



# **Quality Enhancement Project Phase 2 Focus Area and Institutional Submission Specifications**

(Public Universities)

March 2017

# 1. Introduction

The Council on Higher Education (CHE) is the quality assurance body and Quality Council for higher education in South Africa. In terms of the Higher Education Act 101 of 1997 as amended, its functions include: to advise the Minister of Higher Education and Training on aspects of higher education and training, promote quality assurance in higher education, audit the quality assurance mechanisms of higher education institutions (HEIs), accredit programmes of higher education, publish information regarding developments in higher education and promote the access of students to higher education institutions.

In 2004, the CHE began the first quality assurance cycle, which lasted until 2011. A key activity in this period was to conduct institutional audits of HEIs. During this period there was a significant reconfiguring of the higher education landscape in which the total number of public higher education institutions was reduced from 36 to 23 through a process of mergers. As a result of this process, new institutions were created and new institutional quality assurance mechanisms were developed. Institutional audits played an important role in ensuring that these mechanisms were appropriate and effective by identifying areas in which improvements were needed, requiring institutions to develop improvement plans and then monitoring that these improvement plans were implemented. In 2011, the last audit report for a public HEI was produced. While this marked the formal end of the first audit cycle, it took several more years for a number of institutions to demonstrate that they had effectively addressed the recommendations of their institutional audits. In the past few years three new HEIs have been established.

Towards the end of the first quality assurance cycle discussions began within the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and with the higher education sector about what should be done in the second quality assurance cycle. In the discussions, the need to improve teaching and learning in higher education emerged as a central theme.

An external evaluation of the HEQC<sup>1</sup> in 2009 stated that,

With regard to the promotion of quality assurance, the panel believes that the HEQC has been successful in developing a credible quality assurance system for South African higher education and has worked well with institutions to develop their own quality assurance mechanisms, especially through the audit process.

However, the evaluation noted that the cost in time and human resources of carrying out comprehensive institutional audits was great, and suggested that a different approach should be taken in the next quality assurance cycle. It indicated that for the next cycle the focus should be on quality promotion:

The panel believes that quality assurance mechanisms and practices have been embedded in the higher education system. While this strength should be maintained and strengthened

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<sup>1</sup> *External Evaluation Report of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education, South Africa, February 2009*

further, the panel believes that the HEQC should find ways to focus on quality promotion for the second cycle...the panel is confident that the HEQC...will design a process which will effectively help institutions to advance to increasing levels of quality and responsiveness to student and national needs.

In 2011 the National Development Plan<sup>2</sup> drew attention to the fact that the higher education system was a “low participation, high attrition system”. The production of the CHE’s first VitalStats in 2013 confirmed that student completion rates were low. This provided added impetus for a focus on improving teaching and learning, particularly at the undergraduate level, since over 80% of students enrolled in South African HEIs are undergraduates.

For three years, from 2010 to 2012, numerous discussions were held with the higher education sector and within the CHE, and a number of working documents were prepared to formulate how best the CHE could work with the sector to promote quality teaching and learning. In the last of these discussion documents<sup>3</sup> it was stated that although the HEQC initially considered “following the broad format of the first cycle of audits”, an alternative approach should be used:

It was recognised, though, that in order to strengthen teaching and learning, the national system might benefit from an alternative approach that takes a quality development approach where institutions actively focus on and address the quality challenges in teaching and learning through internal reflection and collectively sharing good practice and exploring ways to deal with hindrances, many of which are common across the higher education sector. Therefore, an institutional quality enhancement programme approach will be implemented in the second period of quality assurance.

In the second half of 2012 and first half of 2013 these ideas were further elaborated and a new methodology was developed. At the end of 2013, after several years of discussion and consultation in the HEQC and the higher education sector, it was agreed that the focus of the second quality assurance cycle would be on improving student success, both at individual institutions and across the higher education sector. This focus was operationalized through the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP). The framework<sup>4</sup> and process<sup>5</sup> were approved by the HEQC and Council in December 2013. The use of the term “quality enhancement” signals an intention to follow the recommendations of the HEQC evaluation to “help institutions to advance to increasing levels of quality.” It is also in line with international trends in which enhancement, which involves looking forward towards improvements, is increasingly gaining favour over assurance, which is associated with looking back over what has been done.

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<sup>2</sup> National Planning Commission (2011). *Our future – make it work. National Development Plan 2030*. Department of the Presidency.

<sup>3</sup> Council on Higher Education (28 June 2012). *Framework for the Institutional Quality Enhancement Programme (2012-2017)*

<sup>4</sup> Council on Higher Education (2014). *Framework for Institutional Quality Enhancement in the Second Period of Quality Assurance*.

<sup>5</sup> Council on Higher Education (2014). *Quality Enhancement Project. The Process for Public Higher Education Institutions*.

For the purposes of the QEP, student success is defined as:

Enhanced student learning with a view to increasing the number of graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable.

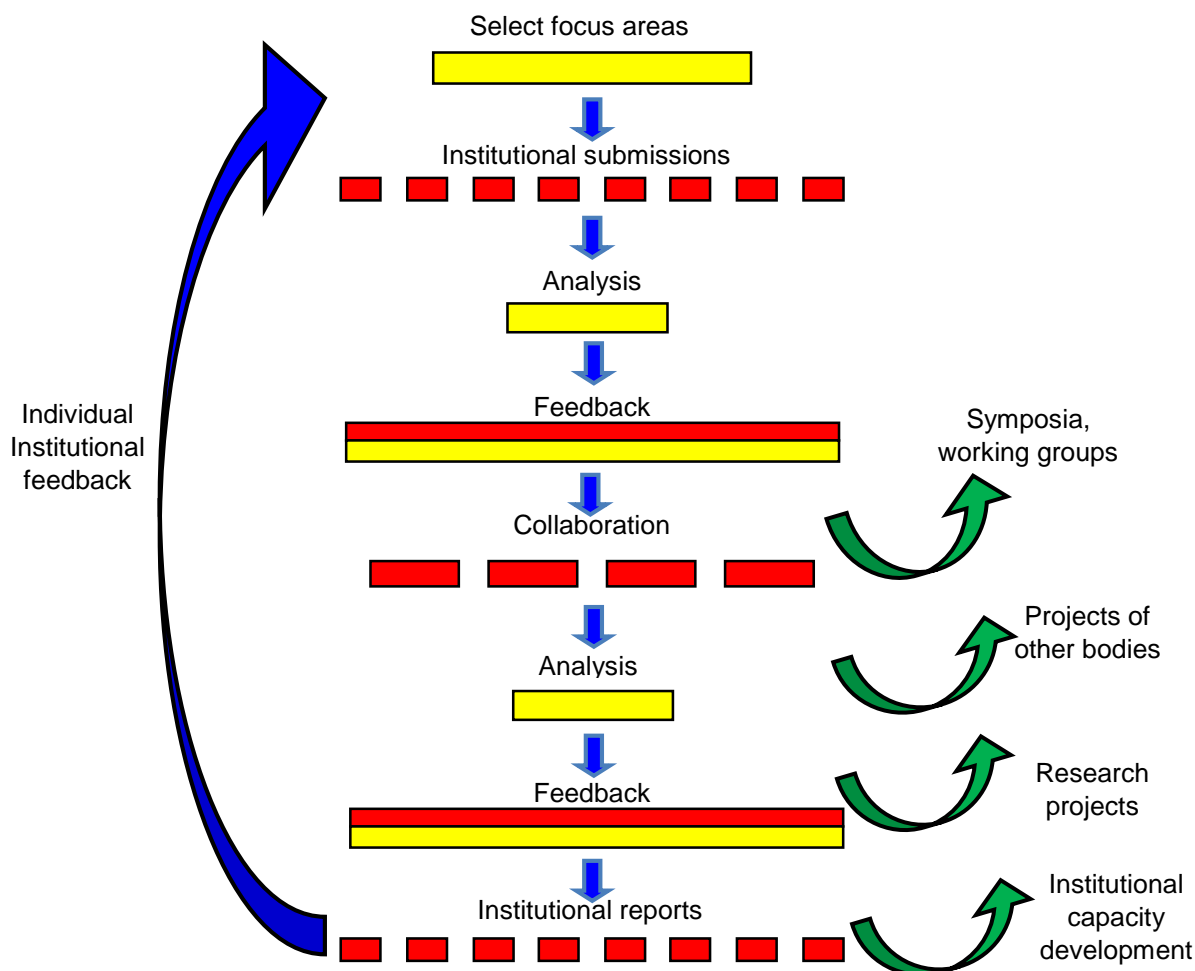
In addition to promoting quality in teaching and learning, the QEP provides a platform for the CHE to address its mandate of promoting access of students to higher education, particularly to the historically marginalised and underprivileged in our society. Furthermore, the design of the QEP provides multiple opportunities for institutions to identify and share both what is working and is not working in improving student success, and to develop a culture of evidence-based decision-making.

The approach adopted in the QEP is inductive — information and insights emerging from each part of the QEP process inform what is done in the next part of the process. It is also iterative in that there are two phases, although as a result of events in South Africa in the past two years, changes have been made to the approach for Phase 2 (discussed later). Originally it was intended that in each phase, institutions would be asked to engage with selected focus areas through baseline submissions, collaboration with other institutions and reports on enhancements made in the focus areas during the phase (Figure 1). More information can be obtained in the CHE's 2014 document, *Quality Enhancement Project. The Process for Public Higher Education Institutions*.

The green arrows in Figure 1 represent spin-off activities, some of which are carried out by the CHE and others by numerous other role players in higher education, but all related to improving student success. In Phase 1 of the QEP there have been numerous such activities. An example of a capacity-building activity undertaken by the CHE was a set of two, two-day workshops on *Assessment and Recognition of University Teaching*, to which all deans and directors of teaching and learning from all universities were invited. Examples of relevant activities undertaken by other role players include: collaborative research projects, new formal programmes for professional development of academics and academic development staff, the Siyaphumelela<sup>6</sup> project on improving data analytics in the service of student success, projects funded by DHET collaborative Teaching Development Grants, such as the Teaching Advancement at Universities fellowship programme and the South African National Resource Centre for First-Year Experience and Students in Transition, workshops and conferences by professional bodies such as SAAIR and HELTASA and numerous workshops and conferences organised by institutions.

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<sup>6</sup> Funded by the Kresge Foundation and managed by SAIDE



**Figure 1: The process for each phase of the QEP.**

While the process as planned was followed for Phase 1, for Phase 2 the process has been modified. Nationwide student protests in 2015 and 2016 calling for transformation, decolonisation of the curriculum and free higher education, together with the desire on the part of institutions to consolidate what was learnt in Phase 1 of the QEP and the time needed to achieve a shared understanding of what the focus should be in the light of student protests, resulted in a one-year delay in the start of Phase 2. From the CHE's side, concerns about quality have led to a decision to move the implementation of the next quality assurance cycle, which will focus on assessing institutions' quality assurance systems, forward by a year (to 2018). For these reasons, in Phase 2 of the QEP there will be only one institutional submission, together with analysis and opportunities for collaboration across the sector. Further institutional engagement with and among institutions on issues related to promoting student success will take place within the framework of the new institutional quality assurance process currently under development.

The next section provides a brief summary of the focus areas for Phase 1. Section 3 describes the focus areas for Phase 2, Section 4 explains the purpose of the submission and Section 5 spells out the content of the institutional submission for Phase 2.

## **2. Phase 1 of the Quality Enhancement Project, 2014-2015**

Phase 1 of the QEP began in 2014. Four focus areas were selected with which all institutions were asked to engage. These are:

### 1. Enhancing academics as teachers

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

### 2. Enhancing student support and development

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

### 3. Enhancing the learning environment

*Including teaching and learning spaces, ICT infrastructure and access, technology-enabled tools and resources, library facilities.*

### 4. Enhancing course and programme enrolment management

*Including admissions, selection, placement, readmission refusal, pass rates in gateway courses, throughput rates, management information systems.*

These four focus areas dealt with institution-level issues. The enhancement of academics as teachers requires institutions to provide professional development opportunities. But for academics to pay attention to improving their teaching, institutions need to include teaching quality in performance appraisal and rewards systems. A mechanism for distributing workloads equitably and recognising the time needed to undertake quality teaching is also needed.

Student support and development need to be offered through appropriate structures by qualified people at different levels of an institution. Interaction and coordination among these structures and the people in them are needed to ensure effectiveness. Institutional policies and processes are needed to identify and resource the various forms of student support and development opportunities that are aligned to the institution's mission.

The physical learning environment can constrain or enable the nature and quality of teaching and learning. The provision of physical spaces, equipment and ICT for teaching and learning is planned and resourced at institutional level. Decisions about what is provided, when, where and why need to be guided by an institution's teaching and learning strategy.

Managing the process at institutional level of which students are enrolled in which programmes is a crucial element of promoting student success. Effective methods are needed to select and place students into programmes in which they have a good chance of succeeding. Institutional IT systems and staff are needed to monitor students' progress and to identify blockages to student progress, such as gateway courses with low pass rates.

Taken together, the four focus areas address a number of prerequisites at institutional level that must be in place in order to improve teaching and learning and student success.

In September 2014 all public higher education institutions submitted baseline information for each of the four focus areas on activities they considered to be successful and those they considered to be less successful than they had hoped. These activities were synthesised in the 2015 CHE publication, *Content Analysis of the Baseline Institutional Submissions for Phase 1 of the Quality Enhancement Project*. The complete institutional submissions are available on the CHE website. These submissions represent the first time that all universities engaged with specific aspects of student success simultaneously. The rapid analysis and publication of the content analysis — eight months after the institutional submissions were received and 15 months after the QEP was launched — meant that the document could be used as a resource for institutions to bring about improvements while Phase 1 of the QEP was still underway and the issues were current. While no claims can be made about best practice, the content analysis is a useful resource for the higher education sector, as it provides numerous concrete examples of approaches and actions that institutions can adapt or adopt for their own context.

All public HEIs and the majority of private HEIs have participated in Phase 1 of the QEP, which ended with the submission of institutional reports by public HEIs. These reports were originally due on 11 December 2015, but owing to extended student protests at many universities in the closing months of 2015, some reports were submitted in early 2016. These reports are also available on the CHE website.

The “feedback” component of the QEP process takes the form of a visit and a written report. In 2016 and early 2017, one-day QEP institutional visits were conducted by two peer reviewers and the Director: Institutional Audits to interact with senior management and key role players involved in each of the four focus areas about the improvements that each institution was making or planning to make related to the focus areas. Appreciative Inquiry<sup>7</sup> was used as the frame for the visits. Following the visits, reports were written that summarise areas of and for improvement, based on institutions’ two submissions and the visits. Where appropriate, reference was made to good practices at other institutions, since facilitating learning from one another is an important aspect of the QEP. Owing to the turbulence in the higher education sector in 2016, there were delays in finalising the reports, but these will be sent to institutions in early 2017.

### **3. Focus area for Phase 2 of the QEP: Curriculum**

The focus area for Phase 2 is curriculum. Curriculum lies at the heart of students’ academic experience. It provides the vehicle by means of which students obtain a qualification, a formal recognition by an educational institution and society of a specific set of achievements. The design of the curriculum in particular ways embodies assumptions, often tacit, about what the

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<sup>7</sup> Cooperrider, D.L. and Srivastva (1987). Appreciative inquiry in organizational life. In Woodman, R.W. & Pasmore, W.A. (Eds), *Research in Organizational Change and Development*, Vol.1 (pp 129-169). Stamford, CT: JAI Press.

institution considers the purpose of the curriculum (and the qualification of which it is a part) to be, a purpose which may or may not be shared by the students, and which has come under heightened scrutiny as political activism on other non-related issues have flared up periodically.

### 3.1 Political and policy context

Curriculum is a highly contested notion in higher education, including in South Africa. While there are different definitions and understandings of curriculum, for the purposes of this document, an operational definition of curriculum is the structure and processes that frame the learning opportunities provided to students. However, these structures and processes are not value-free. In the well-known words of Bernstein<sup>8</sup>:

How a society selects, classifies, distributes, transmits and evaluates the educational knowledge it considers to be public, reflects both the distribution of power and the principles of social control.

South Africa has a long history of using education as a tool to restrict access to power and exert social control, and to marginalise, deligitimise and devalue indigenous knowledge. In writing about school curriculum in 1993, shortly before South Africa's transition to democracy, Muller and Taylor<sup>9</sup> illuminate how this finds expression through the exercise of authority and power by the state and the academy, and their pernicious effects as follows:

We have argued that there are primarily three specialist domains [political, bureaucratic, academic] that maintain the curriculum cycle through the exercise of redescriptions and authorisations of knowledge. Grossly asymmetric relations exist between the three domains and the everyday domain in South Africa. These result from the exercise of surplus authority by these domains, at the expense of each other, but largely at the expense of the public good.

...The bureaucratic domain suffers under surplus authority directed at it from both the state and academic spheres. Surplus political authority ensures a political homogeneity within the bureaucracy which tends to stifle debate and encourage corruption. Surplus academic authority, on the other hand, results in the reification and opacity of knowledge and its monopolisation.

Within higher education, the effects run deeper and have been more enduring. Indeed, the very establishment of certain HEIs in South Africa was a manifestation of a particular political ideology, regulated and supported by politically-aligned bureaucracy, while in other institutions reification and monopolisation of knowledge effectively limited epistemological access to a particular group of students.

After South Africa made the transition to democracy in 1994, explicit steps were taken to transform higher education. These steps and the rationale for them are spelt out in *Education*

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<sup>8</sup> Bernstein, B. 1971. On the classification and framing of educational knowledge. In MFD Young (ed). *Knowledge and Control: New directions for the sociology of education*. London: Collier MacMillan, 47-69.

<sup>9</sup> Muller, J. and Taylor, N. (1993). Into other wor(l)ds: curricular knowledge in the making. In N. Taylor (Ed.) *Inventing Knowledge: Contests in Curriculum Construction*. Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 312-330.



*White Paper 3: A Programme for Higher Education Transformation*<sup>10</sup>. In his Foreword, the then Minister of Education wrote:

The transformation of the higher education system to reflect the changes that are taking place in our society and to strengthen the values and practices of our new democracy is... not negotiable.

In the Introduction it states:

South Africa's transition from apartheid and minority rule to democracy requires that all existing practices, institutions and values are viewed anew and rethought in terms of their fitness for the new era. Higher education plays a central role in the social, cultural and economic development of modern societies. In South Africa today, the challenge is to redress past inequalities and to transform the higher education system to serve a new social order, to meet pressing national needs, and to respond to new realities and opportunities. It must lay the foundation for the development of a learning society which can stimulate, direct and mobilise the creative and intellectual energies of all the people towards meeting the challenges of reconstruction and development.

However, transformation in higher education has not happened as quickly or as universally as hoped or envisaged. As a result of concerns about the pace and extent of transformation in higher education, in 2008 the Minister of Education established a ministerial committee to look into this issue<sup>11</sup>. One of the issues that the committee identified is the need for curriculum reform:

A key element in the broad interpretation of transformation, as indicated in Section 2.1, is epistemological transformation, i.e. 'how knowledge is conceived, constructed and transmitted' (Hall 2006). It could be argued, given that the primary function of higher education is the production and transmission of knowledge, that epistemological transformation is at the heart of the transformation agenda. And at the centre of epistemological transformation is curriculum reform - a reorientation away from the apartheid knowledge system, in which curriculum was used as a tool of exclusion, to a democratic curriculum that is inclusive of all human thought.

The committee made the following recommendations to higher education institutions related to curriculum<sup>12</sup>:

The Committee found that the transformation of what is taught and learnt in institutions constitutes one of the most difficult challenges this sector is facing. In light of this, it is recommended that institutions initiate an overall macro review of their undergraduate and postgraduate curricula, so as to assess their appropriateness and relevance in terms of the social, ethical, political and technical skills and competencies embedded in them. This should be done in the context of post-apartheid South Africa and its location in Africa and the world.

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<sup>10</sup> Government Gazette (16 August 1997). *Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education*. Vol 386 No. 18207 3.

<sup>11</sup> Department of Education (30 November 2008). *Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions*.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid

In short, does the curriculum prepare young people for their role in South Africa and the world in the context of the challenges peculiar to the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

Given the decontextualised approaches to teaching and learning that are evident in virtually every institution, it is recommended that institutions give consideration to the development of curriculum approaches that sensitise students to the place of, and the issues surrounding South Africa on the African continent and in the world at large.

The student protests of the past two years have brought to the fore another curriculum issue referred to in the same document – the Eurocentric orientation in content, the constitutive rules and norms that control thinking, and what knowledge and productive processes are valued and legitimised formally at and through our universities. The pervasive dominance of western canons of knowledge in curricula in South African higher education institutions have not gone unnoticed. A rising tide of critical voices among students and academics urge for decolonisation and Africanisation of the curriculum. Some commentators have warned against ‘ethnocentric particularism,’ arguing that the intention is not to devalue or banish other knowledge traditions. This point is argued in the report as follows<sup>13</sup>:

However, a careful review of the notion of Africanisation will reveal that it does not exclude other knowledge systems but is rather an expression of the desire to be inclusive. As Chabanyi Manganyi has argued in relation to the notion of an African university:

*When I talk about African universities ... it should be clearly understood that I am not referring to an ethnocentric particularism of the kind that is common in South Africa today, but rather this: that all South African universities will hopefully begin to see themselves as being in Africa and of Africa (Manganyi, 1981: 160).*

This, of course, does not mean that African universities will ignore other knowledge traditions. The starting point of the Africanisation of the curriculum is the importance of affirming and validating, as opposed to marginalising knowledge that is based on African views of the world and systems of thought. This, however, does not mean making them the exclusive focus of the curriculum in the ethnocentric-particularist manner of Eurocentric approaches.

Indeed, the local context must become the point of departure for knowledge-building in universities across the world. They are situated within specific environments that they have to relate to in vigorous and constructive ways for purposes of growth and development. In this sense, they are responsive to a national imperative. In short, they have to be responsive to the needs of their societies in effective ways. That is what Africanisation is intended to mean. It does not mean neglecting the global context and the right of everybody everywhere to have full and unfettered access to the universal store of human knowledge.

### **3.2 What and who is curriculum for?**

The purposes of higher education in a democratic South Africa were clearly spelt out in 1997 in Education White Paper 3<sup>14</sup> :

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> Government Gazette (16 August 1997). *Education White Paper 3: A programme for the transformation of higher education*. Vol 386 No. 18207 3.

- To meet the learning needs and aspirations of individuals through the development of their intellectual abilities and aptitudes throughout their lives.
- To address the development needs of society and provide the labour market, in a knowledge-driven and knowledge-dependent society, with the ever-changing high-level competencies and expertise necessary for the growth and prosperity of a modern economy.
- To contribute to the socialisation of enlightened, responsible and constructively critical citizens.
- To contribute to the creation, sharing and evaluation of knowledge.

Curriculum is the primary vehicle by means of which the purposes of higher education are achieved. In addition, as discussed in the previous section, curriculum has an important role to play in contributing to the transformation of South Africa as a nation from its discriminatory past to a participatory, inclusive and economically vibrant democracy. White Paper 3 states as one of the goals at the system level:

To improve the quality of teaching and learning throughout the system, and in particular to ensure that curricula are responsive to the national and regional context.

More recently, the National Development Plan<sup>15</sup>, released in 2011, states:

Universities are key to developing a nation. They play three main functions in society:

- Firstly, they educate and train people with high-level skills for the employment needs of the public and private sectors.
- Secondly, universities are the dominant producers of new knowledge, and they critique information and find new local and global applications for existing knowledge. South African needs knowledge that equips people for a changing society and economy.
- Thirdly, given the country's apartheid history, higher education provides opportunities for social mobility. It can strengthen equity, social justice and democracy. In today's knowledge society, higher education is increasingly important for opening up people's opportunities.

Unfortunately, South African higher education is still far away from achieving the goals envisaged for it. In a paper produced for the Second National Higher Education Summit in 2015, the Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in South African Public Universities<sup>16</sup> wrote:

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<sup>15</sup> National Planning Commission (2011). *Our future – make it work. National Development Plan 2030*. Department of the Presidency.

<sup>16</sup> The Ministerial Oversight Committee on Transformation in South African Public Universities (September 2015). *Annexure 8: The Transformation of South African Higher Education*. Concept paper prepared for the second national Higher Education Summit, 2015.

The higher education system is perceived to be reproducing the individual and institutional inequalities that were entrenched by apartheid and this is in spite of policy reform changes in the higher education landscape. The reproductive impulses are easily verified by the massive empirical data at our disposal which underscore the fact that the systemic challenges that the higher education sector inherited from the colonial-apartheid past, despite several and significant shifts (e.g. enrolment patterns, student financial aid), have not fundamentally changed. The 'system' still reproduces student and staff development outcomes reflective of the enduring legacies of our past. The Vital Statistics (2014) report of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), which captures audited data from 2007 to 2012, confirms that despite some significant progress in enrolment rates, our higher education system still reproduces much of the racialised participation rates of the past. The annual reports of the Employment Equity Commission demonstrate the same patterns for higher education and other societal sectors.

The paper goes on to say:

The changes in higher education must be viewed in a context where the notion of a 'traditional' student is no longer valid, either in South Africa or other parts of the world. The dominant notion that shapes university administrative structures, is that of a predominantly homogeneous population of 18-24 year olds who 'have time on their hands' (SAQA/DLL 2015) to study full time and to attend classes during the day. Michelson (2015) adds that in general terms the university globally and the way it/we conduct teaching and learning has the young, prosperous white heterosexual male body as its reference...

...After 21 years, taking into account both evidence and experience, the time is ripe for a new narrative. **A narrative of Transformation that confronts our reality: Africans in Africa living through a globalising world and places Knowledge at the centre of transformation...** The active encouragement and support of universities (staff and students) to be leading, together with others, public debate, scholarship and social activism, in the collective search for a more socially, economically and environmentally just society, are called for.

In the report from the Higher Education Summit<sup>17</sup>, it was agreed that, "Curriculum change is at the core of university transformation initiatives." In a new approach to funding development at universities due to be implemented in 2018, the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG)<sup>18</sup>, one of the underpinning principles is stated as follows:

Curriculum is at the heart of the academic enterprise and is the main site of engagement between lecturers and students in an academic environment. The UCDG recognizes that the curriculum is contested and that its construction is characterized by conflict and choice which has the potential to privilege, and marginalize, and that at this point in South Africa's history, curriculum transformation is an imperative that must be supported, both in terms of social

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<sup>17</sup> Department of Higher Education and Training (January 2016). *Report on the Second National Higher Education Transformation Summit*, International Convention Centre, Durban, KwaZulu Natal, 15-17 October 2015.

<sup>18</sup> Department of Education and Training (29/30 September 2016). Discussion Document on the Implementation of the University Capacity Development Programme through effective Management and Utilisation of the University Capacity Development Grant 2018 – 2020 *'Transforming teaching, learning, researching and leading towards enhanced quality, success and equity in universities.'*

justice imperatives, as well as in regard to imperatives that speak to relevance and the ability of graduates to participate meaningfully in society, including through useful work.

### 3.3 Facets of curriculum

There are many ways of characterising curriculum. For the purposes of this document, three facets of curriculum are identified:

- curriculum structure
- curriculum content
- curriculum implementation

Each facet is influenced by many factors, some of which are technical and pragmatic, others are philosophical and ideological. Technical factors include, for example, adherence to regulations, such as credit values and levels on the NQF, and to quality regimes; pragmatic factors include provision of appropriately skilled and knowledgeable teachers and suitable teaching and learning resources, physical and virtual; philosophical factors include how learning is conceptualised; and ideological factors include the perceived purpose and role of higher education institutions and defining characteristics of their graduates.

**Curriculum structure** includes the components of the curriculum, usually specified as courses or modules with credit values, along with allowed time frames and associated rules and regulations. It also includes design elements, such as vertical and horizontal articulation and epistemological transitions. Historically, curriculum structure in South African higher education was rigidly defined, in part because of how funding was allocated, and students were expected to complete in “regulation time”. However, cohort studies conducted over the years by the CHE<sup>19</sup> showed that only a small minority of students were able to achieve this. One of the contributing factors was the wide gap between the expectations of universities and the characteristics of the majority of entering students. As a means of addressing this, the CHE proposed a flexible curriculum structure<sup>20</sup> that would address both the need to improve student success and to ensure that universities had the funding to do so. The increasing availability of technological tools and the changing demographics of students from young, academically well-prepared, full-time, financially secure students to a more diverse student population increase the possibilities and need for flexible curriculum structures.

**Curriculum content** refers to what is explicitly and implicitly contained in the curriculum. The selection of content is influenced by, among other things, ideology, educational philosophy, institutional values, disciplinary imperatives, purpose of a particular course or qualification and students for whom the curriculum is designed. It is also influenced by the

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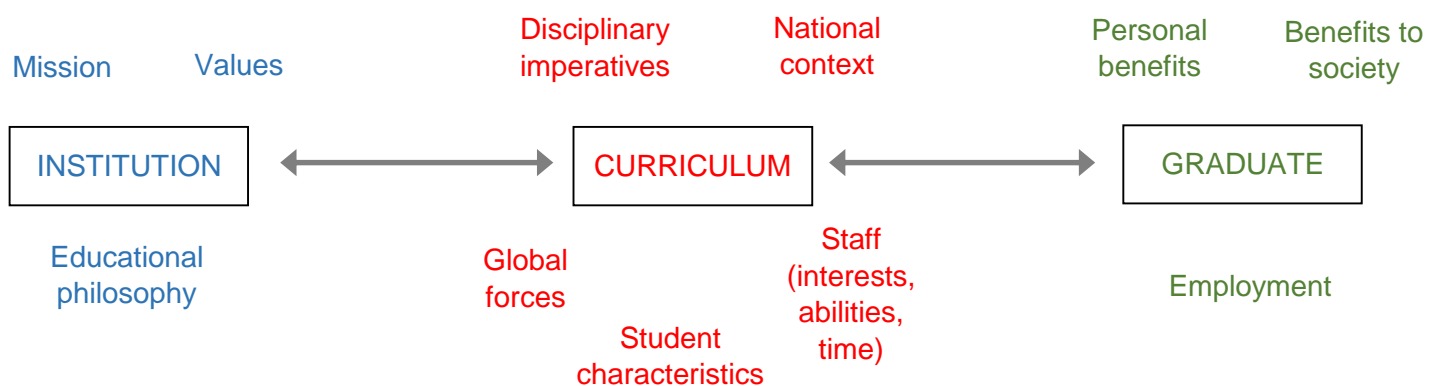
<sup>19</sup> Council on Higher Education (2012, 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016). VitalStats. Pretoria: CHE.

<sup>20</sup> Council on Higher Education (August 2013). *A proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa: The case for a flexible curriculum structure*. Report of the Task Team on Undergraduate Curriculum Structure. Pretoria: Council on Higher Education.

local and global context and by the choice of people who have a say in its design, development and renewal, such as academics, learning designers, students, graduates and employers.

**Curriculum implementation** is the engagement of students with the curriculum. It includes the pedagogical approaches, assessment, tools and resources, the environment within which learning and teaching take place and the interactions among students and between students and staff. Like curriculum content, it is influenced by ideology, educational philosophy, institutional values, disciplinary imperatives, purpose of a particular course or qualification and students for whom the curriculum is designed. The knowledge, skill and attitudes of the university teachers, as well as institutional policies and availability of human and physical resources, have a significant effect on how curriculum is implemented and how effective it is in promoting learning among the students for whom it is designed. The way in which curriculum is implemented also has an effect on students’ “being and becoming”, as Barnett<sup>21</sup> puts it:

We may note that it is not unusual, on the occasion of a university graduation ceremony, for the proud graduate to say to her or his equally proud parents in front of a key tutor that ‘this course has changed my life’. They do not characteristically say that ‘I acquired lots of knowledge on this course’ or ‘I gained many new skills’. We can only make sense of such an observation on the part of the student if we invoke concepts such as being and becoming: through the student’s course of study, their being was transformed.



**Figure 2: Curriculum at the centre of an institution’s engagement with its students.**

Figure 2 is a simplified representation of curriculum at the centre of engagement of an institution with its students. A key measure of the successful implementation of a curriculum that is well-designed for the enrolled students will be graduates who have attributes (including knowledge, skills, dispositions and values) that are personally, professionally and socially valuable.

<sup>21</sup> Barnett, R. (2009). Knowing and becoming in the higher education curriculum. *Studies in Higher Education*, 34 (4), 429-440.

## **4. Purpose of the Institutional Submission**

As indicated in section 2, the approach for Phase 2 of the QEP has been modified and shortened. There are two main reasons for this. First, the implementation of Phase 2 was delayed by a year, largely as a result of student protests and institutions' need to respond meaningfully and appropriately to them. Second, as a result of an identified need for the CHE to play a more active role in ensuring institutional quality, the start of the third cycle of quality assurance has been brought forward by a year to 2018.

Unlike in Phase 1 of the QEP, when institutions produced two reports, one providing baseline information on existing initiatives and the second demonstrating improvements made, for Phase 2 there will be only one submission. Producing two submissions enabled institutions to reflect on their own journey to improvement. Such reflection is more difficult to achieve in a single submission, but given institutions' experience in Phase 1, it is hoped that institutions, nevertheless, will find it both possible and worthwhile to do so. The submission for Phase 2 therefore needs to show the path that each institution is on to address important matters related to curriculum – where it has come from, where it is, where it is headed, what the obstacles and enablers, the disappointments and the wins have been on the journey. As in Phase 1, the purpose of the report is twofold:

1. To provide a structured and time-bound opportunity for institutions to reflect on and document their own choices and experiences related to the focus area.
2. To provide information to the sector that can be used as the basis for shared learning and system-wide enhancement.

## **5. Institutional Submission**

Where possible, please frame your responses in terms of curriculum structure, curriculum content and curriculum implementation.

### **5.1 Curriculum renewal and transformation**

**Suggested length: 5-10 pages**

*Includes advancing the purposes of higher education spelt out in policy documents, addressing transformation imperatives, ensuring local relevance and global awareness and developing graduates with attributes that are personally, professionally and socially valuable.*

5.1.1 At the institutional level:

- a) What is the institution's approach to addressing curriculum renewal and transformation?
- b) What initiatives have you undertaken in the past few years to address curriculum renewal and transformation that have been successful and how do you know? What

thinking/theorisation about the value, purposes, and assumptions about knowledge and higher education have informed the process?

- c) In response to the student protests in 2015 and 2016, what further changes have been made related to curriculum renewal and transformation? Why were they made and how? Who participated in deciding to make and then making the changes? How are the changes being received by various stakeholders? What effects are the changes having and how do you know?
- d) What plans are in place for further efforts related to curriculum renewal and transformation in the next year or two?
- e) What unresolved challenges does the institution need to grapple with related to curriculum renewal and transformation?

5.1.2 In about half a page each, describe 2 to 4 exemplars of successful curriculum renewal and transformation initiatives.

## **5.2 Diversity and inclusivity**

**Suggested length: 5-10 pages**

*Includes catering for students with diverse academic needs and abilities and life circumstances, ensuring inclusivity of all students regardless of demographic characteristics, countering bias towards, and alienation of, sections of the student population.*

NOTE: This question relates to the formal curriculum (structure, content and implementation), not to activities that would typically be classified as student support and that take place outside of the formal curriculum.

- 5.2.1 In the past few years, what reform of the curriculum has your institution undertaken to cater for students with diverse academic needs, abilities, preferences and life circumstances? Which approaches have been successful and unsuccessful and what evidence is there for this? What role has the student voice played in developing, modifying or abandoning particular approaches?
- 5.2.2 During the past few years, in what ways has the institution endeavoured to promote inclusivity of all students through curriculum? How has the student voice influenced these efforts? Which efforts have been successful and which have been unsuccessful and how do you know?
- 5.2.3 What approaches does the institution take to identify instances of bias and alienation related to the curriculum? How are these addressed?
- 5.2.4 What unresolved challenges does the institution need to grapple with related to promoting diversity and inclusivity in the curriculum?



5.2.5 In about half a page each, describe 2 to 4 exemplars of curriculum initiatives that promote inclusivity of diverse students.

### **5.3 Curriculum development capacity and quality**

**Suggested length: 5-10 pages**

*Includes capacity development and support in curriculum design, development and implementation and processes to assure quality of curriculum content and implementation (including teaching).*

- 5.3.1 What approaches does your institution take to ensure that those responsible for curriculum design, development and implementation have the requisite skills, knowledge and attitudes and receive the support needed to ensure that the curriculum is educationally sound, fit for purpose and aligned to the institution's values? Are there guidelines or policies at institutional or lower levels?
- 5.3.2 What processes are in place at institutional and other levels within the institution (e.g., faculty, departmental) to ensure the quality of curriculum design, ongoing development and renewal, and implementation?

### **5.4 Participation in curriculum design and development**

**Suggested length: 5-10 pages**

*Includes involvement of various stakeholders in the initial design, ongoing development, renewal and transformation of curriculum.*

- 5.4.1 In what ways are students involved in the design, development, renewal and transformation of curriculum? Are there guidelines or policies at institutional or other levels?
- 5.4.2 In what ways do the voices of diverse stakeholders external to the university, such as employers, professional bodies and graduates, influence the development of curriculum? Are there guidelines or policies at institutional or other levels?
- 5.4.3 In about half a page each, describe 2 to 4 exemplars of curriculum initiatives that successfully incorporated the voices of a range of stakeholders, indicating how this was done and what was successful about it.

### **5.5 Any other comments**