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Dear Reader, This newsletter offers a brief perspective on the quality assurance of academic programmes and support departments at the NWU, so as to emphasise the responsibility of everyone within the context of academic and/or support services. Please send any questions and comments to Tommy Pietersen (tommy.pietersen@nwu.ac.za)

SUPPORT SERVICES – A BUSY YEAR AHEAD FOR THE INSTITUTIONAL QUALITY OFFICE

The second cycle of quality assurance has officially begun for the support services departments of the NWU. Although most departments already have quality manuals or have updated their existing ones, the aim is to deliver 28 more manuals this year. The Institutional Quality Office aims to have a quality manual in place for every support service department (there are 76) at the NWU by mid-2015.

Twelve self-evaluations are planned for 2014, and the following departments will receive soft-review visits:

Institutional Office:

- Record Management and Administration
- Management Information Systems
- Archives and Museums
- Institutional Governance and Secretariat Services

Vaal Triangle Campus:

- Protection Services
- Student Affairs

Mafikeng Campus:

- Protection Services

This year a joint peer review of Human Capital (Institutional Office and the three campuses), will take place from 8 to 12 September, and the annual INDABA discussion forum is planned for 23 October. Various improvement plans and progress reports will also be submitted this year. A busy year indeed for the quality assuring of the NWU support services departments!

Below is a summary of the year's activities planned for the support services portfolio:

Discussion forum	1
Follow-up visit	1
Improvement plans	6
INDABA	1
Peer evaluations	1 (joint)
Progress reports	8
Quality manuals	28
Self-evaluations	12
Soft reviews	7

THE COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION'S QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT – STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITY FOR THE NWU TO PROMOTE STUDENT SUCCESS

What is the Quality Enhancement Project?

The Council on Higher Education (CHE's) permanent sub-committee, the Higher Education Quality Committee, is responsible for quality assurance in the South African higher education sector.

The CHE conducted the first cycle of institutional audits from 2005 to 2011, and has now put the framework in place for its second cycle of quality assurance that will take place from 2014 to 2018.

The key difference between the first and second cycle of institutional reviews is that during the second cycle, the CHE will focus on how higher education institutions can enhance quality. For this reason, the CHE refers to its process for institutional reviews during the second cycle as the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP).

The QEP, that was formally launched on 27 February 2014, will have two phases, each lasting for approximately two and a half years. The goals of the QEP are to:

- Improve the quality of undergraduate educational provision;
- Increase the number of quality graduates; and
- Develop a higher education system that is improving continuously as members of the higher education community collaborate to share good practices and solve shared problems.

From these goals, it is clear that the QEP differs from the first cycle of institutional audits in a number of significant ways.

Firstly, the first round of audits had a wide scope, including the institutional mission and strategic planning process, as well as the arrangements for assuring quality in all the core activities of teaching and learning, research and community engagement.

The QEP, by contrast, has a much more specific focus, namely student success in undergraduate education. The reason for this shift in focus is that student success is perhaps the most crucial problem that the South African higher education sector needs to address. Student success does not only refer to the student's ability to complete his/her studies successfully, but also to the extent to which they are prepared to make an optimal contribution to social and economic development.

It is well known that, as the National Development Plan (2012) acknowledges, our higher education system is characterised by low participation rates, high dropout rates and low graduation rates, as well as a lack of capacity to address important skills shortages in the economy.

As the recent CHE report on the reform of the undergraduate curriculum reminds us, cohort studies on the 2006 intake indicate that 45% of all contact students who enrol in three-year undergraduate diplomas and three- and four-year undergraduate degrees will never complete their studies. The picture is even worse when statistics for Unisa are included. Other cohort studies confirm that urgent attention needs to be paid to the reasons for the high dropout rate in our higher education system. The QEP therefore provides an opportunity for the higher education sector to approach the problem. As Prof Vincent Tinto, an international authority on teaching and learning and advisor to the CHE on the QEP, remarks:

"Student success does not arise by chance. Nor does substantial improvement in institutional rates of student retention and graduation. It is the result of intentional, structured and proactive actions and policies directed towards the success of all students."

In the spirit of Prof Tinto's remarks the CHE defines enhancement as the deliberate steps that an institution takes to improve the learning experience of its students. A second difference between the QEP and the first cycle of institutional

audits is that it provides for a more collaborative process in which the sector will work together and share ideas on what works in improving student learning. Therefore, while the NWU will have to prepare an institutional submission during each phase of the QEP, we will also have the opportunity to participate in various regional and national workshops with the rest of the higher education sector in order to discuss student success and to develop best practice guidelines.

At the end of the QEP, the CHE will prepare a comprehensive report on student success, addressing the critical issues that each South African university should take into account in order to provide its students with an optimal learning experience that prepares them for their professional careers and their roles as active citizens.

How will the Quality Enhancement Project benefit the NWU?

We are currently finalising the NWU's teaching and learning strategy. The strategy identifies four strategic drivers that will help us to realise our vision of being a leading South African provider of flexible dual-mode education, known for our innovative approach to teaching and learning and the outstanding learning experience that we provide to our students. These four drivers are:

- High-quality teaching and learning, which to a large extent depends on developing and strengthening the expertise of our academic staff in the area of teaching and learning;
- Student access and success;
- Curriculum transformation and renewal; and
- An enabling authorised and supportive learning environment.

The four focus areas for the first phase of the QEP correlate strongly with the strategic drivers in our draft teaching and learning strategy, as can be seen from the theme of each focus area:

- Focus area 1: Enhancing academics as teachers
- Focus area 2: Enhancing student support and development
- Focus area 3: Enhancing the learning environment
- Focus area 4: Enhancing course and programme enrolment management.

Therefore, the work that we do on the QEP provides us with a significant opportunity to take our teaching and learning strategy forward by clarifying what we already do well, as well as identifying issues that need further attention.

In this way, we can be confident that at all our campuses, and in all forms of educational delivery, we are creating the conditions that allow us to provide our students with an outstanding learning experience and environment. Thus, our work on the QEP is an integral aspect of our process for putting our teaching and learning strategy into practice.

How will the Quality Enhancement Project be managed at the NWU?

During the first phase of the QEP, from 2014 to mid-2016, we will have to develop an institutional submission of approximately 30 pages that addresses the four focus areas of the QEP by the end of August 2014.

After this the CHE will analyse all the institutional submissions during the rest of 2014, and invite institutions to various collaborative workshops during the first part of 2015. The NWU will then have to develop an institutional report by the end of 2015, indicating what we plan to do in order to make progress in the four focus areas.

During 2016, the CHE will develop an institutional profile for the NWU, based on our institutional submission and report, as well as other relevant documents and information.

Based on our profile, the CHE will have a discussion with the NWU on areas that have been identified as strengths as well as areas in need of improvement. The second phase of the QEP, from mid-2016 to the end of 2018, will unfold in a similar manner.

The first planning workshop for all the task team members took place on 10 April. Regular reports on our progress with the QEP will be submitted to the Institutional Committee for Teaching and Learning as well as Senate. More information on the QEP, including the various CHE documents relating to the project, can be obtained from Dr Jannie Jacobsz (jannie.jacobsz@nwu.ac.za).

In conclusion, I trust that our work on the QEP will provide us with a valuable opportunity to reflect in a systematic manner on how best we can develop students who are successful, not just in terms of their studies at the NWU, but also because we have prepared them to be graduates who can make a difference to South African society and the wider world.

Prof Martin Oosthuizen
Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching-Learning

In order to manage the QEP at the NWU, four task teams have been formed that will each take responsibility for one of the four focus areas. Approved at the institutional management meeting of 19 March 2014, the following steering committee will oversee and coordinate the work on the QEP during its first phase:



Prof Martin Oosthuizen (Chair; Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Teaching-Learning)



Dr Jannie Jacobsz (Project Coordinator – Director: Quality Office)



Prof Luvuyo Lumkile Lalendle (Vice-Rector: Teaching-Learning and Quality Assurance, Mafikeng Campus)



Prof Mariëtte Lowes (Convenor: Focus Area 1; Vice-Rector: Teaching-Learning, Potchefstroom Campus)



Dr Muki Moeng, Director: Teaching-Learning. Will take over from Prof Mariëtte Lowes



Prof Rantsoa Letšosa (Convenor: Focus Area 2; Vice-Rector Teaching-Learning, Designate: Potchefstroom Campus)



Prof Linda du Plessis (Convenor: Focus Area 3; Vice-Rector: Academic Quality and Planning, Vaal Triangle Campus)



Prof Marlene Verhoef (Convenor: Focus Area 4; Institutional Registrar)



Mr Janco Jordaan (President: Institutional Student Representative Council)



Quality assurance **of** **academic programmes** for 2014

During 2013 the Institutional Quality Office negotiated with the campuses with regard to the scheduling of all academic programmes that are considered Category A qualifications under the Higher Education Qualifications Sub-framework (HEQSF).

These programmes underwent very few (if any) changes in order to be included in the new Programme Qualification Mix (PQM) of the NWU.

The scheduling thereof will be implemented during 2014-2020, during which clusters of the various qualifications will be subjected to internal and external programme evaluations, including aligned internal and external programme evaluations.

Aligned external programme evaluations

The first aligned external programme evaluation for BEdHons Special Education:

Learner Support will take place this year across all three campuses.

Aligned internal programme evaluations

Two aligned internal programme evaluations will be conducted this year, namely in BSc (IT) and BEdHons Curriculum Studies, involving two of our campuses

Internal programme evaluations (not aligned)

Nine internal programme evaluations will be conducted across the three campuses during the course of 2014.

External programme evaluations (not aligned)

Four external programme evaluations will be conducted on the Mafikeng Campus, and one on the Potchefstroom Campus.

Various statutory and non-statutory bodies will also be visiting the NWU during 2014.