusted depending on the nature and context of the institution under consideration.

1. Institutional mission statement;
2. Teaching and learning plan/ strategy;
3. Policy/ guidelines on staff development;
4. QA policies, reports and documentation;
5. Human resources policies;
6. Current human resources data on recent trends in the staff profile – i.e. the number, composition, skills, qualifications, distribution and levels of staff;
7. Documentation on the institution's performance management or appraisal system;
8. Planning documents on the implementation of the Skills Development Act, Employment Equity Act and other relevant labour legislation;
9. Documentation on staff needs analyses;
10. Workplace skills plan and reports;
11. Information on recruitment, selection, appointment and promotion procedures;
12. Organogram illustrating the structures and lines of responsibility for staff development;
13. Evaluations of formal HE and staff development programmes, induction, mentoring, learnerships and informal training workshops etc.;
14. Examples of software or guidelines intended to assist staff in the evaluation of teaching, e.g. custom-built student opinion questionnaires etc.;
15. Examples of data collection tools intended to elicit students' perceptions of teaching;
16. Guidelines/ procedures intended to assist staff in evaluating the teaching of peers;
17. Examples of teaching portfolios;
18. Criteria used to assess teaching portfolios;
19. Information on institutional expenditure on the professional development of staff; and
20. Information on how the impact of staff development is determined.

## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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CHE	Council on Higher Education
ETDP	Education and Training Development Practices
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HESDI	Higher Education Staff Development Initiative
HET	Higher Education and Training
ILT	Institute of Learning and Teaching
IT	Information Technology
ITL	Improving Teaching & Learning
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
PGCHET	Postgraduate Certificate for Higher Education and Training
QA	Quality Assurance
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SETA	Sector Education and Training Authority
SGB	Standards-generating Body
WBL	Web-based Learning

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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**action research** is a method of research designed to change and improve practice. It involves a continuous cycle of planning, implementing, documenting and reflecting critically on practice. The process is usually conducted through collaboration in a group of like-minded researchers.

**capacity building** refers to the informal development of targeted skills and knowledge.

**educating** refers to the (usually formal) process of learning and understanding education theory and practice.

**professionalisation** is the process of developing professionals who, by definition, possess a rich knowledge base and can use theory and reflection on practice to operate autonomously and ethically as experts in their field. Professionals have the capacity for continuous self-improvement.

**reflective practitioner** refers to the concept of a thoughtful practitioner who learns from the interplay between theory (propositional knowledge) and practice (procedural knowledge and experience) and so is capable of self-improvement.

**training** refers to the acquisition of occupational or job-related skills.

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# 7

## ITL Resource No. 7 Postgraduate Research and Supervision

Each of the seven Improving Teaching & Learning Resources can be read and used individually, although there are cross-references as some are closely related. However, it is important to read the Introduction, as it deals with the purpose of the Resources and how they relate to the Higher Education Quality Committee's quality assurance mandate and its quality promotion and capacity development activities.

### In this Resource...

- **Focus Area**
- **Rationale**
- **Discussion**
- **Evaluative Questions**
- **Evaluative Questions and Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**
- **Suggested Data Sources for Self-evaluation and Review**
- **Abbreviations and Acronyms**
- **Glossary of Terms** (postgraduate supervision)
- **References and Suggested Reading**

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## FOREWORD

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The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) prioritised quality issues in teaching and learning very early on in the development of its quality assurance systems. Mandated by legislation to conduct institutional audits and programme accreditation and to promote quality and quality assurance, the HEQC initiated a project in 2002 aimed at the improvement of teaching and learning in higher education.

The project on teaching and learning was intended to refocus attention on one of the core functions of higher education in an environment where the restructuring of higher education had given much attention to issues such as governance, financing and the 'size and shape' of the system. The project also reflected the importance of quality-related capacity development in the work of the HEQC, especially in a context where historical disadvantage impacts on the capacities of academic staff to plan and deliver good quality programmes and on the capacities of students to benefit from them. These issues needed to be addressed and to be brought to the centre of the debate about the purposes of a new quality assurance system for South Africa. Moreover, the project fitted in with international debates and developments in higher education, which were prioritising the learning experiences of students as well as giving increased attention to the professionalisation of higher education teaching and to staff development and support.

The HEQC set up the project in a way that would involve a number of role-players. It was important to draw on teaching and learning expertise in higher education as well as maximise the impact of those involved within higher education institutions. The Resources for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning should be seen therefore as the fruit of an extensive collaboration between the HEQC, a large number of experts and practitioners and a range of public and private higher education institutions.

It is hoped that the Resources will be adapted creatively for a number of purposes and used by higher education practitioners individually and in teams in the process of improving the quality of teaching and learning. Improvements in teaching and learning are essential to give effect to the transformation objectives in the restructuring of higher education, especially in relation to redress and equity and to the responsiveness of higher education to national goals and challenges.

The HEQC looks forward to further cooperation with key partners in higher education in effectively developing and using the Resources. We would like to acknowledge that funding for the project and this publication was made available by DFID and the Carnegie Corporation.

Dr Mala Singh  
Executive Director  
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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

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The Improving Teaching and Learning (ITL) Resources are the product of collaboration between the HEQC and a wide range of academics based in private and public higher education institutions (HEIs). These included several academics from other countries who assisted with the project or provided advice. The 14 regional workshops at which the draft Resources were introduced and discussed in 2003 were generously hosted by public HEIs.

## FOCUS AREA

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This ITL Resource on *Postgraduate Research & Supervision* deals in some detail with the support and oversight of postgraduate research. The Resource is therefore particularly applicable to research-intensive institutions that have a strong research focus specified in their missions. This Resource will complement the HEQC's *Quality Management of Research* (forthcoming in 2005). The good practice described in this Resource may not be of direct relevance to those institutions (particularly in the private sector) that do not offer postgraduate research degrees. However, in its *Criteria for Institutional Audits*, the HEQC states that:

**Although not all higher education institutions have research as a defining aspect of their mission, it is assumed that some measure of research activity is underway at all higher education institutions (e.g. research undertaken to inform teaching, and research by postgraduate students). (2004a: 16)**

Thus, in its institutional audits, the HEQC will expect to find at least a research policy and plans to support and develop research capacity among staff in non-research-focused institutions. Furthermore, Criterion No. 15, which applies to all institutions, requires that 'Effective arrangements are in place for the quality assurance, development and monitoring of research functions and postgraduate education'. In Criteria Nos. 16 and 17 the requirements for the quality management of research and postgraduate supervision are elaborated further. These criteria apply only to those institutions with a research focus and postgraduate students.

The HEQC, in Criterion 9 of its *Criteria for Programme Accreditation* (2004b: 14-15), sets out specific minimum requirements for postgraduate research in respect of policies, procedures and regulations. For example, it states that a minimum requirement is that, 'The selection and appointment criteria in place for postgraduate supervisors are acceptable to the research community in the area of study', and further details of what is required in this respect are given. The other criteria apply to all levels of higher education (HE), and the expert peer evaluating a postgraduate programme will check if appropriate requirements are in place for aspects such as staffing, infrastructure and student support and development.

This Resource applies to all research programmes at public and private HEIs, e.g. Master's by full thesis and Doctoral studies, and also to the research components of taught Master's and Doctoral programmes. This Resource has implications for policy development, and

the establishment of structures for research implementation and monitoring, and is applicable to institutional, faculty, departmental and postgraduate programme levels. At the institutional level, the Resource relates to institutional policy and planning to assure the quality of postgraduate qualifications and to regulate and improve procedures for research supervision. At the institutional level, the Resource also relates to the promotion of a research culture in which a research infrastructure and environment are provided and the conditions created for developing research capacity in both staff and students. At the programme level, the Resource relates to specific postgraduate research programmes, whose quality depends on the professionalism of individual supervisors, on the quality of the students, and on the more specific research capacity, facilities, regulations and procedures provided by faculties, schools or departments.

The HEQC *Criteria for Institutional Audits* (2004a: 5) includes the following open-ended questions relating, directly and indirectly, to research and postgraduate supervision:

- What are the unique and distinctive ways in which the institution enriches and adds excellence to the HE sector and society – nationally, regionally and internationally?
- What does the institution do to produce a vibrant intellectual culture within the institution and in society at large?
- In what ways does the institution act as an incubator of new ideas and cutting-edge knowledge and technologies within the national system of innovation?
- What are some of the notable examples in the last three years of institutional success in promoting and enhancing quality?

The term ‘postgraduate supervision’ usually refers to the supervision or promotion of students’ research activities leading in whole or in part to the awarding of a Master’s or Doctoral degree. The goals of postgraduate supervision are both the production of a good thesis and the transformation of the student into a competent and independent researcher. The supervision process is essentially a complex teaching and mentoring activity that includes a range of activities, such as:

- Assisting students to define a research topic and design an acceptable research proposal;
- Getting the proposal approved;
- Providing guidance on appropriate literature;
- Assisting with the determination of the research design and methodology;
- Supporting students in the collecting and analysing of data and writing up the thesis or dissertation as a final product;
- Providing detailed feedback to students;
- Meeting reporting requirements on students’ progress; and
- Writing a final report on the research process for the external examiners and examining committee.

At the institutional or faculty levels postgraduate students also require support to access funding for their research, and guidance on how to make their research results public.

## RATIONALE

In its *National Plan for Higher Education* (Ministry of Education, 2001),<sup>1</sup> the Department of Education (DoE) suggests that the 'value and importance of research cannot be over-emphasised. Research ... is perhaps the most powerful vehicle that we have to deepen our democracy' (2001: 5.1: 71). The *Education White Paper 3* (DoE, 1997)<sup>2</sup> places strong emphasis on the need to develop research capacity and output – to ensure both open-ended intellectual enquiry and the application of research activities to technical improvement and social development. Despite the NPHE and the White Paper, however, the current capacity, distribution, outcomes and throughput rates of the public HE research system remain cause for concern.

In the NPHE, the Department calls into question the ability of the HE system to meet the research and development agenda of the country (2001: 5.1: 72). In support of this contention, the following statistics are quoted in the NPHE:

- In recent years there has been a 10% decline in total published research outputs;
- There has also been a decline in the South African share of world research output;
- Only six universities are responsible for 65% of research outputs and for 70% of all Master's and Doctoral graduates in the system;
- Master's and Doctoral enrolments as a proportion of total enrolments are far too low – 5.0% in 1995 and 5.7% in 1999; and
- Black students constitute only 30% of all Master's and Doctoral enrolments and women only 40%.

The DoE has set an increase in postgraduate enrolments and outputs as a strategic goal for the South African HE system. In 2001 the DoE suggested that in the subsequent five years the system should improve the efficiency of its postgraduate outputs so that Master's graduates constitute 6% of the annual output of graduates and Doctoral graduates constitute 1% (2001: 5.3: 76). The DoE aims to steer the system to improve its research outputs through the following mechanisms:

- The New Funding Framework (2002a) introduces a separate research component based on research outputs, i.e. Master's and Doctoral graduates and research publications.
- The DoE will provide earmarked funding to build research capacity and for postgraduate training in historically disadvantaged universities (HDUs) and universities of technology (former technikons) and for the facilitation of inter-institutional research collaboration.
- The DoE will consider providing postgraduate scholarships to students from under-represented groups, and for subsidy purposes it will treat foreign postgraduate students as South African students.
- In the NPHE, the DoE also calls on the HEQC to make the evaluation of postgraduate programmes a priority<sup>3</sup> (2001: 5.3: 77).

<sup>1</sup> Hereafter: NPHE (2001).

<sup>2</sup> Hereafter: White Paper (1997)

<sup>3</sup> This was one of the reasons the first national review conducted by the HEQC was of the Master's in Business Administration (MBA); a report on the MBA review was published in 2004.

Traditionally, postgraduate supervision is not an area that has been systematically quality assured. The process has usually been left to the trusted professionalism of the individual supervisor, with minimal guidance and ‘interference’ from the institution. Given this context, the HEQC has identified the quality assurance (QA) of postgraduate research programmes as an important concern in its focus on improving the quality of teaching and learning, particularly for those institutions that specify postgraduate research in their institutional mission. The HEQC employs an additional set of institutional audit criteria for institutions with a research focus.

## DISCUSSION

For practitioners to be reflective, scholarly and innovative, they need to engage in robust debates that are theoretically informed. **Kathy Luckett**, the coordinator of the working group, was asked to write this section so as to reflect on issues discussed by the working group in the course of developing the first draft of the Resources.

The views and ideas put forward in the following discussion do not necessarily reflect the policies, views or practices of the HEQC.

Those institutions that plan to increase their postgraduate enrolments and outputs will need first to create the institutional conditions for this to occur: for example, guidelines and policies for developing and evaluating research proposals; the provision of research funding; incentives for research outputs; staff training and development; the development of research support networks; and generally developing a research-conducive infrastructure and culture. This applies to private HEIs that offer postgraduate programmes. Pressure will also be particularly acute for those HDUs and universities of technology (former technikons) that currently lack appropriately qualified staff and appropriate research infrastructure and so fail to attract postgraduate students. Likewise, merging institutions will need to attend to the development of a common research infrastructure and culture across the new institution. However, even those institutions that are perceived to be strong research institutions could benefit from a review of the quality of their postgraduate research and supervision practices. A common problem, for example, is the lack of systematic attention paid to the development of basic research knowledge and skills in undergraduate and Honours programmes. This is short-sighted, favouring as it does advantaged students and impacting negatively on equity and redress.

Postgraduate supervision and research training are core academic activities for most HEIs worldwide and are distinctive in that they provide the link between teaching and learning and research. Traditional approaches to postgraduate supervision are characterised by isolated, intense and sometimes intimate personal relationships. Such approaches are based on an apprenticeship model that often sets up a dependency relationship between student and supervisor, and on unequal power relations that are easily abused. Traditionally, this model of supervision has allowed informal and idiosyncratic approaches by the supervisor

and required enormous commitment from the student. This model is often characterised by slow throughput rates, unaccountable behaviour by supervisors, disputes between students and supervisors, and a general lack of clarity on procedures and regulations for the supervision process. In the South African context the traditional apprenticeship model carries with it additional historical and political ‘baggage’; namely, that the supervisory role has been dominated by white male supervisors and is often perceived to have been characterised by exclusive and elitist practices.

Recent shifts in knowledge production towards more applied research, a greater emphasis on employability, the increasing prevalence of qualification inflation, greater numbers and diversity of students, and pressure on HEIs to produce more postgraduates in less time, have meant that the traditional practice of research supervision is under pressure. Its nature is changing and being replaced by more pragmatic and efficient approaches, based on explicit accountability and contractual requirements for parties, an emphasis on research skills training and an emphasis on the employability of the graduate. The shift to a more formal, contractual and accountable relationship has the advantage of protecting both staff and students from negative perceptions and from the possibility of exploitative relationships. However, we believe that it is important to preserve, as far as possible, the intense one-on-one supervisory relationship, while avoiding the dangers of isolation and exploitation; this can be achieved by creating communities of research practice within departments, into which novice researchers can be inducted and which serve to ‘dilute’ the supervisory relationship and monitor the supervision process.

## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS

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The following questions may be adapted for use in self-evaluating the quality of postgraduate supervision and research training:

1. Do the institutional mission and strategic plan emphasise research and postgraduate niche areas? If so, how is this aspect of the institutional mission realised through its planning and resource allocation procedures?
2. How are postgraduate studies and supervision managed and quality assured at the institution?
3. Does the institution have clear policies, regulations and procedures for each stage of the postgraduate research process? How does the institution ensure accountability for the implementation of these policies and regulations?
4. To what extent are guidelines, acceptable to the local research community, communicated to postgraduate students on their rights and responsibilities with respect to the supervision of their research?
5. How does the institution/ faculty/ school/ department provide a research-conducive infrastructure and environment for its postgraduate students?
6. How does the institution provide appropriate induction to research and research skills training and support for postgraduate students, particularly for underprepared students?
7. How does the institution provide access to funding opportunities for postgraduate students?
8. To what extent are guidelines and criteria, acceptable to the local research community, provided for the selection and appointment of postgraduate supervisors? How does the institution provide guidance and staff development for postgraduate supervisors?
9. To what extent are guidelines and criteria, acceptable to the local research community, provided for the appointment of internal and external examiners and for the examining process?
10. How does the institution regularly monitor and review its postgraduate provision, completion rates, outputs and the employability of its graduates? Does this quality management system include eliciting student feedback on supervision, and the review of postgraduate policies and procedures?

## EVALUATIVE QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTED GOOD PRACTICE DESCRIPTORS

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### **Evaluative Question 1:** Realisation of the institutional mission through planning & resource allocation

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

Mission statements and strategic plans relating to postgraduate research have been operationalised; e.g. as faculty plans.

Postgraduate enrolment and output targets are clearly stated.

Recruitment and admissions procedures for postgraduate studies are aligned with these plans and targets.

Postgraduate research plans are supported by business plans and/or research funding.

### **Evaluative Question 2:** Effective management of the postgraduate system

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#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institution has developed clearly defined policies and procedures for:

- The recruitment, admission and induction of postgraduate students;
- The approval of research proposals;
- The supervisory relationship;
- The appointment of supervisors and examiners;
- Thesis presentation and examination;
- The award of degrees;
- Student complaints and appeals; and
- Postgraduate publications.

The institution's postgraduate research policy is supported by financial, administrative and organisational support and staff development.

Lines of accountability for the supervision process are clear. A senior academic/ line manager is assigned responsibility per faculty/ school/ department to coordinate research degrees, monitor the progress of postgraduate students and oversee assessment procedures. For taught Master's degrees the same person ensures that coursework and research are properly coordinated. Supervisors are required to document and report regularly to a senior manager on the supervision process.

Monitoring and review of this system takes place regularly and includes student feedback.

## Evaluative Question 3: Postgraduate policies & procedures

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution has developed postgraduate policies, regulations and procedures that are in keeping with its general research policy.

Postgraduate policies and regulations are widely disseminated, understood by students, administrative and academic staff and implemented consistently across the institution.

### Admissions

Admissions procedures are clear, consistently applied and aligned with the *Higher Education Qualifications Framework*, or HEQF.<sup>4</sup> As far as possible, decisions about admissions are linked to funding opportunities for the students concerned. Regular selection criteria ensure that students admitted to particular research programmes are adequately prepared to undertake the required research. Equity and access concerns are responsibly built into selection criteria and protocols; for example, if students do not meet regular admissions requirements, flexible entry routes could be provided through the recognition of prior learning (RPL), or alternative assessment protocols, which could include interviews, presentations, references, portfolios of previous work etc. Where the institution/ faculty does admit students via alternative/ flexible admissions procedures, provision is made for additional research training, language and writing skills development and support, both prior to and during the research process.

### Approval of research projects

Training for research proposal development is provided for students. Criteria for the approval of research projects include consideration of the following issues: the suitability of the project for the award in terms of the research questions and conceptualisation of the research; suitability of methodology; and analysis and scientific integrity of the proposed research. Further considerations include evidence that the student has the required research competences to complete the project; evidence that a suitable supervisor is available; and the availability of facilities and resources for the completion of the project.

### Student complaints and appeals

Open, fair and formal procedures are in place for hearing and adjudicating student complaints about the quality of the institution's supervision and support provision and for appeals against assessment decisions; these are clearly communicated to students. Students have the right of reasonable access to their records.

## Evaluative Question 4: Rights & responsibilities of postgraduate students

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The rights and responsibilities of postgraduate research students are clearly communicated to them, ideally in the form of a supervision/ learning contract. This includes: specifying students' responsibilities for registration; the payment of fees; communicating with and setting up appointments with supervisors; the nature and frequency of contact with the supervisor; attendance at meetings, seminars etc.; progress reports and monitoring of progress; submission of written work; meeting of deadlines; and meeting examination requirements and degree regulations.

The expectations of students with respect to observing research ethics, codes of conduct, regulations on plagiarism, copyright and intellectual property rules, rules for publication,

<sup>4</sup> Note that *The Higher Qualifications Framework: Draft for Discussion* (Ministry of Education: 2004), which replaced the New Academic Policy, or NAP (DoE, 2002), had not yet been finalised at the time of publishing these Resources.



sponsors' conditions, teaching assistant duties, and health and safety procedures are also made explicit.

## Evaluative Question 5: Provision of a research-conducive infrastructure & environment

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution provides a research-conducive infrastructure and environment for its postgraduate students. For example, students are inducted into an active research community, and provided with a suitably skilled and knowledgeable supervisor and/or supervisory committee. Adequate research facilities and equipment are provided, such as computing and information technology (IT) facilities, library facilities, study and laboratory space and technical equipment and accommodation. Optimal access to these facilities is available.

Postgraduate students have access to other academics in their specialisation, visiting researchers and other experts. The students also have access to financial support for conference attendance and publication.

The HEI provides its students with opportunities for communicating and meeting with other students; presenting and receiving feedback on work in progress; effective student representation; and establishing postgraduate student associations.

## Evaluative Question 6: Research skills training & student support

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution seeks to build student research capacity, particularly for underprepared students, through a range of support activities such as: an orientation/ induction programme; research design and methods training; research skills training; language and writing skills development; editorial support for writing; the development of research and professional skills (such as project management, information retrieval and database management); a mentoring system; and the provision of guidance and counselling in the event of difficulties.

Postgraduate students have access to appropriate student support and development facilities such as counselling, healthcare, and social and recreational facilities.

## Evaluative Question 7: Funding opportunities

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The institution effectively disseminates information on funding opportunities for postgraduate students, and provides support for accessing these opportunities. As far as possible, access to funding for operational expenses required for completing research projects is made available to postgraduate students through faculty/ departmental budgets. This could include: funding for library searches; photocopying; conferences; travel for fieldwork or experimental work; visits to other research teams or laboratories etc.

Postgraduate scholarships and grants are available to meritorious students.

Funding incentives are available for postgraduate students from designated groups. Fee reductions or remission of fees are granted to staff engaged in doctoral studies.

## Evaluative Question 8: Selection & appointment & guidance for supervisors

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

The selection and appointment criteria for postgraduate supervisors are acceptable to the local research community and are strictly applied. Selection criteria include relevant qualifications, experience, expertise, peer recognition, research track record and publications.

There are guidelines for other considerations such as supervisor workloads, alternative arrangements if supervisors are to be absent for an extended period, co-supervision, transfer arrangements, reporting and advice routes for both students and supervisors if communication breaks down or if there are concerns about a student's ability to cope, and mechanisms for deciding to suspend or terminate a student's registration. Where feasible, students have access to a postgraduate committee (which includes the supervisor) in order to get wider feedback and support for their research.

The institution provides a framework for arranging supervisor-student interactions in terms of explicit roles and responsibilities, expectations regarding frequency of meetings, supervisor reporting and feedback responsibilities, and turnaround times and responsibilities with respect to assessment arrangements.

Support for supervisors includes an induction/ orientation to institutional policies on research, the management of postgraduate supervision and the role and responsibilities of supervisors in the research process. Guidelines such as a format for establishing agreements or learning contracts between postgraduate students and supervisors are provided.

Staff development such as in-service training, mentoring and peer support is available for novice supervisors.

The institution also rewards supervisors for the graduation of postgraduate students.

## Evaluative Question 9: The assessment of postgraduate research

### Suggested Good Practice Descriptors

Assessment criteria and/or an explicit understanding of the quality of research achievement required, plus thesis production, length, referencing and layout requirements, are clearly communicated to students on commencement of their studies, by means of an institutional or faculty guide/ handbook.

Internal and external examiners are appointed according to acceptable criteria; for example, at least one examiner external to the institution is appointed per dissertation/ thesis. Examiners are appointed on the basis of qualifications, experience, expert knowledge in the research area and independence.

The institution provides clear guidelines to external examiners on the standard/ quality of research achievement required, on the nature of their task and on institutional examining regulations. The requirements for examination reports are clearly documented for examiners. External examiners usually report directly to the Senate (or its sub-committees), or equivalent, of the institution.

There are clear guidelines on how assessment outcomes, corrections and further work are communicated to students and monitored by their supervisors. Without undermining the principle of assessment by academic judgment, assessment decisions are made transparently and students are afforded reasonable access to information (e.g. examiners' identities and reports). There are appeal mechanisms for students and opportunities for them to defend their theses, e.g. through an oral defence.

Higher degree committees or similar structures consider examiners' reports qualitatively and make considered decisions about examination outcomes.

On completion of their research, students are encouraged and guided by their supervisors on how to publish their findings in suitable journals.

### **Evaluative Question 10: Monitoring & review of postgraduate research**

#### **Suggested Good Practice Descriptors**

The institutional QA system ensures that the processes and outcomes of postgraduate research programmes are monitored and reviewed regularly, usually at programme and/or school/ faculty level. Reviews are based on: data gathered from postgraduate student feedback on the quality of their learning experience; supervision and support infrastructure; examiners' reports; and supervisor and research coordinators' self-reviews and reports. Other sources of data could be feedback from external funders and employer/ graduate surveys.

The institution runs a central research information system, which captures and monitors overall completion times, graduation rates and postgraduate research outputs.

Review results are fed into future planning cycles.

## SUGGESTED SOURCES OF DATA FOR SELF-EVALUATION AND REVIEW

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These suggestions are not intended to be used as a checklist. They are offered rather to assist and guide HEIs on what may be appropriate sources of data. This list will obviously need to be adjusted depending on the nature and context of the institution and/or programme under consideration.

### INSTITUTIONAL LEVEL

1. Institutional mission statement;
2. Institutional three-year rolling plan, and 'programme and qualification mix' or PQM (in the case of public HEIs);
3. Documentation on postgraduate policies and procedures;
4. Organogram of the postgraduate decision-making and accountability structures at the institutional/ faculty/ departmental levels;
5. Documentation on admission requirements for postgraduate students;
6. Documentation on staff development programmes for postgraduate supervisors;
7. Guideline documentation for supervisors;
8. Guideline documentation for examiners;
9. Guideline documentation for postgraduate students;
10. Documentation regarding postgraduate student support facilities and available research infrastructure;
11. Documentation regarding funding available for postgraduates;
12. Documentation regarding progress made towards reaching equity targets in postgraduate enrolments and outputs; and
13. Research reports relating to postgraduate studies (e.g. completion and throughput rates).

### PROGRAMME LEVEL

1. List of postgraduate supervisors (and co-supervisors), their *curriculum vitae* (CVs), the topics they are supervising and their students;
2. Samples of postgraduate supervision contracts or agreements;
3. Samples of supervisors' reports on the supervision process;
4. List of internal and external examiners and their CVs;
5. Samples of external examiners' reports;
6. Postgraduate student opinion data; and
7. Graduate or employer surveys where available.

## ABBREVIATIONS & ACRONYMS

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CHE	Council on Higher Education
CV	Curriculum Vitae
DoE	Department of Education
HDU	Historically Disadvantaged University
HE	Higher Education
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualifications Framework
IT	Information Technology
ITL	Improving Teaching & Learning
MBA	Master's in Business Administration
NAP	New Academic Policy
NPHE	National Plan for Higher Education
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
QA	Quality Assurance
RPL	Recognition of Prior Learning

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

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**postgraduate supervision** refers to the supervision or promotion of students' research activities; typically leading in whole or in part to the awarding of a Master's or Doctoral degree.

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