**Quality Enhancement Project**

**Institutional Report[1]: Phase 1**

**Date: 22 January 2016**

| Name of Institution | **North-West University** |
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| Contact Person | **Prof Martin Oosthuizen (DVC: Teaching Learning)** |
| Date of Approval | **22 January 2016 (Senate Executive Committee)** |
| Date of submission | **22 January 2016** |

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[1] The 2015 "NWU Institutional Report" follows the 2014 "NWU Institutional Submission", both forming part of phase 1 of the QEP.

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# 1    Introduction

## 1.1    Process followed in the development of the Institutional Report

The NWU's Institutional Submission for the first cycle of the QEP was submitted to the CHE at the end of August 2014. At a meeting of the QEP Deputy Vice-Chancellors' Forum on 21 April 2015, the requirements for the development of the Institutional Report relating to the first cycle were discussed, and it was agreed that the reports should be submitted by 11 December 2015. As stated in the CHE guideline for the Institutional Report, its aim is to demonstrate efforts to bring about enhancements in each of the four Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) focus areas since the beginning of Phase 1 of the QEP in February 2014 and to reflect on the journey towards enhancement and assess the extent to which the efforts have resulted in improvements.

In order to coordinate the development of this Institutional Report, a workshop was held on 27 May 2015 with the members of the four task teams that were responsible for the development of the Institutional Submission for the first cycle of the QEP. At the workshop, the task team members were oriented to the analysis that the CHE has conducted of the institutional submissions provided by all the public universities in the sector, and were also provided with guidance on the requirements for the development of the Institutional Report. Each task team then met to plan its work for its part of the Institutional Report. The composition of the task teams is included in the introduction to this report. To guide the task teams in their work, it was agreed at the workshop that they would be provided with access to the reviews of the status of teaching and learning which were conducted at the Potchefstroom Campus in 2011 and at the Mafikeng and Vaal Triangle Campuses in 2013.

In terms of the schedule for the finalisation of the Institutional Report, It should be noted that NWU obtained permission from the Director of Institutional Audit at the CHE to extend the submission deadline to 29 January 2016, instead of 11 December 2015. During September 2015, each task team met to discuss their initial draft reports, after which they developed revised reports by 15 October 2015. Subsequently, the focus area reports were consolidated into a first draft consolidated report by 2 December 2015. This process entailed further revisions of the task team reports on each focus area, as well as inputs on focus area 1 by the faculty teaching and learning committees. The draft consolidated report which was circulated to the NWU QEP Steering Committee as well as the faculty deans on 9 December 2015, with a request for inputs by 12 January 2016. The final draft QEP report was circulated to the Senate Executive Committee on 15 January 2015 for input and approval by 22 January 2016, with approval obtained by the due date.

In terms of student consultation, during 2015, student leaders from all three campuses were invited to participate in the Quality Enhancement Project and to provide inputs on relevant issues relating to each focus area. Two campus student representatives participated namely, Ms Anrie van Wyk (Potchefstroom Campus) and Mr Boitumelo Mogohu (Mafikeng Campus).

The CHE guideline for the Institutional Report indicates that the focus should fall on changes at the institutional level, while exemplars may be drawn from levels that are deeper down in the institution such as faculties, departments, divisions and units. Because of North-West University's multi-campus nature, the discussion of changes at the institutional level will include changes at the campus level. While such changes may not yet have an institution-wide scope, they provide the basis for the development of policies, systems and practices at the institutional level. The format of this report follows the template provided by the CHE.

## 1.2    Composition of Steering Committee and Task Teams

During 2015, the QEP Steering Committee consisted of the following members:

- Prof Martin Oosthuizen (Chair; DVC: Teaching-Learning)
- Dr Jannie Jacobsz (Project Coordinator; Director: Quality Office)
- Prof Lumkile Lalendle (Convenor of Task Team 1; Vice-rector: Teaching-Learning and Quality, Mafikeng Campus)
- Prof Rantoa Letsosa (Convenor of Task Team 2; Vice-rector Teaching-Learning, Potchefstroom Campus)
- Dr Gerhard du Plessis (Co-Convenor of Task Team 2; Director Academic Support Services, Potchefstroom Campus)
- Prof Linda du Plessis (Convenor of Task Team 3; Vice-rector, and Acting Campus Rector, Vaal Triangle Campus)
- Prof Marlene Verhoef (Convenor of Task Team 4; Institutional Registrar)

The respective task teams consisted of NWU staff members from all three NWU campuses as well as from the Institutional Office (IO) and the members included in this list contributed either through participation in interactive workshops, by means of written contributions and or availing valuable evidence and or data to the respective task teams.

(Institutional Location: IO – Institutional Office; MC = Mafikeng Campus; VTC = Vaal Triangle Campus; PC = Potchefstroom Campus).

| TASK TEAM 1 (Focus Area 1) Enhancing Academics as Teachers | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Institutional Location** | **Title** | **Name** | **Department/Position** |
| MC | Prof | Lumkile Lalendle (Convenor) | Vice Rector: Teaching-Learning and Quality |
| IO | Prof | Mariëtte Lowes | Acting Director: Teaching-Learning |
| VTC | Dr | Esmarie Strydom | Director: Academic Development and Support |
| MC | Dr | Mamolahluwa Mokoena | Director: Academic Development Centre |
| IO | Ms | Ria Nel | Director: Organisational Development |
| MC | Prof | Dawid Gericke | Dean: Faculty of Education and Training |
| PC | Prof | Flip Schutte | Director: School of Undergraduate Studies, Faculty of Law |
| PC | Prof | Jaco Fouche | School of Accounting Sciences |
| VTC | Prof | Mirna Nel | School of Education Sciences |
| MC | Ms | Hunadi Rakhudu | School of Nursing Sciences |
| MC | Dr | Eva Manyedi | Quality Coordinator |
| MC | Ms | Annelize Cronje | Academic Development and Support |
| PC | Prof | Henk Klopper | Faculty of Law |
| PC | Mr | Dirk van den Berg | Academic Support Services |
| PC | Dr | Jessica Pool | Academic Support Services |
| PC | Dr | Gerda Reitsma | Faculty of Health Sciences |

| TASK TEAM 2 (Focus Area 2) Enhancing Student Support and Development | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Campus** | **Title** | **Name** | **Department/Position** |
| PC | Prof | Rantoa Letsosa (Convenor) | Vice Rector: Teaching-Learning |
| PC | Dr | Gerhard du Plessis (Co-Convenor) | Director: Academic Support Services |
| VTC | Dr | Saneth Dreyer | Director: Student Development (Counselling) |
| VTC | Ms | Daleen Gerber | School of Information Technology |
| PC | Ms | Elza Hattingh | Faculty of Engineering |
| PC | Prof | Fanus van der Merwe | Faculty Manager: Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences |
| MC | Dr | Ellen Materechera | Academic Development Centre |
| IO | Ms | Mariaan Klopper | Manager: Academic Development and Support |
| PC | Prof | Johann van der Walt | School for Languages |
| PC | Prof | Tobie van Dyk | Head: Centre for Academic Literacy and Professional Language Practice |
| IO | Ms | Bernice Smit | Manager: Career Centre |
| MC | Ms | Lerato Wana | Guidance and Counselling |
| MC | Ms | Bogadi Sito | Bursaries |
| MC | Mr | Cornelius van Rooyen | Financial Aid |
| MC | Mr | Boitumelo Mogohu | SRC Member |
| PC | Ms | Anrie van Wyk | SRC Member |
| VTC | Ms | Prem Coopoo | Dean of Students |

| TASK TEAM 3 (Focus Area 3) Enhancing the Learning Environment | | | |
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| **Campus** | **Title** | **Name** | **Department/Position** |
| VTC | Prof | Linda du Plessis (Convenor) | Vice-rector: Teaching-Learning and Acting Rector |
| VTC | Mr | Hendra Pretorius | Manager: Library Services |
| MC | Ms | Claudia Pietersen | Director: Information Technology |
| VTC | Dr | Marieta Jansen van Vuuren | Academic Development and Support |
| PC | Mr | Kobus le Roux | Academic Support Services |
| MC | Ms | Matshidiso Pooe | Academic Development Centre |
| MC | Dr | Mathew Moyo | Director: Library Services |

| PC | Mr | Janco Jordaan | Dean of Students |
|----|----|---------------|------------------|
| PC | Dr | Alfred Henrico | Marketing and Business Management |
| PC | Ms | Elsa Esterhuizen | Director: Library Services |
| IO | Ms | Adelle Lotter | Information Technology |

| TASK TEAM 4 (Focus Area 4) Enhancing Course and Programme Enrolment Management | | | |
|---------|-------|------|---------------------|
| **Campus** | **Title** | **Name** | **Department/Position** |
| IO | Prof | Marlene Verhoef | Institutional Registrar |
| PC | Mr | Frans du Preez | Campus Registrar |
| VTC | Ms | Elbie Steyn | Campus Registrar |
| MC | Mr | Franco Nkoana | Campus Registrar |
| IO | Mr | Jan-Hendrik Viljoen | Manager (Acting): Management Information |
| IO | Mr | Jaco-Phillip Ellis | Manager: Student Administrative Systems |
| PC | Mr | Tom Cato | Manager: Student Administration |
| MC | Dr | Nelda Mouton | Subject Matter Expert (Office of the Registrar) |
| VTC | Mr | Neels Vermeulen | Director: Academic Administration |
| PC | Ms | Corrie Postma | Manager: Faculty of Health Sciences |
| MC | Mr | Hosia Kgoa | Faculty of Agriculture, Science and Technology |
| MC | Ms | Nomasomi Morule | Academic Development Centre |
| MC | Ms | Nandi Mintoli | Admissions |
| PC | Mr | Theo Foutie | Marketing |
| MC | Prof | Sonia Swanepoel | Dean, Faculty of Commerce and Administration |
| PC | Mr | Johan Erasmus | Quality Coordinator |
| IO | Ms | Mari Prinsloo | Information Technology |
| PC | Ms | Alta van Zyl | Academic Administration |
| MC | Mr | Sam Ndaba | Academic Administration |
| MC | Mr | Shuping Mokgothu | Academic Administration |
| MC | Mr | Vuyani Maneli | Academic Administration |
| PC | Mr | Anton Steyger | Institutional Researcher in the office of the Vice Rector: Research and Planning |

In addition to the aforementioned task teams, a substantial delegation of senior staff members from all three campuses attended and participated in the CHE arranged workshop "Enhancing Academics as University Teachers" in June 2015. This was followed by an institutional feedback and discussion opportunity on 18 June 2015. These discussions and deliberations furthermore fed into the work conducted by Task Team 1.

### 1.3 Significant changes at the institutional level since the submission of the QEP baseline report

While the guideline for the QEP Phase 1 report focuses on changes at the institutional level in relation to the four focus areas, it is deemed necessary to highlight two key large-scale processes which impact on the focus areas. Firstly, since at least July 2014, North-West University has been engaged in a major reconsideration of its strategy, operating or management model, and organisational structure. This process has culminated in a proposed new strategic agenda for the ten year period from 2015 to 2025, which was approved by Council at its meeting of 20 November 2015. The approved strategic agenda includes an identity statement, a set of eleven key strategies, and related strategic goals and targets, which draw on a success model, key market direction decisions, and a set of strategic assumptions. The new strategic agenda could have significant implications for teaching and learning, and the QEP focus areas, while many of the issues that are discussed in the Institutional Submission and Report should make an important contribution to the realisation of the strategic agenda. Furthermore, the consultative process around the development of the strategic agenda has included a reconsideration of the University's management model and structural arrangements. Though it is not the purpose of the QEP to discuss these issues, the fact that Council at its meeting of 20 November 2015 approved a new management model and organisational structure for the NWU, will have significant implications for the manner in which many policies, practices and processes that are discussed under each focus area will be taken forward.

Secondly, since the QEP baseline submission in 2014, the NWU has launched a project for the transformation of teaching and learning which represents a systemic approach to the need for innovative practices in a resource constrained environment. This project is informed by the broader strategy formation process, and presents a mechanism whereby strategies relating to teaching and learning can be brought together into an integrated planning, implementation and monitoring framework.

The NWU Project on the Transformation of Teaching and Learning project (*TransfTL Project*) draws partly on the self-evaluation done for the QEP, but also brings together other ongoing projects such as the Teaching Development Grant, the HEQSF-alignment process, and various internal projects. This convergence of projects utilises the symbiosis of various non-voluntary projects and other projects needed for the strategy formulation that the NWU is engaged in, but prioritises those aspects that are deemed to be of greatest importance and benefit to the NWU. It therefore follows that the matters prioritised by the NWU may have shifted since the QEP baseline submission.

An analysis done by the project team for the *TransfTL Project* initially highlighted five core areas of importance for the project (currently being mapped as key lifecycles as a first step), namely the Governance of Teaching and Learning (focus 1), the lifecycle of the qualification/academic programme (focus 2), the lifecycle of the student (focus 3), the lifecycle of the lecturer (focus 4), and a section on cross cutting issues (focus 5). Out of the last grouping it has since been agreed that a separate focus area would be added for unpacking the provision of the physical and virtual learning environment.

The convergence of projects is accommodated as follows in the planning documentation for the *TransfTL Project* of the NWU:

- Focus 1: Transformation-focussed governance and management of Teaching and Learning and related sub-projects:
    - CHE QEP Project, focus area 4 (Enhancing course and programme enrolment management)
    - Enrolment planning and monitoring to ensure alignment with desired institutional size and shape
    - Teaching Development Grant, priority programme 4 (Researching teaching and learning)
    - T&L Strategy formulation to be finalised pending outcomes of the above projects
- Focus 2: Innovative qualification and programme development, management and review and related sub-projects:
    - NWU project for the Implementation of HEQSF alignment (Phase 1 NWU HEQSF curriculum mapping process)
    - National HE-AIDS curriculum project
    - CHE QEP - relevant aspects from QEP focus area 4 (Enhancing course and programme enrolment management)
    - Graduate attributes linked to T&L Strategy to be finalised pending outcomes of the above projects
- Focus 3: Advancement of student access, retention and success:
    - NWU project on student access, retention and success
    - CHE QEP Project, focus area 2 (Enhancing student support and development)
    - CHE QEP Project, aspects of focus area 4 (Enhancing course and programme enrolment management)
    - NWU review of access provision
    - NWU monitoring of the first-year experience
    - National HE-AIDS curriculum project
    - Teaching Development Grant, priority programme 2 (Tutorship and mentorship)
- Focus 4: Recruitment, development and retention of an excellent and diverse teaching staff complement ("the lifecycle of the lecturer"):
    - CHE QEP Project, focus area 1 (Enhancing academics as teachers)
    - Teaching Development Grant, priority programme 1 (Development of university teachers and teaching)
    - Teaching Development Grant, priority programme 2 (Tutorship and mentorship)
    - Teaching Development Grant, priority programme 3 (Enhancing the status of teaching)
- Focus 5: Cross-cutting projects, including Innovative approaches to the provision of the physical and virtual learning environment:
    - CHE QEP Project, focus area 3 (Enhancing the Learning Environment)
    - Teaching Development Grant, Priority Programme 6 (NWU priority programmes)

# 2 Focus Area 1 – Enhancing Academics as Teachers[2]

## 2.1 Key Issues in enhancing academics as teachers

The task team that worked on this focus area included academic managers such as school directors, staff from academic development services and researchers in teaching and learning. In compiling their report, the task team members were requested to collect data in order to define themes and sub-themes and formulate the narrative, but also to substantiate the claims that were made. The task team held various workshops in order to identify themes and sub-themes pertaining to this focus area, while faculty teaching and learning committees also were requested to make inputs. Staff who have participated in the Institutional Teaching Awards were also invited to make inputs on the success of the revisions that have been effected to the award system. In addition, the task team drew on the mapping process conducted to date in Focus 4 in the NWU Project on the Transformation of Teaching and Learning (*TransfTL Project*), which concerns the lifecycle of the lecturer, to identify the key issues relating to this focus area.

The following are considered to be key issues in enhancing academics as teachers: Professional development; Reward and recognition systems; Conditions of service including academic workloads; Performance management linked to personal development plans; and Feedback.

- **Professional development**:
  - The aim of the professional development programme at NWU should be to: (i) provide a structure for a professional teaching career path in higher education; (ii) enhance teaching knowledge and skills and thus enhance student learning; (iii) help staff to build a portfolio of competence as evidence of teaching excellence; and (iv) equip lecturers with examples of good practice which they can implement in their classrooms. To measure the efficacy of professional development activities: (i) each workshop or training event should have clear outcomes with a rubric outlining the minimum required evidence to demonstrate competencies; (ii) each participant should be awarded a form of recognition (such as a badge) which they add to their professional development portfolio of evidence; and (iii) an evaluation should be conducted at the end of each capacity development event;
  - To achieve this aim, there should be coordinated planning, implementation and tracking of professional development opportunities, which may take the form of briefer interventions such as workshops and seminars, or more extensive programmes offered through a workshop series, short courses or formal programmes leading to a qualification. It is important that the range of available professional development opportunities should be planned in a coordinated manner, monitored and reviewed, and that there is record-keeping, recognition and tracking of staff participation in professional development opportunities;
  - Professional academic development should be conceptualised as not only a university-wide process, but also as a local practice and as a continuous process of peer learning within specific faculty and disciplinary contexts. In the NWU context, this implies that a balance should be achieved between professional development opportunities that are the primary responsibility of central support units, such as the academic development services, and those that are embedded within faculty and school contexts with appropriate integration into systems for mentoring, performance management and career planning linked to personal development plans. One key aim of more localised approaches to professional development is to establish communities of practice, in which staff are able to share innovative practices and to support each other as reflective practitioners;
  - Professional development should address the needs of academic staff at various phases of their careers, and be responsive to innovation and the changing higher education landscape. This implies that at NWU members of academic staff are guided to develop a career map or path that is linked to a strategy for their professional development.
- **Reward and recognition systems**: Reward and recognition systems such as teaching excellence awards and the promotions policy should provide a clear indication that teaching, and the facilitation of learning, are valued responsibilities that play a vital role in promoting student success. Therefore, academic staff should feel that their commitment to evidence-based excellence in teaching and learning receives adequate recognition in the design and implementation of reward and recognition systems. The message should be clear that research competence and output does not constitute the full extent of educational competence. A key challenge is that promotion policies should define the scope of what defines excellence in teaching and learning in an adequate manner, and should recognise such excellence appropriately. A further challenge is the extent to which promotion policies should differentiate between the performance requirements for academic staff in more purely theoretical disciplines and those in professional disciplines.
- **Conditions of service**: Conditions of service, such as arrangements relating to probation and sabbaticals, should provide a conducive environment that support staff in improving their formal

[2] Includes: professional development, reward and recognition, workload, conditions of service and performance appraisal

qualifications, and also in participating in professional development activities relating to teaching and learning.

- **Performance management**: The performance management system should provide adequate recognition for teaching in personal development planning and performance review, while there should be appropriate workload models that, as far as possible, ensure that staff have sufficient time to provide a quality learning experience to their students and to participate in professional development activities.
- **Feedback**: Feedback, especially student feedback on modules, programmes and lecturers, but also feedback from employers and graduates, is important in informing strategies for the development of academics as lecturers. There should be an effective system for gathering and disseminating feedback, but also for monitoring and communicating to students (and other stakeholders) the action taken as a result of feedback.

## 2.2 Changes made during Phase 1 of the QEP

This section discusses the following change in the enhancement[3] of academics as teachers. These changes are as follows:

- Changes in progress: Revision of the promotion policy;
- Changes in the planning stages: Development of an academic workload model; Defining the role of academic managers in the promotion of teaching and learning.

### 2.2.1 Promotion policy

Section B.1.4(c) of the NWU Institutional Submission referred to the review of the promotion criteria as an example of an activity that had been implemented over the previous 12 to 18 months, noting that the review was still in progress and awaited final consideration and approval. The Institutional Submission referred to the manner in which the revised criteria aim to create an appropriate balance between performance in teaching and learning, research and community engagement/ implementation of expertise. An important step forward in the proposed revised policy is that it includes the implementation of expertise/ community engagement as a fourth domain, alongside teaching-learning, research and postgraduate programmes, and organisational and management tasks in the promotion criteria. The revised guidelines aim to recognise involvement in the scholarship of teaching and learning, innovative teaching and learning practices and contributions to curriculum development in the domain relating to teaching and learning.

The Institutional Report includes this matter here and under section 2.4.1 as the approval of the revised academic promotion policy still needs to address the issue of possible differentiation in promotion pathways. Therefore this proposed institutional change is discussed as an example of a (proposed) change that has not been as successful as intended.

### 2.2.2 Management of academic workloads

The development of an appropriate workload model is a critical area that needs urgent attention. The University is planning to review the current guidelines on workload allocation and to develop a progressive framework on workload allocation to facilitate a fair and equitable distribution of academic responsibilities, inter alia to enable growth and development of young and emerging academics. Currently, the University has a workload system that apportions a 40:40:20 percentage of time to teaching and learning, research and community engagement including administrative duties. Its purpose is to regulate teaching, research, community engagement and administration for academics. This traditional workload model may need to be reviewed in order to capture more accurately the manner in which academics allocate their time to their core responsibilities.

This is an area where innovative guidelines are needed, based on appropriate criteria and definitions, in order to ensure that faculties develop a fair and equitable distribution of workloads especially in relation to young and emerging academic staff. An appropriate workload model – at the institutional and faculty levels – should provide a transparent basis for assessing claims relating to workloads, in order to make a significant contribution to balancing staff responsibilities and supporting the quality of teaching and learning and the supervision of post-graduate students. Without such a model, there is a danger that junior staff members may be expected to carry disproportionately heavy workloads compared to senior academics, including responsibilities for handling large classes without adequate support.

As part of the development of the QEP report, all faculties were requested to provide information on their respective workload models. From the documentation that was received the following became clear:

- Faculty workload models ranged from none to very comprehensively detailed systems with calculated hours per activity (one example of a well-designed workload model from the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the Potchefstroom Campus is provided as an example of a promising practice in section 2.5.3);

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[3] Quality enhancement is seen as an aspect of institutional quality management that is designed to secure, in the context of the constraints within which the institution and the respective campuses operate, steady, reliable and demonstrable improvements in the quality of learning opportunities for academics as teachers.

- Faculty workload models all account for a range of activities that can be classified within the broad categories of teaching-learning, research, community engagement and administrative responsibilities. However there is not consistency in terms of the scope of activities that faculty workload models provide for, so that workload models differ widely, to the extent that it is difficult to find similarities in the criteria that inform them. To an extent this situation is understandable, as the nature and type of work that is conducted in each faculty differs considerably, and so should the specific application of workload models that help to inform the management of such activities. However, faculty-specific models should take their cue from an institutional workload framework;
- The range of activities included in faculty workload models consist of instructional activities; programme/ module development; development of courseware/study-guides; attendance of conferences; undertaking of own studies; writing of articles/doing research; supervision of post graduate students; involvement in community projects; administrative work; mentoring of staff members and or students; execution of duties related to Open Distance Learning (ODL); and execution of duties related to Work Integrated Learning (WIL);
- Workload models and the quantification thereof are often expressed in "hours". It was however not clear how these "hours" were calculated or determined. Workload models ranged from approximate estimations to detailed mathematical calculations;
- In some instances (working) hours were clearly indicated as a norm. A limited number of faculties stated clearly that a specific number of modules will be regarded as the maximum to be offered by a lecturer, e.g. 2 modules per lecturer per semester. The number of modules presented by lecturers also differs extensively from faculty to faculty, with some lecturers taking responsibility for four to eight modules per year, while others teach one or two modules per year.

This preliminary analysis suggests that in the planned revision of the workload model it will not be possible or appropriate to develop a generic workload model for the University. There cannot be a "one-size-fits-all" approach. Faculties clearly differ far too much in the type and scope of work that they conduct, and often have faculty, school, programme, and subject, discipline or field of study specific requirements which are not necessarily required by all faculties. Furthermore workload models need to be sensitive to the fact that the profile of the students who enrol in the same programme across campuses may differ appreciably. At the institutional level, an appropriate workload framework should provide guidance on the broad areas that should be accounted for, the typical activities within each area, and the determination of criteria that could be adapted within faculty and school contexts.

The HR Division's staff establishment project which has been running for some time now, has already delivered significant analytical information that can be used as the basis for the development of a workload model, but there are a number of key decisions and issues that need to be finalised, some of which are:

- Where should the responsibility for decision-making on staff allocations be located? Should there be centralised decision making primarily via the budgeting process and the availability of financial resources, or should there be distributed decision-making, in which deans and school directors make final decisions on staff allocation within guidelines of policy, procedure and monitoring?
- To the extent that they still exist, it is important to ensure that discrepancies inherited from the merger with respect to the nomenclature, job descriptions, grading levels, and pay levels for essentially the same job are addressed so that there is consistency within and amongst faculties.
- Is the workload model linked to conditions of service and reward systems?
- How is the workload model weighted in terms of teaching and research?
- How would a blended learning approach impact on the workload model?

### 2.2.3    Defining the role of academic managers in the promotion of teaching and learning

Academic managers, namely school directors, programme leaders and subject chairs, play an important role in promoting the teaching and learning activities of academic schools, and creating a supportive environment for the professional development of academic staff.

While the job profile of school directors (which was approved by Senate in 2007) sets out their core responsibilities, the current description does not pay sufficient attention to their role in planning, supporting and monitoring the professional development of academic staff. It is also important that the role of programme leaders and subject chairs in the promotion of teaching and learning should be clarified. The NWU does have a document, *Appointment of Subject Chairs and Program Leaders Guide* (2013), which sets out their generic responsibilities, However, this document focuses strongly on administrative issues and procedural matters, such as staffing, timetabling, programme reviews, curriculum advice during registration, and assessment results, but provides little guidance in terms of how subject chairs or programme leaders contribute to the professional development of academic staff. During 2016, as part of the process of preparing for the implementation of the new management structure and the new faculty structures, attention will be paid to more explicit role clarification in terms of the responsibilities of academic managers in the area of teaching and learning, including their role in the professional development of their staff.

One matter which was finalised during 2015 is the guideline for the determination of school directors' allowances, which was approved by Senate at its meeting of 21 October 2015. To date, there has not been a consistent manner of determining their allowances. The establishment of an appropriate model for school director allowances is certainly an important step in terms of the adequate recognition of their role in the promotion of teaching and learning.

## 2.3 Exemplars to illustrate specific aspects of the changes that are regarded as successful

### 2.3.1 Institutional Teaching Excellence Awards (ITEA)

The University has a well-established system of Institutional Teaching Excellence Awards (ITEA) in which academic staff may participate. The Institutional Submission (Section B.1.2(a)) indicated that from 2014 onwards the teaching awards were reclassified into three categories namely, the i) Emerging Teaching Excellence Award (*ETEA*); ii) Teaching Excellence Award (*TEA*); and iii) Distinguished Teaching Excellence Award (*DTEA*). The revised classification system recognises that members of staff are at different levels of development in terms of their teaching careers by providing them with two distinct entry points, namely the ETEA and the TEA (the DTEA is awarded to staff who participate in the TEA category). Thus , by means of the ETEA, the revised system provides an opportunity for staff who are at an early stage of their career to participate in a developmental process that supports them in defining their approach to teaching and learning, and planning for their professional development as university lecturers. It also provides participants with a platform to display innovations in teaching and learning.

Furthermore, the revised system is meant to be experienced as less of a "performance" in terms of the criteria, and more as an authentic process of self-reflection with a stronger focus on the lecturer's responsibility for building a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate teaching excellence.

In general the staff who facilitate and participate in the ITEA process view the revised system as successful. Feedback was obtained from eleven participants in the 2014 ITEA process, while faculty teaching and learning committees were also invited to comment on the revised system. The feedback indicates that the revised system is viewed as a positive development but that there is room for substantial improvement in some respects. The following points outline key aspects of the feedback:

- Most respondents indicated that they received adequate support from the academic development (AD) facilitators during the process;
- Most respondents feel that the criteria for the various award categories are clearly communicated to them, and that the criteria distinguish clearly enough between the different categories, at least in terms of the ETEA and TEA. However, many respondents observed that the criteria for the DTEA are not clear enough and that the distinction between the DTEA and TEA should be made more explicit. Some of the feedback suggests that the expectations for the DTEA may also be too high, and that publication and presentation on teaching and learning at national and international conferences may be an unrealistic expectation;
- While most respondents indicated that the AD (Academic Development) facilitators explain the ITEA process properly, some stated that electronic guidelines relating to the process should be made available on the intranet, as this will assist them appreciably in ensuring that they have met all the requirements for participation when they submit their portfolios;
- With respect to the requirements for the teaching portfolios that candidates are required to develop, some stated that the AD facilitators explained the requirements clearly, while a few indicated that they would have benefited from more support and guidance in constructing their portfolios. An important issue to consider is that some faculty teaching and learning committees feel that the ITEA process has become too cumbersome, and that the focus may fall too much on the portfolio and not sufficiently on actual teaching practice. On the other hand, another teaching and learning committee remarked that more candidates have chosen to participate in the revised system, and that they portray good insight into and reflection on their teaching and learning practices. One helpful suggestion from a faculty teaching and learning committee is that the presentation that candidates make to the evaluation committees about their portfolios, should be taken into account in addition to the actual portfolios themselves;
- In terms of the moderation process, most respondents view the internal process which is used to adjudicate whether they qualify for an ETEA or TEA award as fair, though some expressed a need for more individualised feedback. One respondent, and some of the feedback from the faculty teaching and learning committees, also referred to the need to take the specific contexts of the different campuses into account. In addition one faculty teaching and learning committee proposed that the teaching and learning committees should be allowed to make recommendations to the internal moderation panels as to whether candidates should be eligible for an award or not.
- However, significant concerns were expressed about the external moderation process used to select the DTEA recipients. Most of the respondents expressed doubts about the rigour and fairness of the process

followed, and sought reassurance that the external panel has access to the teaching portfolios, while also observing that the criteria that the external panel uses should be transparent and communicated adequately. Furthermore, the directors of the academic support units and the ITEA coordinators at the campuses were not given insight into the external moderation process and did not receive feedback on the moderation results.

These remarks illustrate the diversity of views around the teaching and learning awards. Some remarks and observations may not be fair or based on sufficient information. However, it is clear that there are various issues that do merit consideration in the further implementation of the revised system. Thus, it will be important to ensure that while the requirements for the development of the teaching and learning portfolio are rigorous, they are not unnecessarily cumbersome, and that for each candidate the ITEA process does provide an appropriate opportunity for self-reflection. Clearly, steps need to be taken to ensure that the criteria for the DTEA are clear and appropriate, and that the external moderation process for this award category are transparent and fair.

A last matter that may merit consideration is the relationship between the ITEA awards and the academic promotion process. In this respect, the proposed guidelines for academic promotion should be specific on how ITEA participation may be taken into account in academic promotion processes. For instance, how recent should ITEA participation be in order to be considered in the promotion process, and how can teaching portfolios developed for ITEA contribute to the evidence base for academic promotions? In the latter regard, the ITEA teaching portfolio criteria and descriptors provide a useful reference point for the description of the academic promotion criteria in the teaching and learning domain at different position levels.

While there clearly is a need for further and ongoing refinement, the revised ITEA system is regarded as a successful practice which can contribute to the reflection on institutional systems for the recognition of teaching excellence at a national level.

### 2.3.2 Institutional Course for New Lecturers (ICNL)

The Institutional Submission (Section B.1.3(a)) noted that various revisions were made to the Institutional Course for New Lecturers (ICNL) in order to improve its efficiency and effectiveness, including the integration of its various parts. The revision, which was based on the results of a comparative research project that included feedback from previous ICNL participants, included:

- The re-design of Phase 1 so that it incorporates the previously separate Phase 3 – which provides an introduction to philosophical foundational issues in higher education;
- Better integration between Phase 1, which is presented on an institutional level, and Phase 2, which is presented at the campus level;
- Greater consistency amongst the campuses with respect to Phase 2 – in terms of content and process;
- The re-design of Phase 2.

In general, the revisions to the ICNL that have been introduced since 2014 are regarded as successful. Feedback from course participants and the course presenters indicates that the new Phase 1 provides a more coherent orientation to key issues in higher education teaching and learning, as well as a good grounding in terms of institutional policies relating to teaching and learning, initial guidance on the development of course guides and teaching portfolios and an orientation to academic support services (Research and Commercialisation, Research Support, Community Engagement, SoTL, Quality Assurance, IT, Language Services).

In particular, the fundamental re-design of ICNL Phase 2 provides participants with a more coherent developmental programme, and allows them to develop their competence in the use of various teaching approaches (instead of falling back on formal lectures). The following section provides an overview of this phase at the three campuses, in order to identify the key elements of the re-designed phase that can be described as successful.

The format of Phase 2 does differ across the campuses. At the Vaal Triangle Campus, the programme has been systematically revised over the past three years. Its key requirement is that the ICNL participants should develop an electronic or e-portfolio which is based on self-reflection on their teaching and learning practice, and is submitted as evidence for the completion of the ICNL process. Key aspects of the portfolios that participants are required to develop are:

- A lesson evaluation report based on the observation of one of their teaching activities according to an observation guidelines discussion document, as well as a report on their observation of an excellent lecture or teaching activity presented by a past ITEA winner,
- Reflection on their attendance of two compulsory workshops (eFundi and Assessment) and three elective workshops (exam paper development, study guide development, large classes, Clickers, or other eFundi tools);
- An analysis of assessment tasks prepared by them.

In the development of their portfolios, the ICNL participants are supported by ADS (Academic Development & Support) academic advisors and academic mentors. Since 2013, the campus has paid significant attention to the role, responsibilities, selection and training of the academic mentors, as well as the communication between academic mentors and the ICNL participants that are assigned to them. In addition from 2015 onwards, an ADS academic advisor is assigned to each faculty in order to support the ICNL process. The revised programme commences with a one and a half day orientation event for the ICNL participants at the beginning of the first and second semesters, which includes an information session for the academic mentors and ADS academic advisors. Building on the re-design of the ICNL phase 2, it has been recommended that academic mentorship should become part of the task agreement of lecturers.

At the Mafikeng Campus the ICNL phase 2 commences with a three day training event that is offered three times a year during January, April and June in order to accommodate newly appointed lecturers. During this three day training event, lecturers are introduced to a variety of teaching and learning topics as well as academic support services available on the Campus. Topics addressed include assessment, teaching strategies, development of study guides, SoTL, how to reflect on teaching and learning, integration of technology and basic eFundi training. Lecturers also have the opportunity to present micro-lessons in front of their colleagues and together they reflect on the lessons. During the initial training event, the participants receive guidance on the requirements for an e-portfolio of evidence that they have to submit before the end of the year, and are introduced to an ADC (Academic Development Centre) mentor, who is available for consultation and support in the development of the e-portfolios. The mentor conducts a class visit on invitation; a video recording is made for reflection purposes and student-lecturer evaluations are administered.

The format of Phase 2 at the Potchefstroom Campus is similar to that at the Mafikeng Campus. A two and a half day training event is presented three times per year in order to provide for in-time training so that newly-appointed lecturers may 'find their feet' in the HE environment as soon as possible. The following aspects are seen as successful changes. Firstly, the course includes a broader range of topics, including the profile of the students on campus, blended learning, assessment and moderation, constructive alignment (in terms of how programmes are aligned with the HEQSF and the NQF level descriptors), and the writing of e-guides. Secondly, as is the case at the other campuses, it now provides a more hands-on training component. This is achieved by inviting selected guest lecturers to demonstrate their proficiency in teaching, while on the final day the newly-appointed lecturers have the opportunity to present a concise "class" (micro-lesson) of twenty minutes in front of their colleagues and a teaching advisor. This is an excellent opportunity to implement the aspects and advice they received during the first two days. By evaluating the micro-sessions the teaching advisors can immediately recognise the extent to which the previous two-day programme added value to the lecturer's teaching practices. Thirdly, after the two and a half day training event, the ICNL Phase 2 participants are required to develop a teaching and learning portfolio with the support of the academic mentors and teaching advisors that are assigned to them. In the development of their portfolios, the staff draw on feedback provided by the academic mentors and teaching advisors who attend contact sessions, as well as student feedback. In this manner, ICNL Phase 2 encourages participants to continuously reflect and also assess their practical ability in providing a quality learning experience as academic teachers.

At all the campuses, the developmental process provided by the ICNL is monitored by means of the university's performance management system, as the new staff members enter into performance agreements followed by regular discussions with their respective line managers [usually a school director] and eventually resulting in a comprehensive performance review at the end of an academic year where areas that are [still] in need of development then become part of the developmental trajectory for the following year.

This description indicates that while the precise format of Phase 2 differs across the campuses, the core requirements of the development of a portfolio of evidence, mentoring, and participation in capacity development workshops relating to key aspects of teaching and learning, are the same. As the revised ICNL process is implemented more attention will be paid to creating a common framework for Phase 2 that draws on good practice at all the campuses. It is thought that the more hands-on approach to Phase 2 supports the better integration of the two phases, as Phase I is more concerned with a broader orientation to a range of policies, practices and systems that support the academic project and assist academic staff in their work. However, feedback from some of the faculty teaching and learning committees suggests that the role of the mentors may not always be optimal, with one recent ICNL participant commenting that the ADC mentor should have played a more active and structured role in terms of the development of the teaching portfolio. In some cases, recent ICNL participants view Phase 2 as too long, and feel that some sections are too theoretical. One faculty teaching and learning committee also felt that more should be done to distinguish between the developmental needs of new lecturers who are new to higher education, and those "new" lecturers who already are experienced academics. Clearly, views on the desirability of a longer or shorter introductory programme, as well as the balance between more theoretical and practical components will differ.

Both phases of the ICNL are evaluated by means of questionnaires (though the Phase 2 questionnaires differ across the campuses), that are used as a reference point for the improvement of the course, so that it may accommodate specific requests and problems that newly-appointed lecturers encounter. As stated, the general feedback from participants in the ICNL is that it is very effective in orienting newly appointed academics to the North West University' teaching-learning and research environment, by laying fundamental principles and developing core competencies on which they can build further. The data[4] reflecting on ICNL practices that has been generated over several years is regarded as invaluable as the findings and intelligence derived from it pro-actively informs future practices and the protocol for the ICNL. However, the evaluation of the ICNL still lacks integration, as the Institutional Committee for Teaching and Learning (ICTL) only receives a feedback report on Phase 1 and not on the combined phases. From 2016, the ICTL should receive an integrated report that draws on feedback from participants relating to both phases of the course, and also reflects on aspects such as the adequacy of the mentoring and support provided by the senior academic staff, and the teaching advisors, the quality of teaching portfolios developed, and the extent to which the performance management system links up effectively with the ICNL process. All the academic development support units should be involved in the development of an integrated report of this nature, so that it may provide an important mechanism for monitoring the consistency in the implementation of Phase 2 across the campuses, and for reviewing the relationship between Phases 1 and 2 on a regular basis.

## 2.4    Exemplars of changes that have not been successful.

### 2.4.1    Revision of the academic staff promotion policy

In classifying the proposed revised academic staff promotion policy as an example of a change that is not as successful as intended, it is important to state firstly the aspects which are a clear improvement on the current policy. As indicated in section 2.2.2, the inclusion of the implementation of expertise/ community engagement as a fourth domain of activity is an important step forward. So is the guidance provided on the types of performance or outputs that would be expected within each domain at each position level. The current *Academic Staff Promotion Policy* (2005) is supported by a standard norm profile that sets out typical areas that should be taken into account within each domain, but the academic promotion criteria do not provide sufficient guidance as to the types of performance and outputs that would be expected at each position level. This responsibility is fulfilled by each dean, who must develop faculty-specific norm profiles for each position level, albeit subject to the approval of the campus rector and vice-rectors. While it is important that the promotion criteria should be sufficiently contextual in terms of faculties and disciplines, it is also important to ensure that the promotion process is fair in its application across faculties. In this regard, the development of the draft *Guideline for Promotion of Academic Staff* (with the latest version at 9 September 2014) is important for its delineation of the progressive demonstration of types of performance that are linked to each position level within the four domains. By providing this type of specification, the guidelines develop a common institutional framework that will promote consistency, and the necessary degree of "standardisation" in the promotion process.

However, the most contested aspect of the proposed revised policy from a teaching-learning perspective lies in the fact that it no longer provides for differentiated promotion criteria at the level of associate professor. The current policy provides for a differentiated weighting of the percentages that apply to the various domains in order to provide for promotion to the level of associate professor mainly in terms of a teaching-learning track or a research track, or on the basis of a balance between the tracks. Thus, the "teaching track" provides for promotion to associate professor on the basis of a 60% weighting for teaching, and 20% each for research and organisational and managerial tasks. The Academic Staff Promotion Policy (2005) provides for such differentiation on the basis of the principle that "individuals have different competencies, interests and potential, and therefore different pathways for promotion are provided". Admittedly, the pathway is only differentiated at the level of associate professor. By contrast, the proposed promotion guidelines do not accommodate different pathways. It is important to note, though, that in the consultative process relating to the guidelines within the Institutional Deans' Forum, a strong alternative view in favour of the retention of different pathways at associate professor level was expressed. This view was linked largely to the Vaal Triangle and Mafikeng Campuses, but it is possible that further discussion of this matter may indicate a greater nuance in views on the question of different promotion pathways across campuses.

Following the CHE workshop in June 2015, it has been decided that a task team will take the work on the finalisation of the academic promotion guidelines, and the associated revision of the academic promotion policy, forward. The key question from a teaching and learning perspective is which approach best does justice to the recognition of excellence in teaching within the context of the University's strategic direction. Promotion systems in higher education can be arranged according to a three-track ("teaching track", "research track" and "teaching and research track"), two-track ("teaching track" and "research track") or

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[4] Data generated by Institutional ADS and Academic Development Units on the respective campuses.

single-track system. In its work, the task team, and eventually Senate, will need to consider the following matters:

- The case for the provision of differentiated career pathways and which system (three-, two-, or single track) best accommodates differential pathways;
- The position levels for which provision should made for differentiation (if differentiation is recommended);
- The evidence and criteria to be used should provision be made for differentiated pathways.

Unfortunately, it was not possible to convene the task team during the second semester of 2015, but this matter will receive priority during the first semester of 2016. The task team will also consider other issues, such as the possible provision for a category of "senior professor" in order to retain exceptional staff as academics, as the lack of promotion prospects at senior levels may be one factor that encourages highly talented staff to pursue careers in university management.

## 2.5 Promising practices related to the enhancement of academics as teachers

### 2.5.1 Scholarship of Teaching and Learning

The Institutional Submission (B.1.4(a)) discussed developments relating to the establishment of the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL), noting that it could be ideal to locate the SoTL initiative in a Centre for Higher Education linked to a faculty as this would provide SoTL with an academic home and strategically position it with dedicated academic staff who are qualified scholars in this area.

SoTL is at an early stage in its development at NWU, and, as a result, there is still some uncertainty with respect to its status and its contribution to the creation of a learning environment that supports student success optimally. The reviews of the status of teaching and learning conducted during 2013 noted that for many academic staff SoTL remains a vague, if not alien concept. As one senior leader stated:

'The drive towards the scholarship of teaching and learning is taking effect, but it takes a long time to get traction because people find the notion a little strange... people can do action research in their classroom that can be written up in an informed, scholarly way.'

This section describes promising initiatives that should contribute to the institutionalisation of SoTL. At the Potchefstroom Camus, two SoTL researchers were appointed during 2014. One of the SoTL researchers is based in the Academic Support Services (ASS), and the other in the Faculty of Health Sciences. The aim of both appointments is to develop teaching and learning quality, through the promotion of a research-based approach to the professional development of academic staff. The researcher who is based in the ASS works across all faculty contexts at the campus which provides for an interdisciplinary approach to teaching and learning development. In contrast, the location of the other SoTL researcher in the Faculty of Health Sciences provides for an individualised, structured and focussed approach to teaching and learning development within a faculty context. The different location of the SoTL researchers picks up the theme of the interplay between more centralised and localised approaches to professional development, as referred to in Section 2.1. This development provides an opportunity to learn about the relative advantages of an institution-or campus-based location for staff who specialise in SoTL, in comparison to a faculty-based location, and the extent to which the two approaches may be complementary.

The SoTL researchers present or arrange workshops and seminars regarding teaching and learning aspects to support lecturers with their scholarly research. In the Faculty of Health Sciences, workshops were presented on a monthly basis in 2014, and thereafter once every three months, with an average attendance of 30-40 lecturers. The themes of these workshops were based on the needs and interest of the faculty members, such as interprofessional education, mentoring, the development of e-guides, and work-integrated learning. Similar themes are covered by the SoTL researcher based in the ASS. In addition, both researchers also present training workshops for academic staff on various aspects of research in higher education, in order to strengthen their research competence in the area of teaching and learning. Continuous support is provided to help lecturers with the completion of proposals, data collection and ethical clearance for their projects, either through workshops or individual consultations.

Since the appointment of the SoTL researchers at the Potchefstroom Campus, interest and engagement in SoTL has increased, with lecturers identifying aspects of their curriculum, teaching and assessment that they want to change and improve. Over the past year and a half, ten lecturers discussed and/or started with SoTL projects in their disciplines. Some of these projects were formally registered as SoTL projects and funded through the NWU SoTL funds.

The outcomes of some projects have already been implemented within pedagogical practices. Examples include the use of multi-media in nutrition education; peer-teaching in the Pharmacy simulation lab; peer-assessment with video recordings in medicine logistics; strategies to improve student engagement in Mathematics; the use of mock trials to support experiential learning in Law; the use of *Backchat* as an audio assessment feedback tool; the use of online assessment; team-based learning in pharmacy management

and interprofessional education in the Faculty of Health Sciences. In addition, since April 2014 the SoTL projects have generated a significant number of research outputs: 6 poster and 7 oral presentations at conferences; 3 articles accepted and a further 2 submitted for publication in accredited journals. In order to take the potential impact of SoTL work on pedagogical practice further, it is important that staff who engage in SoTL projects should continue to receive guidance and support so that project results may conform to all the necessary criteria for the validation of research.

A further encouraging development in the Faculty of Health Sciences is that there are currently five lecturers who are registered for post-graduate studies in the teaching and learning of their Discipline (2 Master's in Health Professions Education – UOFS; 2 PhD's in Health Professions Education – UOFS; 1 PhD in Recreation Science with a focus on experiential learning – NWU). This may be attributable, at least in part, to the work of the SoTL researcher in the Faculty.

At the Mafikeng Campus, the ADC started a SoTL community of practice (CoP) during 2015. Currently the CoP comprises of six lecturers from the Faculties of Human and Social Sciences and Law as well as the Senior Academic Advisor at the ADC who meet at least once a month. During the meetings members share the SoTL research that they conduct in their courses, discuss projects and innovative trends in teaching and learning, and advise and encourage each other. All the participants have presented their projects at conferences during 2015. The Senior Academic Advisor also conducts individual consultations with lecturers who need assistance with SoTL projects. While the Mafikeng Campus has not appointed specific SoTL researchers as is the case at the Potchefstroom Campus, the establishment of the SoTL CoP provides a further illustration of how a central academic development unit is taking responsibility for the institutionalisation of SoTL.

At the Vaal Triangle Campus, the teaching and learning committees have identified a sub-committee of four members to oversee the SoTL projects on the campus. This has been done to ensure that the research is coherent, to promote interdisciplinary work, and to guide the SoTL project participants in implementing their research in teaching and learning practice. This sub-committee will also promote the publication of SoTL research in accredited journals.

These developments relating to SoTL are described as promising practices that provide valuable experience on which the University can draw in the development of a holistic and structured approach to SoTL work. In taking SoTL forward, the following matters merit consideration:

- Integration of SoTL into a more coherent strategy and framework for professional development, such as marketing SoTL as a viable option when planning a career path, and developing new incentives and recognition for SoTL research (such as allocating professional development points to SoTL work) – this matter is discussed under Section 2.6.2;
- Securing buy-in from research directors;
- Promoting problem-based SoTL projects that contribute to the improvement of teaching and learning practice;
- Encouraging team-based projects at an institutional and campus level.

### 2.5.2 Collaborative networks for the development of electronic teaching resources

Section 4.2.3 of this report discusses the progress achieved and the planning relating to the development of electronic study guides, noting the initiatives and pilot projects launched over the last three years to improve the availability and accessibility of electronic teaching and learning resources for students and lecturers.

With respect to the development of academics, the promising practice is that with the establishment of these initiatives, innovative working practices have emerged whereby academics collaborate closely with graphic designers and instructional technologists in the design and implementation of an interactive learning environment. It is believed that these innovative practices may help to establish the kind of multi-disciplinary or multi-functional capacity that will be needed to create and maintain effective learning environments in which innovative teaching and learning designs support a high quality learning experience. The implementation of the e-guides is being driven from a faculty perspective on all the campuses. For instance, in the Faculty of Health Sciences at the Potchefstroom Campus, lecturers were trained and guided through the process for the development of their e-guides during designated, focused five hour sessions. During these sessions, ASS staff presented training lectures on the principles of blended learning, instructional design, and the structure and purpose of study guides, after which the lecturers developed their own e-guides with support from the ASS staff. Similar capacity development processes have taken place at the Vaal Triangle Campus, and are in their initial stages at the Mafikeng Campus. Student and staff experiences of the implementation of the e-guides will be followed-up through SoTL research in 2016, and integrated into the ongoing development and refinement of the *Framework for E-Guides* (see the discussion under Section 4.2.3).

A key challenge lies in the creation of sufficient specialist capacity, in the form of expertise in instructional and graphic design, to support academic staff to engage with the gradual transformation into a technology-

enabled learning environment. The limitation of the current resources in this regard may have a negative effect on the pace and quality of the development of technology-enabled learning environments on the respective campuses.

### 2.5.3    Development of faculty-specific workload models

As discussed under Section 2.2.2 of the report, NWU needs to develop an institutional workload framework that provides a point of orientation for the design of faculty-specific workload models. Models that currently are in use within various faculties should contribute to the development of the institutional model. To illustrate this point, this section refers to the model that has been developed by the Faculty of Natural Sciences at the Potchefstroom Camus as a promising practice.

The model takes into account that staff provision to subject groups is and will always be a contentious issue. Not only does the offering of a subject in most cases require a certain critical mass (subjects are mostly divided into speciality areas (e.g. organic-, inorganic-, analytical- and physical chemistry) and accreditation requires expertise in all these areas) but available infra-structure (e.g. appropriately equipped laboratories), student numbers, etc. inform the offering of a particular programme.

The workload model takes the core responsibilities of academic staff into account, but also makes provision for subject diversities, e.g. some subjects may strongly rely on teaching while others are more research focused. It is based on various assumptions relating to the total amount of time required for the core activities of teaching-learning and research, as well as information on all sources of income (Money streams 1-5). Thus the model makes use of assumptions that have been derived either from financial considerations (e.g. time spent on an activity and staff cost) or operational requirements (teaching hours) and has been found a very useful tool. It provides a basis for comparing actual staff allocations to schools and subject groups with ideal allocations, and thus also for determining priorities for staffing allocations. The faculty works from the assumption that a general rule of fewer programmes and fewer modules should always be the point of departure in any optimization process in terms of staffing planning.

The model forms part of an integrated process for informing strategic and operational planning in the faculty, taking into account several key interacting factors that include staff, infrastructure, financial and environmental factors (such as markets - size and shape, etc.). As such it forms part of a set of available planning resources and "decision-making tools" on which decisions, which are aimed at promoting the optimal internal utilisation of available resources, partly can be based. To ensure its legitimacy, it is important that the dean communicates regularly on its design and implementation as well as that of other decision-making tools, in order to ensure buy in and ownership in the strategic plan of the faculty/university. New market opportunities, changes in current demand and other factors influencing the development and direction of the faculty have to be communicated regularly so that changes to planning instruments such as the workload model may be implemented in a timely/proactive manner.

## 2.6    Main challenges in relation to the enhancement of academics as teachers.

### 2.6.1    Clarification of the roles and responsibilities of faculty teaching and learning committees

While almost all faculties have teaching and learning committees, their roles and responsibilities need clarification. The reviews of the status of teaching and learning at the Vaal Triangle and Mafikeng campuses conducted in 2013, as well as a 2012 report at the Potchefstroom Campus on the composition and function of faculty teaching and learning committees at the campus, pointed to various challenges in this regard

- Staff are reluctant to serve on these committees because they realise that the "status comes from research not teaching" – this perception may be reinforced by cases where senior academic managers such as deans or school directors do not chair or participate in the teaching and learning committees, as their absence makes it more difficult for the committees to play an effective role in decision-making processes. In cases where senior managers such as school directors chair the committee it seems to function more effectively;
- It is important that programme leaders and subject chairs should participate in these committees so that they can make input on practical challenges experienced by the staff in their programmes or subject areas, and can provide feedback to academic staff on discussions at the committees;
- In some cases, the teaching and learning committees are unsure of their role and mandate. As a result, while some teaching and learning committees play an active role in enhancing teaching and learning relating to matters such as SoTL, ITEA, teaching and learning technology, and so forth, others may function primarily in a more technical manner, focusing on administrative issues such as the production of study guides, the implementation of the supplemental instruction programme, timetabling, procedures and rules, student complaints and so forth.

To address these challenges, a common institutional guideline should be developed that clearly articulates the role, function and terms of reference of the faculty teaching and learning committees. This should be a collaborative process led by the faculty deans. The development of such a guideline is an important priority

which should follow on the approval of the composition and terms of reference of the Institutional Committee for Teaching and Learning at the Senate meeting of 21 October 2015. Within the guideline document, attention should be paid to matters such the role of faculty teaching and learning committees in recommendations on academic promotions and the design of promotion criteria, curriculum reform, the enhancement of teaching practices, the promotion of professional development opportunities for staff, student academic development including academic literacies, the use of feedback from students and other stakeholders, and support for faculty-based communities of practice. The link between teaching and research may also be enhanced when TL Committees focus on innovative teaching practices and the research conducted by the academic staff on those matters. TL Committees can act as forums for the integration of SoTL results into the faculties' teaching and learning approaches.

### 2.6.2  Better planning and coordination of professional development activities

The Institutional Submission (Section B.1.3(b)) noted that capacity development workshops mainly take the form of workshops, seminars and showcase events on various aspects of teaching and learning, though one campus has introduced a capacity building programme in order to provide a more coordinated approach to professional development. In general these training and capacity development opportunities introduce academics to a variety of topical issues in the realm of teaching-learning in higher education. Common areas covered by these training and development opportunities centre mainly around the following areas: Research supervision; Facilitation techniques; Use of technology in the classroom; Programme design and review processes; Assessment tools and methods; Curriculum development; Designing interactive study guides including E-Guides and Smart Guides; and the use of anti-plagiarism software.

As already stated in the Institutional Submission, there is a need to introduce a more coordinated and focused range of professional development activities. Firstly, workshops and other capacity development opportunities of a more episodic nature should be supplemented by interventions such as short courses and workshop series that provide the opportunity to explore specific themes in a more in-depth manner. Secondly, there should be a systematic process to strengthen the conceptual and structural coherence of professional development activities. In terms of conceptual coherence, attention should be paid to the underlying philosophy that underpins professional development, by addressing aspects such as the role of academic staff in teaching and learning, the value that is attributed to students in the teaching and learning process, and the manner in which professional development activities are embedded in discourses relating to the professional identity of academic staff. With respect to structural coherence, it is important to plan and review the scope and relevance of capacity development activities on a regular basis. One way of doing this would be for the ICTL to receive an annual report on professional development activities, which would include input from faculty teaching and learning committees. Another aspect of a more focused approach could include tailoring capacity development activities to address the needs of specific faculties, such as the provision of faculty specific workshops and seminars.

However, in developing a more coordinated approach to professional development, NWU must address the fact that there is no formal requirement beyond the ICNL for lecturers to undergo any form of professional development. As far as the ICNL is concerned, though participation is compulsory for newly-appointed members of staff, steps are not always taken to follow up on lecturers who do not attend. Further professional development in teaching and learning is not a requirement for appointment or promotion. At some other South African universities, and increasingly in some international higher education systems, lecturers need to complete a formal teaching qualification/certificate during a probation period before the confirmation of their permanent appointment.

As part of the development of a more coordinated system for professional development, it should be noted that a position paper on the establishment of a Centre for Higher Education Development and Research (CHEDR) recently has been developed. While the merits of the proposed Centre as the most effective mechanism for the coordination of professional development still need to be discussed, the following perspectives from the position paper point to key functions that should be fulfilled by whatever mechanisms the NWU creates for this purpose. The role of the Centre would be to coordinate and facilitate professional development activities, to support discipline-specific research on teaching and learning (SoTL), and to conduct research on higher education studies (for example international and comparative higher education, higher education policy, quality assurance in higher education, and so on). The CHEDR would provide a point of coordination for a range of professional development activities that are currently presented through faculties and support units, and link such activities to a learning pathway which may consist of short courses (with proposed credits), as well as a sequence of formal qualifications including a Postgraduate Diploma and a Master of Philosophy in Higher Education. In this manner, participation in professional development, including short courses and SoTL projects, will be placed along a trajectory that supports staff in the progressive development of competence in teaching and learning and recognises them for this. The CHEDR would be a cross-campus institutional facility, though its structural location needs further consideration. Members of academic staff could be recognised as associates of CHEDR as an acknowledgement for their participation in professional development activities.

While the position paper on CHEDR is in an early phase of development, it presents a vital opportunity to develop a framework for professional development in ways that are similar to the 'pedagogical academy' discussed by Olsson at the June 2015 CHE workshops on the assessment and recognition of university teaching. As such the CHEDR could play a key role in addressing the main challenge of developing a clearer articulation of the requirements for the demonstration of pedagogical competence, as discussed under section 2.6.4, and could provide the enabling framework within such competence could be developed, inter alia to address criteria for the recognition of teaching and learning in a revised promotion policy – as discussed under section 2.2.2.

### 2.6.3    Career path planning and support

The institutional submission noted that more needs to be done to support staff in the planning of their professional career paths (Section B.1.5(a)). In this respect, it is encouraging to note that the majority of deans and directors use the performance appraisal process to foster and support the growth and development trajectory of academic staff members, and that staff are required to develop personal development plans that form part of approved performance agreements, while their progress towards the achievement of their personal development goals is monitored as part of performance review discussions. In some faculties, personal development plans cover a three to five year period.

Personal development plans appear to work well in assisting staff in the completion of their formal studies. Thus, based on their agreed development plans, academic staff may apply for support such as research leave, reduced workloads, and financial assistance from the Research Support Office for the completion of their doctoral degrees. The conditions for such financial support are that staff should be permanently appointed full-time academic staff members, who are registered for a doctoral degree, and in their final year of enrolment. Funding may be used for lecturer replacement support, for spending time with a supervisor or mentor who is an expert in the field, and for editing, printing and binding of the thesis. A promising practice is that in some faculties, deans or school directors have conversations with academic staff members who do not possess a Masters or Doctoral degree, on how they can assist them to achieve these higher degrees.

It is not so clear that personal development plans are effective in supporting staff to articulate their goals and develop their competence in the area of teaching and learning. In this regard, there is a need for personal development plans to make explicit provision for professional development in teaching and learning. Few faculties have formal mentorship programmes to assist younger academics in their career path planning – with mentorship being confined to the ICNL programme. An encouraging development in this regard is that the Vaal Triangle Campus will introduce a mentorship programme that goes beyond the ICNL and in which the academic mentors will have a broader responsibility for supporting mentees to participate in professional development activities (see also the discussion under section 2.3.2). In the Faculty of Commerce and Administration at the Mafikeng Campus, new staff members are allocated to a mentor, and mentorship activities are incorporated in the task agreement of the mentor. These examples are useful practices which could contribute to the more widespread development of a faculty-based academic mentoring system to support young members of staff in the development of their teaching careers.

### 2.6.4    Clearer articulation of requirements for demonstration of pedagogical competence

Like many other universities, the NWU also faces the challenge of the relative undervaluation of teaching and learning compared to research. Part of the problem is that there is a clearer, more established understanding of the outputs that are used to measure research, while it is more difficult to assess competence in teaching and learning in a robust and adequate manner. Therefore, NWU will need to provide more systematic guidance with respect to how academic staff demonstrate that they understand the full dimensions of their teaching role in terms of the design, facilitation and assessment of learning. This guidance should consist of at least three aspects:

- The articulation of criteria relating to teaching and learning competence – with respect to themes such as: a) the profile of higher education learners; b) what learning in higher education really entails; c) approaches to effective teaching; and d) what constitutes a scholarly approach to teaching and learning (i.e. based on appropriate theoretical perspectives, drawing on appropriate evidence, outcome oriented, and subject to self and peer evaluation);
- The manner in which evidence of teaching and learning competence is demonstrated – for instance by means of the development of a teaching and learning portfolio. In this regard, it is recommended that faculty teaching and learning committees should at least encourage the development of portfolios as part of the evidence base for promotion, and that portfolio development should be seen as an integral aspect of career path development that builds on staff participation in the ICNL and ITEA processes, SoTL projects, and other capacity development opportunities;
- Opportunities that the University should provide for the development of teaching and learning competence (see the discussion in other parts of this section on SoTL and the more focused approach to professional development).

These matters should receive consideration in the revision of the NWU teaching and learning policy during 2016, and should inform the consideration and review of teaching and learning in personal development plans, performance reviews and the promotions policy.

### 2.6.5    Revision of the system for student feedback on lecturers and modules.

The University has an approved policy for student feedback on teaching and learning (2008), as well as a student feedback form that focuses on lecturers, which was approved by Senate in October 2011. The current student feedback system is deficient in various respects. Firstly, the role and responsibilities for its implementation are unclear. On some campuses, the academic development units collect the student feedback, while on others this is viewed as a faculty responsibility. Secondly, aspects of the approved policy dealing with matters such as the responsibility of deans to answer to campus managements for the implementation of the policy as part of the performance management system (section 3.2), and the requirement that the feedback instrument should be reviewed by the academic development units on an annual basis and be presented to the first Senate meeting of each year for approval (section 4), are not implemented properly. Thirdly, the feedback instrument fails to distinguish between feedback on modules and feedback on lecturers, which ignores the fact that module quality and the quality of the individual lecturer are distinct constructs. The instrument also fails to distinguish between teaching approaches, as generic questions do not accommodate a variety in teaching styles and methods. Fourthly, it is not clear that lecturer feedback is used consistently to inform personal development planning and performance review, or how such feedback should inform performance review. Fifthly, the current system for the collection, analysis and dissemination of feedback is labour intensive and should be replaced by an online system. In the sixth place, there is no system for the presentation of an overview report on student feedback to the ICTL (Institutional Committee for Teaching Learning) and Senate. This may contribute to a perception amongst students that the questionnaire is waste of time, that the process is too subjective, and therefore that the validity of the results is open to question. In the seventh place, there is no guidance as to how the results of student feedback should be provided to students, or used by Faculty Teaching and Learning Committees in their engagement with student representatives in order to improve teaching and learning.

The Teaching and Learning Forum has discussed this matter at various meetings during 2015, and the re-design of the student feedback system is a priority project for 2016.

### 2.6.6    Strengthening institutional collaboration

Working in a multi-campus environment with such an extensive geographic reach presents considerable challenges in the area of teaching and learning. While there are many good activities and promising innovations, it is important to develop mechanisms that ensure that they are not isolated bur rather are drawn into a cohesive approach that builds on the diverse experiences and experimental projects that are underway at the various campuses, and within different faculties. There are signs that some of NWU's challenges are due to the diverse backgrounds and historical trajectories of the various campuses, which has tended to foster more campus-specific orientation. However, the need for greater cohesion is not merely reducible to the multi-campus environment. It also has to do with the different nature of faculties and disciplines on campuses. In some cases, faculties have effective systems in place to promote collaboration amongst disciplines, while in others this is not the case.

NWU does have a number of endeavours that are geared to promoting collaborative work and the dissemination of good practices relating to teaching and learning across the three campuses, such as the annual SoTL conference and cross-campus SoTL projects, the ITEA awards, and the ICNL. Importantly, the approval of the new structural proposals by Council provides a vital opportunity to create the structures that will strengthen institutional collaboration. As the University promotes greater cohesion, it will be important to continue to provide for the specific circumstances of specific disciplines and to allow for developmental activities through which academics develop competencies relating to the construction of knowledge and appropriate pedagogical approaches within their fields.

# 3    Focus Area 2 – Enhancing Student Support and Development[5]

## 3.1    Key issues in enhancing student support and development.

While the QEP recognises the importance of non-academic support services including financial aid, accommodation, food and health care, the CHE indicates that the intention of Focus Area 2 is to address aspects that are directly related to academic performance, including academic and career advising, life and academic skills and literacies, counselling and performance monitoring linked to referral systems (CHE 2015:105). Therefore, while the NWU offers a range of non-academic support services, they are not included in this discussion. The support services that do relate to Focus Area 2 are as follows:

- Academic support services, including:
    - Libraries
    - Academic literacy support: Reading laboratories; Writing Centres; and Academic literacy modules;
    - Supplemental instruction (SI), tutoring and mentoring services
    - Graphic support services;
    - eFundi help-line (to engage with the learning management system)
- General Student Support Services (reports to the Student Deans, or equivalent, on each campus):
    - Student Counselling Services
    - Institute for Psychotherapy and Counselling
    - Career Services
    - IT Support (One-Stop Service)
    - Student support systems established in residences
    - Disability support
    - Student Representative Council (SRC)

The task team that worked on this focus area (details of the task team composition are provided in Section 1.2) was representative of NWU's three campuses and the Institutional Office, as well as the following student support services – academic support services, non-academic support services and general student support systems. The task team held various workshops in order to identify themes and sub-themes pertaining to this focus area, recording responses and following up in order to clarify details that were not clear. In addition, the task team drew on the mapping process conducted to date in Focus 3 in the NWU Project on the Transformation of Teaching and Learning (*TransfTL Project*), which concerns the lifecycle of the student, to identify the key issues relating to this focus area. The final report was circulated among the broader sub-task team before it was finalised. The task team identified the following key issues relating to student support and development – it should be noted that Section 3.1 is not intended to provide an analysis of how these issues impact on NWU, as Sections 3.2 to 3.6 describe how these issues relate to planned or successful interventions, promising practices, and remaining challenges at the University:

- **Systematic approach to access, retention and success**: NWU should develop a framework for student access, retention and access that provides a reference point for various strategies and activities relating to student support and development. A comprehensive student access, retention and success strategy needs to functionally support and contribute towards the total student life cycle.
- **Academic literacy and language development**: The provision of relevant and adequate support with regard to the academic literacy ability of (first-time) entering students is a crucial aspect that contributes to the access, retention and success of students in university education. The following aspects are important:
    - Academic writing is key in the acculturation process (inclusive of attempts to enhance epistemological access) of any student. It follows that if a student is equipped to produce adequate and appropriate written work, success rates will increase. The focus here is primarily on the ability and capacity of the institution to provide the required support in order to functionally embed the academic writing ability of registered students within their chosen fields of study;
    - Reading development: Reading is an essential skill for university learners. All university courses incorporate significant amounts of reading. In fact, there are defined relationships between the credits borne by a course and the amount of reading that it requires. Typically, the higher the level of the course, the more its content moves towards guided study, requiring more independent reading on the part of the student. Additionally, reading is crucial for setting a student on the path of life-long learning, an ability that is not only a critical outcome for universities but also one that is becoming increasingly important in a work environment where the use of computers changes job requirements every few years. It is thus essential that students receive effective opportunities to develop their reading abilities, not only during their first years, but progressively during their study programmes.

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[5] Includes: career and curriculum advising, life and academic skills development, counselling, student performance monitoring and referral.

- **First-year experience:** The importance of the first academic year of study of any student should be emphasised, as the facilitation of 'significant moments' and events during students' first-year experience contributes to overall student success. The development of capacity to support the first-year experience includes a well-designed orientation programme, with key support elements that extend throughout the first year of study and are not restricted to the orientation programme only; the timely identification of at-risk students and appropriate referral systems; the design and implementation of focused interventions; and the monitoring of the success of such interventions.
- **Programme/ subject-specific academic support:** Students need to receive tailored support in order to develop the cognitive, affective and practical competencies that are relevant to their study programmes. Strategies to provide such support include tutoring, mentoring, academic advising, and supplemental instruction. There should be coherent planning, and integrated reporting on the academic support systems available to students, and those students who provide peer support should be adequately trained.
- **Institutional research on student success:**
  - Access to data: The NWU should collect an adequate set of information and data on the needs and experiences of its students, and make it available in a form that supports planning, decision-making and monitoring relating to student development. A challenge that all South African Universities face is the implications of the POPI (Protection of Personal Information) Act for their ability to generate data about their learners;
  - Monitoring and evaluation capacity: There should be adequate capacity to monitor and evaluate the impact of interventions relating to student success. Currently, NWU has little capacity to do so.
- **Support for ODL students:** Given NWU's strong involvement in open distance learning, it is important that ODL students should receive support that is relevant to their learning needs, and that support services work with academic faculties and schools to plan such support and integrate it into programme development and review.
- **Integration of student support initiatives:** The University should promote the integrated provision of student support services, in order to promote effective articulation between them. As part of this strategy there should be an integrated student client service system, which provides students with access to the range of support services available to them.
- **Support for students with disabilities:** The University should decide on the types of support that it is able to provide to students with disabilities, and ensure that there is effective communication between academic support units in its provision (This matter relates to focus areas two and three).
- **Careers development:** In order to inform career planning and employment decisions, students should receive opportunities to engage with employers, have access to information on employment opportunities, and be informed about the nature of employment in various employment sectors relevant to their study programmes. They also should receive effective support in the development of employment-related skills, such as CV development, interview skills, as well as participation in work-integrated and service learning, and other forms of co-and extra-curricular activity that prepare them for the world of work.

## 3.2 Changes made during phase 1 of the QEP

The NWU is currently running several pilots to inform the development of a systematic approach to access, retention and success, which are either in process or in the planning stages. This section describes the changes at the institutional level that (a) have been made, (b) are in progress, or (c) are in the planning stages:

- Changes that have been made: Creation of a forum for access and success;
- Changes in progress: Development of a framework for access, retention and success; Development of academic literacy;
- Changes in planning stage: Support provided by writing centres; Standardised core training for student peer support.

### 3.2.1 Forum for access and success

Since 2014, the University has established a Forum for Access and Success which brings together practitioners from various student support services in order to promote integrated planning to support access, retention and success. While the Forum is not a formal committee, it provides an important collaborative structure in which practitioners discuss projects such as:

- The development of an institutional framework for student access, retention and success;
- An integrated approach to the first-year experience;
- A review of foundation and access provisioning;

- A revision of the academic literacy modules;
- A review of writing centres and reading laboratories and their respective objectives, and the promotion of integrated reporting on the work done by these support services.

The Forum met on three occasions during 2015. While it is too early to say how this Forum may develop in the future, it should be noted that there are numerous examples in international universities of student access and success committees, or student success committees, and that NWU will need to consider how it will link the work of the Forum to formal committees such as the Institutional Committee for Teaching and Learning and Senate.

### 3.2.2 Development of a framework for access, retention and success (ARS)

During 2015, The NWU's Teaching and Learning Forum has embarked on a process of developing a framework for student access, retention and success ("ARS Framework"). A task team was nominated to develop a framework that makes provision for a systematic approach to student access and success, in terms of both student throughput and the qualities of our students. The framework covers the challenges related to widening access, the diverse student population with differing levels of preparedness, and the distinction between formal and epistemological access. It guides the NWU's intentions and commitments in terms of structured strategies and initiatives toward enhancing student access, retention and success, with the attainment of stated student attributes. Reference is made to strategies for preparatory programmes, foundational provision and access through extended programmes. Although the framework should focus on all NWU students (both undergraduate contact/on-campus, open distance learning (ODL) and postgraduate students), the complexities associated with each of these populations, merit an individualised approach. For this reason there should be different focuses respectively for undergraduate and postgraduate students, as well as students who study by means of ODL.

Part of the purpose of the ARS framework is to develop a sufficient understanding of the diverse factors that impact on students access, retention and success, the manner in which they are embedded within the institutional culture, policies, processes and practices, as well as their relationship to the wider socio-economic and educational environment within which the university functions. It also intends to foster the multi-disciplinary, collaborative approaches that are necessary to support students as they negotiate significant transitions (from the secondary system to higher education, from first to second year, from undergraduate to postgraduate study, and from the university to the world of work). The ARS framework presupposes that support strategies and initiatives must be integrated into a comprehensive understanding of the student lifecycle, and seeks to instil an awareness that the institution, its academic and support staff, and its students have a shared responsibility for creating an enabling learning environment that supports widening and deepening participation amongst an increasingly diverse student population, and promotes success. In this manner, the framework seeks to shift the focus away from isolated initiatives to a coordinated approach.

It is not possible to discuss the details of the draft ARS framework in this report, but some of its salient aspects are:

- The distinction between formal and epistemological access, and the recognition that specific strategies are needed to assist students in the process of academic acculturation, so that they are able to progressively develop the ability to engage meaningfully in the norms and practices of the academic discourses relating to their chosen fields of study. The challenge of epistemological access is not limited to the transition from the secondary sector to higher education, as there are other epistemic transitions that students need to negotiate within and between academic programmes that have progressive or different levels of complexity and different knowledge bases and curricular logics;
- Recognition of the critical nature of the first year of study as a key transition, so that specific strategies need to be developed in order to provide students who are entering higher education with comprehensive support. Such strategies include conducting ongoing research on the challenges that they face and that may constitute barriers to progress, the development of effective placement and assessment systems in order to assess their academic readiness, programmes that support first-year students' academic and social integration, the provision of effective and coordinated academic support, and the identification of modules and programmes with high attrition rates and research on the reasons for this;
- Development of learning analytics capability in order to support a data driven approach that contributes to the development of a student profiling system according to categories of at-risk students, and may help to identify specific student groups that are particularly vulnerable;
- As part of the strengthening of learning analytics capability, development of a systematic electronic tracking system that provides for an early warning facility, and monitors referrals and the outcomes of engagements, as well as the academic progress of at-risk students;
- The improvement and alignment of existing retention strategies that are offered by academic and general support services departments, and the possibility of developing more faculty-based academic support systems;

- Exit interviews with students who have cancelled their studies;
- Assessing the readiness of staff to participate in a comprehensive ARS strategy, and equipping them to make an optimal contribution to access, retention and success initiatives;
- Continuous monitoring, analysis and evaluation of ARS initiatives.

The ARS framework is work-in-progress that intends to promote the effective planning, implementation, monitoring and resourcing of strategies to enhance student access and success.

### 3.2.3 Development of academic literacy

Section B.2.3(a) of the Institutional submission referred to the following initiatives to support the development of academic literacy:

- The revision of the academic literacy modules to make them more faculty or discipline specific; and
- The development of new software to promote the development of reading proficiency.

During 2015 considerable progress has been made with respect to both projects.

As far as the academic literacy modules are concerned, the North-West University's strategy for the provision of adequate academic literacy (AL) support is premised on, firstly, the assessment of students' academic literacy levels and, secondly, the offering of a relevant AL intervention aimed at the development of those AL abilities that are crucial for academic success at tertiary level. In the first instance, one has to reliably determine students' levels of academic literacy when they enter university for the first time (results that, at the same time, serve as part of a needs assessment that informs curriculum and course design). For this purpose, the NWU makes use of the highly reliable Test of Academic Literacy Levels (TALL) for students who prefer to study through the medium of English and the *Toets van Akademiese Geletterheidsvlakke* (TAG) for Afrikaans students.

The second aspect referred to above is that of providing a relevant intervention aimed at the development of students' AL abilities. Therefore, depending on the results that students obtain for the TALL/TAG, they have to complete two dedicated, credit-bearing academic literacy modules (AGLE/A 111 and AGLE/A 121), one each semester. Both these modules are generic modules in the sense that the same teaching and learning material is presented to all students, irrespective of their field of study. However, under the guidance of the Standing Committee for Academic Literacy, it was decided that the two generic AL modules (that have been in use from 2009) should be re-developed in a discipline/content-specific manner in order to create a stronger possibility that students would find the intervention relevant to their studies and that this would facilitate better transfer of the AL abilities to which students are exposed in these modules.

Considerable progress has already been made with this project. All three NWU campuses have submitted project plans as to how the re-curriculation project would be managed over the next 3 years. At the Vaal Triangle Campus (where it is possible to work at a school-specific level), seven 1st semester courses have already been developed for the 7 different schools that fall under the two faculties (4 new courses in Humanities and 3 in Economic Sciences and Information Technology) currently housed at the VTC. The Potchefstroom and Mafikeng Campuses have already started with the process of data collection from all relevant stakeholders in 2015 before the actual writing of new learning and teaching materials would commence in 2016. As a result of differing needs on the three campuses, the re-development of the AL modules will be aligned at the level of outcomes, but there will be adequate flexibility in approach to allow for campus-specific needs. As already stated, the Standing Committee for Academic Literacy has the responsibility for co-ordinating the project, and the respective heads of the AL programmes at the different campuses are required to engage in regular inter-campus consultation on the process of re-curriculation as well as the actual materials that are developed. New learning materials would be piloted after development, and adjustments made based on data gathered about the impact of the new materials. All heads of AL programmes will report to the Standing Committee about the progress made with the project, and the Standing Committee will report to the Institutional Senate of the NWU.

Securing funding to sustain the project over the next three years may be the most important challenge in its successful completion.

With respect to the reading laboratories, during 2015 participating colleagues from all campuses as well as from the ODL unit participated in demonstrations of a variety of reading software programmes. The VTC colleagues researched an additional variety of different reading software programmes to close the reading gap in the proficiency levels of entering students. A draft reading report has been prepared for consideration by members of the reading forum for comments and recommendations, with a recommendation on an appropriate software programme. As this is an on-line developmental reading programme it supports the need to address special developmental educational needs, inclusive of ODL students. A pilot study was undertaken during the second semester of 2015 at the PC (Potchefstroom Campus) to investigate the impact of reading proficiency levels of participating students with the use of the recommended software programme.

### 3.2.4    Writing centres

While the writing centres, which have been established on all three campuses of the NWU, could be discussed under the rubric of the development of academic literacy and language development, the Institutional Submission (Section B.2.3(b)) discussed the writing centres as a separate matter, noting that attention was being paid to the following issues: Strengthening the support provided to postgraduate students; and the development of an Online Writing Laboratory to support ODL students as well as students who are not able to visit the writing centre (discussed in Section B.2.5(c) of the Institutional Submission). Building on the Institutional Submission, it can be reported that the following initiatives are in the planning stages:

- Offering postgraduate writing consultations too – currently the focus is on undergraduate students only, but there is an increasing demand for postgraduate support. Evidence to be collected: (i) specific statistics on the writing needs of postgraduate students; (ii) specific statistics on the content covered and the quality of a postgraduate consultation; (iii) the need for the employment of dedicated consultants with higher qualifications (masters or doctoral level) and experience; and (iv) impact of quality and intensity of postgraduate consultations compared to undergraduate consultations (both quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered);
- Redesigning consultant training. Evidence to be collected: (i) impact of quality and intensity of both postgraduate and undergraduate consultations (both quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered); and (ii) accreditation/certification through the Short Courses division of NWU with the necessary quality measures in place;
- Establishing an Online Writing Centre to accommodate the needs of ODL students as well as residential students who are not able to visit the Writing Centre. Evidence to be collected: (i) impact of quality and intensity of online consultations compared to face-to-face consultations (both quantitative and qualitative data to be gathered); and (ii) measurement of the effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability of an Online Writing Centre;
- Increased opening hours, i.e. from 08:00-19:00. Evidence to be collected: (i) increase in so-called walk-in-services; (ii) increase in total number of consultations; and (iii) appointment of more staff to deal with administrative and academic issues – budget issues.

A further initiative which commenced in 2015 is the development of a comparable impact measurement of the improvement of reading and writing proficiency, through collaboration between the staff involved in the reading laboratories and writing centres across the NWU.

### 3.2.5    Standardised core training for student peer support

The Institutional Submission (Section B.2.4(b)) referred to the introduction of academic peer mentoring at all the campuses as an example of a recently implemented activity. Student peer support may be provided in various forms, including tutoring, mentoring and supplemental instruction. During 2015, a standardised core training programme for all students involved in the provision of peer support across the different campuses (not only restricted to SI) has been developed and this will be implemented in 2016. This programme will address the core needs for training in the different peer roles (e.g. tutors, mentors, SI leaders or facilitators), and contribute to the clarification of terminology relating to different peer support practices.

## 3.3    Exemplars to illustrate aspects of the change(s) that are regarded as successful.

### 3.3.1    Revised orientation programme

The Institutional Registrar convened a committee in 2014 to establish a Student Oversight Committee to align the student orientation programmes across all three campuses. The revised orientation programme was developed at the instruction of Council with the aim of ensuring that all the University's campuses provide students with a welcoming and supportive environment that will support their acculturation to university life. The aim was firstly to promote greater consistency in the content of the programme through the determination of a core structure that should be common across all campuses. Secondly, while the programme would provide students with a broad induction to campus life, including social and academic aspects, the emphasis would fall on their integration into the academic environment, with provision for:

- Short refresher courses in fields such as Mathematics;
- General and faculty-specific academic orientation activities including curriculum advice (though see Section 5.7.5 on curriculum advice);
- Various forms of testing to determine student's needs for academic literacy development;
- An orientation to key academic support services such as the library,
- Study skills and time management workshops;
- Commencement with computer proficiency classes for those who lack the required level of computer skills; and

- Guidance on the use of the learning management system.

An example of the successful revision of the orientation and welcome week is the manner in which the library staff members are in the process of designing a more formal programme, to be offered over a longer period, that will focus on the transfer of literacy skills and skills for completing assignments. The intention is to move away from "just in case" training programmes and rather implement a "just in time" approach.

The meeting of the Student Oversight Committee in November 2015 considered reports from the campuses on the 2015 orientation programme. On the basis of these reports, it can be concluded that the revised programme was implemented successfully during 2015.

### 3.3.2  Writing centres

The implementation of an online booking and tracking system on the Potchefstroom Campus was highly successful. Evidence includes: (i) an increase in student numbers visiting the Writing Centre; (ii) adequate and appropriate management data; (iii) better time management by Writing Centre administrative staff; and (iv) specific statistics on the content covered and the quality of a writing consultation.

## 3.4  Exemplars of changes that have not been successful

The task team responsible for focus area two did not identify any issues to include in this section of the report.

## 3.5  Promising practices related to student support and development

The NWU needs to strengthen its capacity to gather information about its students, other than quantitative system data and destination surveys conducted by external bodies such as Universum and the South African Graduate Employers Association (SAGEA) (as reported on in the Institutional Submission, Section B.2.2(b)). Therefore it is important that the University implements evidence-based research projects and feedback systems (including surveys and exit interviews) to understand, monitor and improve the first-year experience and the student experience in general, to determine the reasons for drop-out, and also to track recent graduates. In this section of the report reference is made to two promising developments in this regard, namely key components of the developing first-year experience project, and the graduate destination survey. This section also discusses a pilot project on student academic advising at the Potchefstroom Campus, and developments relating to academic support for students with disabilities.

### 3.5.1  First-year experience project

NWU is currently developing its capacity to support the first-year experience more systematically. Two initiatives are worth mentioning as promising practices in this regard. Firstly, the "*StudyWell Project*" is a cross-campus initiative that aims to develop an evidence-based, culturally sensitive approach to supporting first-year students in their successful adjustment to the University. Its aim is to develop an advanced online analytical process (OLAP) tool to identify students at risk for failure, and to assist NWU and other higher education institutions in determining areas for proactive interventions and to assess the effectiveness of the interventions on important student outcomes in order to develop best practices to promote student success.

The project will profile the pre-entering and entering status of new first-year students (educational background, socio-demographic characteristics, traits, career-choice readiness) in order to assess how these factors, as well as the academic climate (academic demands and resources) and social climate at the University, impact on their adjustment to and integration into the university. On this basis, the project will make recommendations on the academic and social climate that the University needs to create in order to support first year students in their acculturation process. It will also develop key performance indicators for student success and key risk indicators for student dropout, as well as identifying protective factors, such as work experience, academic credentials and character strengths that reduce the chances of dropout.

Currently, two phases are in process:

- Quantitative data gathering: The validation of key instruments is in process. This is a challenge, since most instruments show some form of bias and a lack of parity between different language groups. Instruments have been adapted as a first step. The data will be analysed in January 2016 to determine if the adapted questionnaires can be used for further analyses, or if new instruments need to be adapted.
- Qualitative data gathering: Several interviews and world café sessions have been conducted with first-year students and university support structures to determine the demands and resources that first-year students experience. The first phase of this data gathering is completed. The second phase will aim to develop a Student Demands-Resources framework in more specific detail that will form the basis for the development of a Student Demands-Resources questionnaire that is fair, unbiased and culturally fair.

The second initiative is the first-year experience survey (FYE) which the NWU undertook for the first time during 2014 and 2015, in order to understand the overall quality of the first-year experience across the various campuses and to identify potential trends in the student experience that might have implications for policy change and the improvement of practice. The survey attempts to gather valuable reference points for monitoring the effectiveness of the institution's attempts to cater for a diverse group of new first-year students, through feedback on the application, admission and registration processes, orientation, financial support, student engagement in their academic programmes, the learning experience, factors that impact on students' choice of their study programme and reasons for considering a change to their study programme, as well as the quality and helpfulness of support services. The results of the survey, which were made available at an institutional, campus and faculty level, provide the University with an important evidence-base for planning and monitoring the first-year experience, and should complement the insights that are developed by the Wellness Project.

In addition, NWU's collaboration with the University of Pretoria in the Student Academic Readiness Survey (STARS) project will provide a more focused intervention strategy for students who are at-risk. In terms of this collaboration, the University will administer the STARS at the start of 2016, in order to screen first-year students who may be at risk for failure or withdrawal, in order to identify the needs of specific students as well as generic academic and non-cognitive issues that may impact on students' adaptation to the University, and provide grounds for the provision of student support such as mentoring, tutoring, career guidance, study skills interventions and so on. In combination with the FYE, and the *StudyWell Project* this survey should make a significant contribution to the development of an early warning and referral system. It will be important however, to clarify the relationship between the *StudyWell Project* and STARS.

### 3.5.2 Graduate destination survey

The 2015 Graduate Destination Survey (GDS) was conducted amongst graduates six months after graduation, and is the first survey of its kind at the North-West University. Its purpose is to obtain information on the graduates' university experience, and to determine trends relating to their initial employment experience. In terms of university experience, graduates were requested to provide feedback on their experience of their academic programme, student life in general and the quality of various support services. In terms of initial work experience, the survey provides information on the graduates' main activity (continued study or employment), the extent to which employment correlates with the qualification studied, the extent to which their qualification prepared them for their job, their primary work sector, monthly remuneration and job search approaches. Because the respondents are asked to provide information on the qualifications that they studied for, it is possible to correlate survey results with specific qualifications such as a B.Com or B.Sc.

The results will help NWU to understand how successful our graduates are in finding employment and what best helped them to find employment and to facilitate follow-up surveys/discussions with the employers of NWU graduates. This information will be used to provide current students with more accurate information on employment trends, including remuneration, but can also be used by faculties to follow-up with graduates on their university experience and obtain more detailed information that can be used for programme planning and design.

It is recommended:

- To conduct the survey on an annual basis in order to track any significant changes in graduates' university experience and employment trends;
- To explore best practises to increase the response rate for future surveys, which will allow further drill-down and detailed analysis per qualification;
- To communicate the results regarding the graduate experience to all relevant academic departments and service units and to collaborate with these units in identifying and addressing areas of concern;
- To communicate relevant results to current students in order to provide them with accurate information on employment, remuneration, etc. to assist them in developing realistic expectations with regards to entering the job market;
- To use the survey as a means for promoting the employer engagement activities of the Career Centre, for instance by identifying and targeting organisations and companies within specific industries like education, financial services, health & welfare and government regarding their possible involvement in the Career Fairs, the Career Guide and employer presentations to current students. As part of this process, the survey results could be used by academic schools and departments to facilitate discussions between academic staff, graduates and employers on their specific needs, in order to better prepare students for their careers. This is especially important for the specific qualifications (e.g. BSocSc and BAdmin) where graduates seem to be experiencing problems in terms of finding employment.

### 3.5.3 Academic advisors

NWU provides various forms of peer support. The Institutional Submission (Section B.2.4(b)) discussed the academic peer mentoring programme. Peer support is also provided in the residences at all the campus. For instance, Student Counselling and Development (SCD) at the Vaal Triangle Campus is using a group of

peers who represent the service in the residences (as well as in different courses on the campus). These students are trained extensively on basic counselling skills and receive ongoing training and support within SCD for their year-long term of service. However, this section of the report refers specifically to the introduction of faculty-based academic advising as a promising practice at the Potchefstroom Campus.

During 2015, the Potchefstroom Campus launched a pilot project to establish the services of an academic advisor within each faculty. The purpose of the project is to explore the potential of academic advising, as a specific form of academic peer support that differs from academic mentoring, for making academic support services more accessible to campus students. (At present the Potchefstroom Campus has academic mentors in residences. The academic advisors will be based in faculties, and will be accessible to all students). The academic advisors are full-time students who have done the Supplemental Instruction (SI) training and who have proven themselves over at least 1-2 years as being exceptional facilitators in their field of study (Senior SI Mentors). They are selected and appointed by staff from the Reading and Learning Support (R&LS) Unit within the Academic Support Services, based on their suitability and feedback from students and lecturers while involved in the SI-programme. The academic advisors are trained by the R&LS staff, who are full-time academic advisors with SI advanced training background, and in addition to the SI training, they have follow up mini-training sessions. The vision is that these students will also be trained by Student Counselling Services in future to offer a more comprehensive service to students. This will only be basic training, for the purpose of identifying problems other than academic in order to refer students to the relevant support service.

The role of the academic advisors is much broader than that of academic mentors, in terms of the number of students that they assist and the range of problems that they address. They are trained to identify and evaluate the problem and help the student to find solutions to the problem by either addressing it together (eg, time management, note taking, study strategies, etc.) or referring the student to the appropriate professional support service on campus if it falls outside the academic advisor's scope of knowledge or practice. The R&LS staff monitor the academic advisors and provide ongoing support throughout the year.

Seven academic advisors have been allocated to five faculties for the pilot project. They have set working hours throughout the week and are located in designated offices within each faculty. Students consult with the academic advisors on a voluntary basis.

The programme had a slow start, inter alia because of the challenge of finding on-site accommodation for the advisors in the faculties. Nevertheless it has the potential for developing into a viable practice that complements other forms of peer academic support. The factors that could define the appointment of academic advisors as a promising practice include the definition of their role compared to other forms of the academic peer support, the training that they receive in academic facilitation, and their effectiveness in identifying specific academic problems and referring students to appropriate forms of professional support.

### 3.5.4 Academic support for students with disabilities

This section of the report focuses only on some promising practices relating to academic support in terms of students with disabilities, while section 4.4.1 discusses the impact of the learning environment on support for students and staff with disabilities. The disability units at the three campuses have different structural locations (at the Mafikeng Campus the unit forms part of the Academic Development Centre, while at the Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campuses it forms part of Student Counselling), and the profile of the students that they support differs.

NWU has an approved policy on students with disabilities (2012) which confirms their rights to an equal education, to be treated with dignity and respect, and to be provided with an enabling learning environment with regard to all spheres of academic and campus life. In terms of academic support, NWU strives to make provision for flexibility in terms of access to study materials, execution of academic tasks and student assessment.

Within the contours of the policy all the disability units distinguish between a various types of substantially limiting impairments (visual, auditory, speech, physical, learning, psychological, chronic illnesses, seizure disorders) as well as disabilities of a temporary nature. They conduct an assessment of the learning and support needs of students, provide them with a special orientation programme, and play an advocacy role in communicating the needs of students with disabilities to academic schools and assisting schools to provide appropriate support to students. For instance at the Vaal Triangle Campus (VTC), the disability office prepares a "letter of accommodation" to inform the responsible lecturer and academic school of the types of accommodation that should be provided to students with special learning needs. This campus has developed an extensive website which provides guidance to members of academic staff in understanding how to accommodate the needs of students with disabilities, in terms of preparation for instructional activities, the actual instructional process, and assessment (See http://www.nwu.ac.za/student-counselling-development/services/disability#vi). The disability office at the VTC ensures that final year disability students attend work seminars and also attend CV and job interviewing workshops and career fairs. The office also hosts an annual disability day, in which the broader community is involved (E.g. Emfuleni disability

organisations' forum), and where students with disabilities do presentations about their disabilities. In addition, the office liaises with private companies to subsidise disability students with bursaries. The Campus currently supports 45 students with disabilities.

At the Mafikeng Campus, the number of students with disabilities has grown significantly from 11 in 2008 to 128 in 2015, while 42 of the 44 identified students with disabilities who graduated between 2008 and 2015 have found employment – which indicates the measure of success that the Campus has enjoyed in helping the students to study successfully and to develop life skills and to prepare for their professional lives (for instance through helping them to develop their advocacy skills by presenting at special conferences hosted by the unit in order to create awareness of the needs of students with disabilities). The disability unit provides various forms of practical assistance, and is also involved in an awareness and sensitisation programme for all new employees and managers during their Orientation programme, to make them aware of the needs of students with disabilities.

Based on these good practices, the units are in the process of aligning the support that they provide to students in order to develop a set of standards or good practices that will be used to provide effective academic support to students with disabilities. Key components of these standards include:

- Ensuring that information on academic (and other) support is available to students with disabilities in an easily accessible format (including on the web) during the application and admissions process (and during their studies);
- Conducting an assessment of the learning support of students with disabilities prior to enrolment, so that they can receive information on the support that is available;
- Providing a special orientation for students with disabilities as part of their orientation programme;
- Including guidance on academic support for students with disabilities in the Institutional Course for New Lecturers;
- Providing guidance to academic units on academic support for students with disabilities – in terms of planning the instructional activities, the conduct of the instructional process, and assessment activities (and making this guidance available in an easily accessible format);
- Supporting academic staff in meeting the needs of students with disabilities;
- Obtaining regular feedback from students with disabilities on the effectiveness of the support that they receive, and providing such feedback to faculty teaching and learning committees.

In addition to the development of the standards, the disability units need to make strategic decisions on the types of support that they are able to provide.

## 3.6 Main challenges that the university still faces in relation to student support and development

Before discussing various remaining challenges, it should be noted that despite the promising practices discussed under section 3.5.4, the provision of effective support for students with disabilities remains a challenge. However, as this challenge relates primarily to the learning environment it is discussed under focus area 3 in section 4.4.1 of the report.

### 3.6.1 Strategies for broadening access

The University has various strategies for broadening access in terms of interventions at the pre-tertiary level which fall outside the scope of this focus area. However, NWU also presents a large number of extended programmes (43) at its Mafikeng and Vaal Triangle Campuses, as well as a pilot University Preparatory Programme (UnivPrep), as part of its strategy for widening participation. It is anticipated that the Potchefstroom Campus will apply to the DHET to introduce extended programmes during 2016. The main challenge that NWU must address is the development of an access model that, inter alia, provides an optimal process for admissions and placement assessment, and articulates the relationship between a university preparatory programme and extended (or foundational) programmes in terms of their specific purposes and target student market. To this purpose, a review of access provision is underway, with a focus on the role of the UnivPrep programme, which will be submitted to Senate during the first half of 2016. This review will make recommendations on the continuation of the pilot preparatory programme, its curriculation, its relationship to the extended programmes, and priority areas for the development of preparatory programmes. This review will contribute to the development of an access model that includes the role of extended and preparatory programmes into a strategy for widening participation.

### 3.6.2 Lack of integration of student success and support initiatives

Although the majority of student support initiatives are sound, duplication is prevalent and little articulation and reporting takes places. General ("non-academic") support structures are distributed across the institution and often fall under different structures on each campus. Their objectives are not always aligned with student success objectives. The best practices are not shared and implemented on an institution-wide basis. These initiatives often do not enjoy the institutional support that they require.

In addressing this challenge, there should be greater recognition of the contribution that the student support services make to the holistic development of students. Student support services on campuses (Counselling and Development, Careers Service, Academic Development, etc.) are mandated and provide a comprehensive range of counselling, career and development services to empower students to meet the challenges of the 21st Century individually and corporately. These services are rendered by professionals working in multidisciplinary teams with core objectives that include:

- The promotion of wellness through the enhancement of healthy, holistic growth and development;
- Assistance to students in identifying and enhancing learning skills, which help them to effectively meet their educational and life goals and to increase graduate output;
- The provision of guidance, counselling and/or therapy to students experiencing personal adjustment, vocational, developmental and/or psychological problems.

It is national and international best practice that higher education institutions should provide such services to their students, and that they should be viewed not merely as "support" services which are not related to core academic business, but rather as an integral part of the academic enterprise. Therefore, NWU should align its policies for such services with national and international guidelines, principles and values. This will ensure the provision of a professional service that develops student potential maximally and increases the efficiency of the institution as a whole.

Building on the recognition of the proactive role of various support services to the holistic developmental and preventative empowerment of students, NWU should then develop strategies to promote the integration of student support initiatives. This may include reviewing the structural location of specific support services, their geographical location on campuses, and the formalisation of the Forum for Access and Success so that it may promote and guide the integrated provision of student support services.

### 3.6.3 Integrated student client service system

A general lack of awareness of academic and non-academic services available at the NWU exists among students and staff alike. The establishment of a one-stop facility, or integrated platform through which students can gain access to the range of services available on one platform should be considered as a high priority (a central Student portal, as well as the access channels). This should be supported by a navigational system (accessible to students and staff).

### 3.6.4 Resourcing of writing and reading centres:

In order to support the envisaged expansion of the services provided by the writing centres there is a need for more funding to (i) appoint staff permanently; (ii) equip writing centres suitably for the needs of online and postgraduate consultations; and (iii) operate in a financially sustainable manner. Similar comments apply to the reading centres. In order to sustain the current reading and language support in the reading centres, and to expand the services provided by them, there is a need for more funding to (i) appoint staff permanently; (ii) equip reading centres suitably for the needs of online learning consultations; and (iii) to operate in a financially sustainable manner

# 4 FOCUS AREA 3: Enhancing the Learning Environment[6]

This section of the report makes reference to official teaching [lecturing] spaces, learning spaces in general as well as to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) infrastructure, the library and technology-enabled tools, and resources and initiatives in support of creating an environment that is conducive for learning.

## 4.1 Key issues in enhancing the learning environment

Project area 5 in the *Transformation of Teaching and Learning Project* focuses on the cross-cutting issues and enablers that support innovation in teaching and learning. The learning environment forms part of these cross-cutting issues. Taking the work in the *Transformation of Teaching and Learning Project* into account, the following are considered to be key issues in enhancing the learning environment:

- Learning Spaces: Learning spaces include official teaching venues, such as lecture halls, seminar rooms, laboratories, and dedicated study centres, as well as a variety of other physical spaces such as residences, libraries, cafeterias, coffee shops and open areas that may be designed or reconceptualised in creative ways to support student learning. The key point is that the campus as a whole should be regarded as an environment that supports student learning.
- Integrated planning to support the learning environment and academic programme planning: It is imperative to ensure integrated planning by similar support services across campuses as well as support services across functional areas in order to create an equitable environment that is conducive for learning, and also supports academic programme planning. This has various implications:
  - The development of the institutional budget, and the identification of budget priorities must also take into account planning with respect to key elements of the learning environment, such as the library, information services, and information technology services;
  - Infrastructural planning must be coordinated with work on the development of innovative approaches to teaching and learning. This may imply that instead of building new infrastructure, existing infrastructure is redesigned, with a view to optimising its use. It also implies that infrastructural planning must be approached as a shared responsibility in which academic managers play a key role;
  - There should be systematic processes that require academic staff to consult with support services in the planning for new academic programmes or changes to existing programmes.

## 4.2 Changes made during phase 1 of the QEP

This section discusses changes at the institutional level that (a) have been made, (b) are in progress, or (c) are in the planning stages that relate to enhancing the learning environment.

- Changes that have been made: Establishment of an institutional library forum; Movement of the e-mail system of all enrolled university students to the cloud (this matter is merely for noting and is not discussed in the report).
- Changes in progress: Investigation into the library budget model; Development of electronic study guides; Research focus area for technology-enhanced learning.
- Changes in planning stages: A pilot project has been launched to build loading stations (also part of a green initiative), to enable students to charge their mobile and other electronic devices. A report after the first pilot project is due at the end of 2015. Planning is also underway to develop a central learning object repository to support the development of electronic guides. The changes that are in the planning stages are noted here, and not elaborated on in the rest of this section.

### 4.2.1 Establishment of institutional library forum

The institutional Library Forum was established in April 2014, after the realisation that there was a need to coordinate and align the library services of the three campus libraries at Mafikeng, Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle, and to ensure that there is effective representation of the libraries at institutional and national library forums. The Forum is chaired by the DVC: Teaching-Learning and the Forum members comprise the Chairperson, the DVC: Research, Innovation and Technology, the Vice Rectors: Research and Innovation from the three campuses, who are also the line managers of the respective campus libraries' directors (heads), and the heads of the campus libraries. One of the three directors (heads) is appointed on a two year rotational basis as an institutional library head to coordinate the activities of the Forum and represent the University at all institutional committees (Institutional Committee for Teaching and Learning; Institutional Committee for Research and Innovation; Senate) as well as at national and or international library forums. In

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[6] Learning environment refers to the diverse physical locations, contexts, and cultures in which students learn. Since students may learn in a wide variety of settings, such as outside-of-lecture locations and outdoor environments, the term is often used as a more accurate or preferred alternative to *classroom*, which has more limited and traditional connotations, e.g. a room with rows of desks and a chalkboard, for example.

this way it is ensured that the three libraries "speak with one voice". Whereas in the past it may have been difficult for the campus libraries to come together, the formation of the Forum has removed most potential barriers to effective collaboration. Currently, the Library Forum meets twice annually, or once every semester, in order to deliberate issues of mutual interest and to identify any areas of risk that need to be addressed collectively as part of risk assurance.

### 4.2.2    Library budget model

The Senate meeting of 27 August 2014 recommended that an urgent investigation be launched into the budget model for the respective campus library budgets with specific focus on the practices associated with the budgeting for the acquisition of information resources. In addition to the general concern that the budget model is inadequate to support the acquisition of printed (hard-copy) and electronic resources, a specific concern was raised that the NWU needed to seriously consider the manner in which support and information was provided to open distance learning students. The investigation into the adequacy of the budget model therefore should also address the requisite financial resources to ensure that optimal information literacy support and access to information sources is provided to open distance learning students. This matter is particularly important as the University starts to broaden its open distance learning enrolments from the field of teacher education to other fields of study.

The report on the adequacy of the library budget that was submitted to the Senate meeting of 27 May 2015 included a comparison between NWU and ten other South African universities of the expenditure on library materials per student (headcount enrolments) for 2013/4, concluding that NWU lags significantly behind institutions such as UJ, UKZN, UFS and WITS, and that this conclusion holds even if only contact students are taken into account. While these findings are important, the challenge is to determine an adequate per capita expenditure for NWU that takes the nature of the University's involvement in ODL into account – a matter that is dependent on the development of an institutional strategy in terms of the scope of the major fields of study and programmes that NWU will target for ODL provision (this matter is a priority for clarification early in 2016). The report also indicated that the percentage of the total institutional budget that is allocated to the total library funding lags behind international benchmarks, but that CHELSA is only in the early stages of developing benchmarks for the South African higher education sector. The Library Forum meeting of November 2015 referred the matter of the library budget model to the Institutional Budget Committee, requesting that this committee should determine a budget guideline for the proportional allocation of the institutional budget to library services - using the May 2015 Senate report, as well as further work on adequate spending per headcount student to support NWU's planned enrolment growth in major fields of study and modes of delivery, as points of departure. During the first part of 2016, the Library Forum will take this matter further with the Institutional Budget Committee.

### 4.2.3    Development of electronic study guides

The NWU is currently in a transitional phase with regard to the format of study guides, from a predominantly paper-based format to an electronic format (e-guides). The development of e-guides forms an integral part of the transformation of the teaching and learning environment. Special consideration is being paid to the extent to which these guides should be interactive in order to contribute to the development of innovative teaching and learning designs that promote active student learning, and in which capabilities for e-facilitation and e-assessment allow academic staff to develop the teaching and learning strategies that are most appropriate to the nature of the programme, its delivery mode and its student profile.

The first phase of the transitional process concerns the development of IT and teaching and learning standards or criteria for the e-guides. Over the last number of years research has been conducted by means of various pilot projects to determine the best electronic substitute(s) for paper-based study guides. Some progress has been made and currently there are two solutions that have been tested through various pilot projects - each with its own pros and cons, and not viewed as exclusive alternatives. Experimental work with a third solution is in an initial phase.

- Solution one is the development of a so-called "SMARTguide" – using the "Articulate Storyline" software solution, which has been piloted at the Vaal Triangle Campus since 2013. Building on the experience gained at the Vaal Triangle campus, the faculties and schools for educational sciences decided in 2014 that the BEd Foundation Phase qualification/programme that is to be offered by means of the distance delivery mode from 2016, will be rolled out with "SMART guides" as a pilot project;
- Solution two is the development of an e-guide within the (current) SAKAI "lesson" environment of eFundi (NWU's learning management system), which has been piloted at the Potchefstroom Campus since 2014. This technology solution will be used to roll out the B.Ed Intermediate Phase qualification/ programme which will be offered through the distance delivery mode from 2017;
- Solution three relates to the pilot project that is in its start-up phase at the Mafikeng Campus (in the Faculty of Commerce and Administration), where "Znanja" is being tested as a software solution for the conversion of paper-based to interactive e-guides.

As part of its initiative for the transition to e-guides, it also should be noted that the Vaal Triangle Campus launched a three year pilot project spanning from 2014 to 2016 where 300 tablets were made available to students. Students in the second year Foundation Phase Education Programme (B.Ed.), undergraduate Law programmes (e.g. B.Com. Law), the first year B.Com. Chartered Accounting programme, and the extended B.Com. Chartered Accounting programme, all received the majority of their study guides as SMART-guides on the available tablets. The aim of the project is to learn from the students' experiences about the use of tablets in enabling and supporting an interactive learning experience during on-campus contact sessions as well as off-campus.

In order to address challenges related to the capabilities of current technology to adequately support e-learning and promote the transformation of study guides to e-guides, an e-guide task team has been formed, chaired by the Chief Director of Information Technology, to investigate alternative platforms and or technologies which could be utilised for the development of e-guides. The e-guide task team reported back during 2015 and advised as follows:

- Due to various needs more than one solution (platform) must be available in order to provide for the different needs of different (academic) programmes;
- Both SMARTguides and Lessons (in eFundi) are possible solutions that could be considered (the Znanja solution will also be evaluated by the task team);
- In support of ease of access, modules within one (academic) programme must make use of the same solution (platform);
- A fixed set of IT and Teaching Learning standards and criteria need to be followed and complied with - these were identified and documented by two separate working teams, who then collated and integrated the two sets of standards/ criteria for IT and Teaching and Learning into one comprehensive set of standards/ criteria which are incorporated into the draft *Framework for E-Guides*, and will be used to identify future alternative software solutions in the optimisation of e-guides.

While the "SMART guide" initiative is illustrative of the approach that has been followed at a specific campus, and now will be piloted in the B.Ed Foundation Phase qualification, it is based on design principles that will inform the development of all e-guides at NWU:

- S = Student driven and self-directed learning;
- M = Learning management as the capacity of all learners to achieve learning outcomes, based on the notion of design with intent;
- A = Assessment to measure a learner's knowledge through integrated assessment, pre-assessment, performance testing, proficiency and certification tools; and Access to knowledge;
- R = a Responsive environment to online comments and question from learners, and provision for Remediation and easy Revision of learning content;
- T= emphasises Tracking as a tool for learning analytics. (Learning analytics is the measurement, collection, analysis of and reporting on data about how learners learn. It is a valuable tool in the design, facilitation and delivery of meaningful e-learning events).

In the second phase of the transitional process, which will draw on and run concurrently with the further process for the development of IT and Teaching-Learning standards/ criteria, a process has been initiated to develop a *Framework for E-Guides.* Its purpose is to provide a coordinated institutional framework for the development of e-guides for implementation across all campuses and in all modes of delivery. It should take into account the fact that a change in the format of study guides will require careful planning, including a substantial financial investment, and accommodation of the fact that students may still have a need for paper copies. As an interim measure for containing the costs incurred in the printing of all study guides, all campuses have agreed that during 2016 hard copy guides will be available only for undergraduate modules, while readers that accompany the undergraduate guides, as well as all postgraduate guides, will be available only in PDF format[7] on *eFundi* (paper behind glass). This is done in view of a five year plan to transform all paper-based study guides into interactive electronic study guides on the respective platforms. The development of the study guide framework will take the research, experience and work done by several academics over the last number of years in this regard into account.

The first version of the draft *Framework for E-Guides* was presented to the meeting of the Teaching and Learning Forum in November 2015. It contains a set of eleven guiding principles for e-guide development, as well as guidance on the selection of design/ authoring tools and platforms based on the TOGAF[8] standard – which is a best practice architecture framework for technology solutions. The further development and formal adoption of the *Framework for E- Guides* is a priority area for the TransfTL project in 2016, as this framework provides the basis for the development of an effective electronic learning environment, including moves to online learning in all modes of delivery.

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[7] (*Portable Document Format* (*PDF*) is an open standard for electronic document exchange)

[8] The Open Group Architecture Framework

In order to support the e-guide initiative, it should be noted that planning for the development of a new Study Material Production (SMP) system has started. After a few workshops the specifications are being drafted at the moment for development to start as soon as possible. The blended learning strategy and the move away from paper-based study guides has had a huge influence on the process followed when developing study material – and the new SMP system will have to be able to support the production processes for the old (paper-based) and the new (electronic) study guides.

### 4.2.4 Research focus area on technology-enhanced learning

A proposal was submitted to the [Institutional] Research Support Commission, which is a sub-committee of the Institutional Committee for Research and Innovation (ICRI), a sub-committee of Senate, for the consideration and possible approval of a new Research Focus Area with the title, Technology-Enhanced Learning for Innovative Education and Training, South Africa (TELIT-SA). Within the context of these three "themes" [(i) Technology-enhanced learning; (ii) Innovative education; and (iii) training] it aims to provide research support to all academics interested in technology-enhanced learning and training in general. The proposal has been finalised and has been submitted for external review. The outcome of the review will be tabled at the first meeting of Senate in 2016. An interim arrangement was however made to ensure that the research conducted within these "themes" is accommodated immediately as part of an existing and operational campus-supported research focus area (RFA).

## 4.3 Exemplars to illustrate specific aspects of the change(s) that are regarded as successful[9]

### 4.3.1 Contribution of the Library Forum to integrated library planning

As indicated in section 4.2.1, in order to ensure coordinated planning for library services, the appointed institutional library head works closely with the other two campus library heads in responding to issues of mutual interest at the institutional level and beyond. The library heads meet as and when necessary and take mutual matters that require further attention to the Library Forum. In addition, they have formed task groups comprising members from all the three campus libraries to work on issues such as policy alignment and resource development. The three libraries held a strategic planning Workshop on 5 to 6 October 2015, with the aim of initiating strategic conversations regarding:

- General environment and trends impacting on academic libraries;
- The purpose of the NWU libraries;
- The aspired culture;
- The needs, support and transformation required in order to ensure effective, well-coordinated library and information services.

At the end of the two day workshop, the libraries were able to come up with common goals which will further help in terms of integrated planning, service provision and reporting. This strategic planning workshop was not an isolated event. It was embedded in the pro-active initiative of the libraries to work with other support and academic divisions such as IT Services, the Research Office, and the Academic Development Units in order to support the academic project by means of the integrated planning and implementation of library and information services. Joint workshops and meetings have been conducted on areas such as e-research, information literacy training, and how best IT could support the library services. For example, the library services led the design of a draft NWU policy on open access, which will be further scrutinized and developed by campus and institutional research entities.

The embedded approach by the Library Services in terms of being involved in curriculum design and delivery of subject-specific information literacy training interventions underlines its role and commitment to NWU regarding student success. With regards to new academic programmes, faculty librarians mostly are made aware of the needs in terms of library resources during faculty board meetings and report to the library heads who also receive such information during campus senate meetings. However, Library Heads are not on any sign off lists of new programmes, which makes planning for resources very difficult. The approval flow of the recently implemented institutional system for programme approval should be refined in order to address this problem.

The Library Forum serves as a point of convergence for the collaborative work of the campus libraries, where matters relating to strategic planning, policy alignment, information collection and development, quality assurance, human resources and budgeting are discussed and agreement is reached on how key issues should be taken forward at an institutional level. The spirit of the Forum is that reports should reflect fairly on what is transpiring on all the three campuses. The forum chair then reports to Institutional Management and

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[9] Provision is made for the inclusion of evidence where claims of success are made. Where an activity is in the planning stages, it was indicated what served as evidence.

other committees where library matters are tabled. The appointed rotational institutional library head also coordinates matters of mutual interest and reports to the DVC: TL as well as submits reports to committees such as the Institutional Senate, and the Institutional Committee on Teaching and Learning, using a uniform library reporting template. The Coordinator also gives feedback to the other two campuses regarding matters emanating from institutional committees.

In sum, the Library Forum is regarded as an example of a successful change that has made a significant contribution to the integration of NWU library services over a relatively short space of time. The work undertaken under the auspices of this Forum provides a solid basis for the decisions that will be made on the structuring of the library services within the new University structure.

### 4.3.2    ICT infrastructure

Good progress has been made with the development of various aspects of the ICT infrastructure to support teaching and learning, as indicated by the following points:

- **Upgrading of the learning management system**: eFundi, the NWU open source (SAKAI) learning management system been upgraded to Sakai 10.1. It went into production in December 2014. The most used new functionalities are:
  - Drag and drop for uploading files to Resources;
  - Extensions to the Lesson tool - used to build interactive course guidelines (guides);
  - Group and peer evaluation capabilities for the Assignment tool;
  - A sign-up tool;
  - Improved integration possibilities (LTI 2).

  As part of the development of ICT capabilities to support an electronic learning environment, NWU also developed an export system for the Lesson tool, which allows material developed in Lessons to be exported to a Word format as well as a pub 3 format (standard for publishing electronic books). A fundi App has also been developed (called fundi MOVE) for the synchronization of resources to devices using various operating systems (iOS, Android, Windows), and it will be piloted in the 2nd semester of 2015. Other tools will follow.

- **Lecture capturing**: The pilot phase of this project has been completed. During this phase, lecture capture equipment (Opencast) has been installed in lecture venues on all three campuses, so that lecturers may record live lecture sessions which are then made available to students on the LMS for playback. The system is now fully functional, and the whole process is automated. The cost is in the region of R60 000 per lecture venue. The fact there so few lecture venues are equipped, is still a hindrance. Two staff members became in involved in SoTL (Scholarship of Teaching and Learning) projects on lecture capturing and presented their research at international conferences during October and November 2015.

- **Live streaming**: Live streaming of lectures was implemented in 2014 at the Vaal Triangle Campus for subjects in Law and Politics. Live streaming of lectures takes place during contact sessions where students who are not physically in the venue, can access the live streaming wherever they are as long as they have internet access. A meeting room is created on Adobe Connect and the link posted on eFundi for students to use. The added benefit is that students therefore need not attend alternative classes or travel great distances to attend lectures. They can simply go online and virtually attend the lecture in real-time. As live streaming moves to scale, attention will be paid to the most appropriate technology platform to support its use.

- **Wi-Fi expansion**: Wi-Fi has been installed at 22 of the 68 open and distance learning centres, while 20 more will be equipped with Wi-Fi by the end of 2015 and the rest in 2016. Funding received from the DHET along with internally sourced funding on a matching basis from all three campuses will enable the expansion of Wi-Fi on campuses. This means that all academic buildings on all three campuses will have Wi-Fi coverage by December 2015. As part of the challenge of expanding capability in the residences (see Section 4.6.3) hotspots will also be installed in the residences of the Vaal Triangle and Mafikeng campuses as part of the project, though the residences at the Potchefstroom campus are not included at this point.

- **Technology to support virtual meetings and classes:** Good progress has been made with the rollout of technology to support virtual meetings and classes. Venues on each campus have been equipped with hardware and software using Adobe Connect, and there is an increase in the usage of this technology to support virtual meetings, making it possible for academic and support staff to have more regular inter-campus meetings. IT departmental meetings across campuses are a good example of the usage of this technology. User training and IT support remains the biggest challenge, while it also remains a challenge to equip larger venues for use to support virtual teaching and learning activities as well as larger meetings.

- **Bridgit software (Smartboards)**: As reported in the Institutional Submission (Section B.3.2(a)), Smartboard technology is used to broadcast lectures to open distance learning students in locations

across South Africa. In order to enhance the support provided to ODL students, the library at the Potchefstroom Campus has taken the strategic decision that interactive white boards will now be available in the library in order to offer training sessions to these students. Through their participation in the interactive whiteboard sessions to the respective open and distance learning centres, members of the library staff intends to empowering ODL students with information literacy skills, providing guidance on locating, using and citing of information, as well as the use of various other e-services..

An annual meeting of IT management (including campus IT managers) and academic support departments at the Institutional Office and the campuses is held to discuss IT priorities and issues relating to the development and implementation of technology to support teaching and learning. Training staff and students in the use of the enhanced ICT functionalities is still a challenge.

### 4.3.3    Improvement of printing services.

The PaperCut printer management software has been implemented in all student computer laboratories. The previous system for managing student printing, PCounter, has become outdated and very unstable. IT decided to replace it with PaperCut and the student environment on the Vaal Triangle Campus served as the production pilot. In February 2015 all the student printers (in fact multifunctional devices, also capable of photocopying) were equipped with the necessary hardware and in March 2015 the system went live. The installation also included a money box (similar to those in parking arcades) where students can deposit money on their printing accounts. This has improved the financial management and system administration as credits are immediately available on the students' accounts after depositing money. In the beginning there were some growing pains as students were not used to swiping their cards to release print jobs. They very quickly adapted and started using the different devices to do their own photocopying instead of queuing at the copy shop.

A further advantage of the system is that it provides for mobile and BYOD[10] printing which will support the university's blended learning strategy. The "follow-me" printing feature allows a user (student) to activate a print job from any computer on the network and then release it at the printer device of choice. Students are thus able to release their printing or make photocopies on any of the devices that they have access to. This saves paper as unreleased print jobs are automatically discarded after two days. Furthermore the problem of one student walking away with another one's printing is minimised as the student's card or network user-id and password is needed to release print jobs. This system has now been implemented on all three campuses, and will be extended to the staff environment in future.

### 4.3.4    Restructuring of IT management and project meetings

In order to improve the coordination of IT planning and services, the IT management and project meetings were restructured to improve communication between the IT departments, include campus participation in institutional IT decision-making processes and unify the IT teams with a common vision and goals. The restructuring included:

- The consolidation of the campus and IT Central management meetings into a single IT management meeting, which includes the IT Central and Campus IT management. The meeting is held monthly and focuses primarily on strategic IT matters;
- The introduction of NWU IT departmental virtual meetings that are held on a quarterly basis, and include all NWU IT staff across campuses;
- Extending the membership of the weekly project meeting to the Campus IT Managers.

## 4.4    Exemplars of changes that have not been successful

### 4.4.1    A supportive learning environment for students and staff with disabilities

Despite the promising practices relating to the academic support of students with disabilities as discussed in Section 3.5, NWU needs to develop a more integrated strategy to support students – and staff - with disabilities. As this need relates primarily to the learning environment, it is discussed here rather than under focus area 2. Despite the changes that have been made in redefining the role of the disability units at the various campuses so that they provide an all-inclusive service to students and staff (see also section 3.5 of this report), various challenges remain. The first challenge is addressing the expressed need of students with disabilities to be treated equally and to have access to all services. Significant steps have been taken to make appropriate facilities available to the students. At the Potchefstroom Campus, a space for visually impaired students was initially created in the library. It transpired that students felt excluded and would rather be situated in an open space, amongst other students. The space was subsequently changed and facilities for visually impaired students are now situated in the open study area, accessible to all students. At the

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[10] Bring Your Own Device

Mafikeng Campus, access to computers with specialized software and printing facilities is located in the disability unit, while a dedicated computer with specialized software is available in the library. As these services are limited to business hours only, their availability is limited. These examples illustrate that the NWU is taking steps to provide adequate special supportive facilities to students with disabilities, but also that there needs to be ongoing consultation with such students on the adequacy of the supportive facilities available to them.

The second challenge relates to infrastructure, as a lot of the older buildings and access control units do not cater for wheelchair entry, while some venues are equipped with furniture and infrastructure that does not accommodate disabled students and staff. As an example, at the Mafikeng Campus disabled students such as wheelchair bound students currently cannot access general computer laboratories due to limitations such as access control units which do not provide for wheelchair entry; while the IT student service desk is located on the first floor with no ramp, making it inaccessible to some students with disabilities. At the Vaal Triangle Campus, a qualitative phenomenological research project was conducted on the needs of students with physical disabilities in terms of the learning environment. They mentioned the following barriers: problems with accessibility to buildings; Stairways need railings for support (physical/temporary disabilities); Not enough marked parking spaces for students with physical/temporary disabilities. The limitations of current infrastructure are exacerbated by a lack of integrated planning. As far as the residences are concerned, the campuses follow different approaches. At the Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campuses, the approach is to identify a certain residence and utilize the available disability funding to equip the residence as best as possible for disabled students, rather than trying to make smaller changes at every residence with a limited budget. At the Mafikeng Campus, all the residences have blocks that are equipped to support students with disabilities.

Thirdly, while the disability units at the Potchefstroom and Vaal Triangle Campuses are responsible for conducting the accessibility audits for infrastructure, they are not included in discussions on infrastructure planning, including the renovations of buildings, resulting in buildings and ramps being erected which are not according to the specifications of the Dept. of Labour. The situation at the Mafikeng Campus is different, as the disability unit is involved in discussions relating to infrastructure planning.

In the fourth place, funding and support of disability units remains a challenge. While a central budget is available for staff and students with disabilities, this fund is primarily aimed at financial support for the purchase of hearing aids, software and supporting hardware. It is not sufficient for addressing bigger infrastructure requests. The limited funding leads to a concern about the sustainability of the disability units because of the high cost related to running them. This concern needs to be translated into innovative planning in which best practices are shared, affordable practices for creating a more friendly learning environment are explored (e.g. Signage is available in Braille), and, as already stated in section 3.5, strategic decisions are made about the types of disability support that the University is able to provide. Furthermore, facilities and infrastructure planning to support staff and students with disabilities should not be related primarily to special funding allocated to a central budget for disabilities, but should form part of integrated infrastructural planning.

In order to create a more responsive learning environment for staff and students with disabilities, it is recommended that the following factors should be considered:

- The integration of the existing campus-based services into an institutional service, with an appropriate campus presence, in order to promote planning and coordination across campuses. This move can form part of the University's restructuring process and should build on the current process in which the campus disability units are aligning best practice and support across campuses, as discussed in section 3.5. There are diverse opinions as to whether the disability service should function an integrated part of student counselling and development services or as a separate unit, but whatever decision is made on its structural location it must form part of a multi-disciplinary approach to support students and staff with disabilities.
- The University should decide on which types of disability support it will provide on each campus, taking into account their different student profiles, and should ensure that such support is properly resourced in terms of budgets and human resources (academic and support staff). This includes support so that students with various types of disabilities may have access to assistive technologies and devices to support their learning. More clarity could be provided on the NWU webpage with a link on each campus site to inform parents and prospective students as to the type of support that is available on each campus for which types of disabilities.
- Infrastructural planning should build on the information provided by accessibility audits, which must include consultation with persons with disabilities, in order to create a barrier-free campus for disabled students by means of the incremental modification of existing physical infrastructure. Disability audits and the type of phenomenological research project conducted at the Vaal Triangle Campus should be used to determine a priority list of projects for the design or re-design of infrastructure and learning spaces to support persons with disabilities.

- A consistent institutional approach should be developed towards the design of student residences to support students with disabilities. Taking into account the statements made in this discussion about providing for students with disabilities in an inclusive manner, it is important to consider whether a specific residence should be earmarked or whether more residences should be equipped to accommodate students with disabilities. In reaching a decision on this matter, research should be conducted amongst staff and students – and here it is important to consult widely, and not only with those who have special needs.
- Financial Aid offices should be more proactive in collaborating with disability units in order to provide students with disabilities with information on bursaries and other forms of financial assistance available to them.

## 4.5  Promising practices related to the enhancing the learning environment

### 4.5.1  Technology-enhanced assessment

As a result of limited internet access and computer literacy on the part of many of the students studying through the Unit for Open and Distance learning (UODL), a paper-based correspondence model has been in use. As more ODL students gain techno-competency and internet access, the number of assignments being submitted electronically has increased. Larger numbers of assignments presently need to be printed in order to be included in the paper-based marking process. The high strategic priority for NWU to increase distance learning provision and the resultant increase in ODL offerings by faculties through the UODL will place even higher demands on capacities to mark thousands of assignments and examination papers.

Electronic marking holds a higher potential for students to receive prompt feedback on assignments and more relevant comments from lecturers, especially if the process of tediously compiling standard comments and recommendations which need to be repeated for consecutive assignments could be simplified. If the marking process could be automated to a greater extent, the capacity for scale could be enlarged while more focus could be provided on formative components of assessment to the benefit of students.

Greater automation of the assessment process must be based on sound pedagogical principles. The assessment strategy in terms of the balance between multiple choice questions and essay-style questions must be determined by educational assessment principles (demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes through reliable, valid and authentic assessment tasks), within specific subject areas, and qualification and programme types. First-year students may in certain cases be assessed using higher percentages of multiple choice questions. Generally rote-learning assessment could be assessed to a greater extent through multiple choice questions. Subject areas where writing skills, critical reasoning and analytical skills, design competencies, mathematical or other scientific manipulations feature more prominently in learning outcomes are less suitable to be assessed through automated multiple choice questionnaires.

In addition to assessment principles, there are various considerations in terms of the design of a technology-enhanced assessment system. A first question relates to whether the system should be developed internally or acquired from a commercial vendor. Here the student profile and nature of the programme are important. Thus, while software is being developed internationally to objectively assess English writing skills through automated processes, such solutions require electronic format submission and have limited use in the local context. In some subject areas, computer generated assignments could be required, such as in computer programming. However, there are many subject areas where paper-based assignments and examination papers are still common. To benefit from electronic marking processes, papers may be scanned into PDF format and marked using on-screen marking tools, such as the UNISA Onscreen Marking system. NWU has an established process in place for marking multiple choice questions on specially printed paper sheets using Fujitsu scanners and Kofax software. This is managed by the IT department. The question is whether the scale of the requirements for technology-enhanced assessment can be addressed more effectively through internally developed solutions to electronic marking, or ready-made or tailor-made solutions acquired by commercial service providers. The choice between these approaches invariably boils down to the classic distinctions between the cost of acquisition and the cost in terms of development; the need to develop, maintain and update internally, versus vendor-provided maintenance, development and improvement.

Secondly, it is important to consider an effective process for capturing assessment results where assignments and examination papers contain some questions which may be automatically marked through an electronic marking process and other sections which need paper-based marking or electronic on-screen marking. It could be counter-productive if the automated marking scores need to be synchronised manually by the examiner into the final score of an assignment or examination script. This process could be so tedious that the benefit of automated marking is negated. If fewer markers are to be used, the automated process needs to be separated from the manual process as far as possible using a well-designed on-screen assessment process. The automated results should already be captured into the system when the person marking the rest of the script enters the results for that part. Borderline-cases should be obvious to the

person marking to consider actions while entering the rest of the marks for an assignment or examination script.

Thirdly, an important aspect of electronic marking required by the UODL would be electronic work flow management which enables tracking of assignments and examination papers from submission through capturing to assessment, moderation and publication to ensure a quality verification audit trail. This is probably the most daunting aspect of electronic marking to be implemented. Total integration with existing and future administrative and quality assurance systems would be crucial. Scalability and large data handling with reliability (which includes an appropriate measure of redundancy) to assure quality and security will have to be addressed if electronic marking is to be considered.

Doubtless, many other aspects could be added and a complete picture of aspects to be addressed in implementing electronic marking will only emerge through cooperation between all stakeholders.

During 2015, a UODL pilot project was subsequently launched, focusing on technology assisted marking, using OMR (Optical Mark Recognition) assessment software supplied by the commercial vendor CSX. The project consisted of two phases:

- In phase one, ODL lecturers in 75 modules volunteered to have multiple questions in their June 2015 examination papers marked using optical mark recognition (OMR). This involved approximately 50 000 examination scripts only.
- In phase two, certain lecturers for ODL students volunteered to set examination scripts containing multiple choice question responses as well as hand-written answers to be optically scanned and marked on-screen during the November 2015 examination. In these examination scripts, multiple choice responses may be automatically marked and written responses will be assigned to markers, to grade on-screen.

As a pre-test in preparation for phase two, one module included elements of phase two during the June 2015 examination as well, so that experience gained during the electronic marking of this module could assist in the planning of phase two for November 2015.

Based on the pilot project, indications are that technology-enhanced assessment can be successfully implemented within the ODL environment. Indications from the phase one process are that large quantities of multiple choice exam pages can be successfully scanned with the equipment and software used, or even better equipment and software if a large-scale implementation would follow in the future. It is assumed that the programming of assessment memoranda in the future can be done more efficiently if CSX and academics work together to address these needs through newly developed software.

The lecturers who participated in this study were positive about the experience, the ease with which the process worked and the benefits it held for markers and for the university. The benefits include the following:

- The pool of potential expert assessors can be extended worldwide;
- Answer sheets do not have to be carted around to and from markers' homes or offices;
- Marks are automatically calculated and it is not possible to get more marks per question as allocated on the memorandum;
- During the marking of assignments, appropriate feedback can be effectively given to students about each answer. Constructive comments can easily be made available as consolidated guidelines on the learning management systems or as subject-resources;
- Continuous monitoring of progress is possible and additional markers may be appointed. If a specific marker is not performing, the work can be redistributed to another person with the touch of a key.

The pilot study indicates that revised guidelines are required for the preparation of multiple-choice papers by examiners and moderators in order to ensure effective programming of files used for scanning and marking these papers. Appropriate feedback must be provided to Academic Support Services regarding training of staff on the drafting of multiple choice and other questions used during technology-enhanced assessment.

### 4.5.2  Capacity development for technology-enabled teaching and learning

Support to academic staff to develop their competence in the use of technology to enhance teaching and learning remains a challenge. Although there are so many technology options available, technology is only a resource and teaching methodologies should focus on pedagogy. While the enhancement of academics as teachers resides under focus area one, there are a number of promising developments in the learning environment which should help staff to increase their ability to use technology effectively.

- **Technology commons**: A new initiative that is in the process of being implemented on the Potchefstroom campus is the establishment of a Technology commons. Technology acquired for the commons will be used to assist lecturers to experiment with new, emerging technologies, so that they can discern how these types of technologies can be used for educational purposes in a classroom of the future. The commons will also be used to train lecturers in the use of certain technologies that form part

of the toolbox of technologies made available by the NWU to lecturers and students. Due to a lack of infrastructure (in the form of a physical area where the commons can be deployed) the development of the commons was delayed for more than a year. However, a space was identified and the commons will soon be inaugurated.

- **Innovators@Work**: The purpose of the Innovators@Work initiative is to provide lecturers with an opportunity to investigate and research the use of technology in their own teaching-learning praxis in a scientific manner in order to improve the integration of technology in teaching and learning, expand research on technology integration and deliver research outputs. The initiative takes place in two phases; the first is the innovation, development and experimentation and the second phase is the introduction of the research outputs. Each participant in the initiative is provided with funds to run the research project. Depending on the budget some of the participants are then sponsored to attend an international conference on teaching and learning technologies. The initiative was introduced late in 2014 and there are currently 9 projects underway (Five started in 2014 and four started 2015).
- **Support for lecturers and students in the use of tablets**: The Academic Development and Support Unit (ADS) at the Vaal Triangle Campus currently has 58 tablets which are used for training in the "Tablets in the class initiative". Lecturers book these tablets for use during their class periods. The ADS assists lecturers in finding specific applications and prepares the tablets prior to classes if necessary. Tablets are used for in-class assessment purposes, group activities, web searches, filming of short videos, work with applications and collaborative activities. This initiative has been very successful and a booking system has been created for this purpose. Lecturers who participated in the initial SMART guide development project (see section 4.2.3) received tablets as part of the project and use these for lecturing purposes.
- **Movement to online training**: Lynda.com has been available to NWU staff since March 2015 as a training platform. We have 5000 licenses, and to date 459 users have already used the system, with a total of 430 hours spent in the system. The Top 5 courses are Excel 2013, Shooting with the Nikon, Photoshop, Javascript and CSS Core concepts. Microsoft Academy has also been available since March 2015. The NWU has 3 licenses (one per campus for unlimited users), and there are currently approximately 80 active users registered for training in this environment.

## 4.6 Main challenges the university still faces in relation to enhancing the learning environment

### 4.6.1 Resources to support students and lecturers in the navigation of the learning management system

Although all campuses render support to students to navigate the learning management system, capacity is grossly stretched. As an example, the eFundi Helpline at the Potchefstroom Campus was established to support lecturers and students, but has over the past year observed a consistent growth in the training and support of contact and ODL lecturers and students. The growth in short learning programmes with an online presence is expected to introduce yet another level of capacity requirements for the provision of support to enrolled participants and lecturers alike.

### 4.6.2 Translation of infrastructure plans into blended learning spaces

There is a lack of consultation and collaboration across campuses and between various academic and support units with respect to the development of learning spaces that will support innovative approaches to teaching and learning that make optimal use of teaching and learning technology. This adversely impacts on the alignment of programmes, the creation of a consistently high quality learning experience, and the demand on IT resources and services. In order to address this challenge, a number of factors are being considered at the moment, such as:

- Infrastructural planning relating to teaching and learning spaces should be coordinated institutionally, in order to facilitate cross-campus planning that works from a set of approved design standards for teaching and learning spaces;
- Infrastructural planning needs to develop a decision-making framework that informs decisions on whether new buildings should be erected or existing buildings and teaching and learning spaces should be redesigned so that they are more effective (for instance by being multifunctional);
- It is critical to ensure that there is clarity about the ownership of projects for the design and redesign of teaching and learning spaces, and that all relevant stakeholders are given appropriate opportunity to participate and contribute;
- There should be effective communication with staff and students about projects for the design and redesign of teaching and learning spaces. The report has already referred to the need to ensure that there is effective communication between the disability units and the infrastructure office (section 4.4.1). Similarly, the lack of communication between the infrastructure office and academic development and support services needs to be addressed.

An example of a promising development with respect to the design of blended learning spaces is that the Mafikeng Campus is in the process of converting recreation rooms in residences into multi-purpose venues to be used during weekdays for teaching, and for rest of the time as a recreation venue. This initiative aims to address the shortage of teaching venues, and deserves further consideration in institutional infrastructural planning relating to teaching and learning spaces.

### 4.6.3    Wi-Fi in the Residences

Although all of the rooms in campus residences have internet access, they are still not equipped with Wi-FI access. This is largely due to budget constraints, which means that each campus has to prioritise areas in which Wi-Fi is provided.

Some centralised computer rooms on all the campuses have Wi-Fi accessibility. On the Mafikeng campus, Wi-Fi has been installed in the recreation rooms of the residences. At the Vaal Triangle Campus a 24 hour study room equipped with computers and Wi-Fi is available. Wi-Fi has been installed in the recreation room of some residences at the Vaal Triangle campus. Solutions such as Wi-Fi hot-spots are being investigated.

### 4.6.4    Learning analytics

The discussion of focus area 2 has referred to the need to develop learning analytics capability (Sections 3.2.2 and 3.5.1). This project is still in an infancy stage and much planning still needs to be conducted in order to develop the capacity to support learning analytics through the functionality of the learning management system and IT capabilities. In addition much high level managerial thought needs to be invested into the allocation of resources as this may ultimately impact on the successful optimisation of learning analytics.

# 5 FOCUS AREA 4: Enhancing Course and Programme Enrolment Management

(*Includes: (i) Enrolment planning and monitoring; (ii) MIS; (iii) Performance monitoring/throughput; (iv) At-risk students, (v) At-risk modules; (vi) Gateway courses; (vii) Admissions, readmissions and exclusions; (viii) Selection and placement*).

## 5.1 Introduction

It is accepted that all four QEP focus areas are interrelated. It is evident that decisions, practices and trends within the other focus areas at the NWU have a bearing on enrolment management and vice versa. Instruments such as the NWU Enrolment Plan, the Admission Policy and accompanying practices, the University PQM and the process according to which academic programmes are approved guide the planning and implementation of enrolment management at the NWU. The data warehouse maintained by MIS continues to provide an overview of the performance of students, and the support rendered by the respective academic support services departments enables appropriate interventions to ensure student success.

As already mentioned in the discussion of focus areas 2 and 3, in the use of data and evidence the NWU mainly still departs from a retrospective-analysis approach and has not started with predictive learning analytics as a means to inform academic-support interventions.

The following topics will be dealt with in the report:

- *Key issues* in relation to the enhancement of course and programme enrolment management
- The *changes* made during phase 1 of the QEP, or those planned in relation to enrolment management
- *Exemplars of successful interventions* in relation to enrolment management, as well as references to instances of *interventions that did not render the success* envisaged with these.
- References to *promising practices* at the NWU with respect to the enhancement of enrolment management.
- *Main challenges* still faced by the university with respect to the enhancement of enrolment management.

## 5.2 Key Issues in enhancing course and programme enrolment management

Project focus 1 in the *Transformation of Teaching and Learning Project* focuses on the government and management of teaching and learning, and project focus 2 on innovative qualification and programme development, management and review. As the work on these project focus areas is still at an early stage, project findings that can contribute to the discussion of QEP focus area 4 are not yet available. The task team responsible for focus area 4 identified the following key issues relating to course and programme enrolment management:

- **Differences in admission and recruitment practices**: The NWU is largely a rural university, with considerable geographical distances between its campuses, different student profiles on the campuses, and a significant student enrolment in open distance learning. This situation has a bearing on the recruitment of students and has resulted in a certain degree of variance in the recruitment and admission practices across campuses and within modes of delivery at the NWU. While provision still needs to be made for the accommodation of walk-ins at the Mafikeng and Vaal Triangle Campuses of the NWU, it is not the case at the Potchefstroom Campus. In regard of the difference between recruitment and admission practices for contact and distance students, the practice is that university staff take responsibility for this process within the contact environment, while a third-party service provider mainly fulfils this function within the distance-education environment.
- **Development of online application process**: The University is in the process of moving towards encouraging all prospective students to make on-line applications. Much still needs to be done to optimise prospective students' experience of the on-line application environment while, simultaneously, ensuring that the information obtained through this mode of application is accurate and trustworthy.
- **Management of admissions in accordance with the enrolment plan**: The divergence between the number of prospective students who have been admitted as first-year students and those who ultimately register at the university probably points to the fact that the NWU might not generally to be considered as a first-choice institution. Over the years, various mitigation efforts had been made to counter the effect of this divergence on enrolment management planning at the university, such as an over-admission rate of approximately 30% in excess of the enrolment plan targets. A related problem in terms of the management of admissions is the knock-on effect of students whose NSC results were not sufficient to admit them into their first choice qualification, and who therefore apply at a late stage to be accommodated into an alternative qualification.
- **Career and curriculum advice (linked to admissions and placement assessment**): Career advice in order to inform the choice of study programme should be made available to prospective students prior to

admission and registration. To this effect, a comprehensive profile of prospective first-year students must be compiled with the aid and support of well-equipped career advisors as primarily informed by, amongst others, reliable and valid psychometric test results that form part of an institutional system for admissions and placement testing. Career advisors should then use the results of the profiling exercise to provide prospective students with career advice before registration.

Curriculum advice should be available before and during registration to assist all students in the compilation of their study programmes, and should be rendered in a consistent, integrated manner across all faculties and campuses.

- **Data definitions**: The development of a common understanding of important notions such as success, at-risk, and other concepts to inform unambiguous business rules that, in turn, determines a systems application of these definitions still needs to be finalised.
- **Performance monitoring of students**: Linked to the discussion in section 3.1 and 3.5, a computerised system for the early detection of at-risk candidates as well as a well-integrated tracking system of all interventions concerning an individual student (support and academic tracking), are crucial and can add value to all academic as well as support services, but institutional buy-in is of the utmost importance. Such a venture will help to erase the silos and barriers between all support and faculty interventions and serve as documentation and proof of NWU involvement on a continuous basis in a systematic retention and support strategy throughout a student's time at the NWU. However, the development of an effective tracking and early warning system remains difficult, owing to various factors:
  - Academic administrators do not have a consistent process according to which marks are entered into the system. Absence of reliable data that ought to have been captured from the start of a student's enrolment and that gives evidence of all relevant instances of formative and summative assessment opportunities makes it impossible for reliable performance tracking to take place;
  - It remains a challenge to provide real-time correct data at the same time and in ongoing fashion within the various sets of student data hosted in various sub-systems. While much has been done to ensure integrity of data between operational and warehouse data-sets, work still needs to be done to see to the alignment of data and an interface between the business-information and learning-management systems;
  - Finding a single metric to act as a truly reliable predictor of student success at the commencement of university studies is still a challenge.

In the absence of reliable quantitative data on student performance and student success, and an understanding of the factors that influence these, NWU is not yet able to use quantitative data to its full potential to support student success interventions. The same goes for a full understanding of the notion of so-called gateway courses.

## 5.3 Changes made during Phase 1 of the QEP

This section discusses changes at the institutional level that (a) have been made, (b) are in progress, or (c) are in the planning stages that relate to enhancing the learning environment. There are no changes that have been made.

- Changes in progress: System for recording of work-integrated learning; Development of a careers services management solution;
- Changes in planning stages: Admissions and placement assessment; Alignment of the recruitment, application and admissions processes across the campuses.

It should be noted that the development of the access, retention and success (ARS) framework that is discussed as a change in progress in section 3.2.2 is also applicable to the discussion under focus area 4, as the ARS framework places a strong emphasis on the development of an early warning and referral system, supported by learning analytics as part of a data-driven, evidence-based approach to student retention and success.

### 5.3.1 System for recording of work-integrated learning and service learning

The recording of information related to work-integrated learning and service learning has received renewed attention as existing systems in use have become out-dated or inadequate. A robust system to record and monitor student participation in work-integrated and service learning is especially important in programmes where reporting in terms of experiences in the workplace or in communities is required for the registration of students or graduates by statutory councils and professional bodies. A number of revised qualifications such as the B.Ed. degree and existing qualifications in fields such as human and animal health (such as the B Nursing degree) require meticulous and accurate recording of hours and other detail of students' participation in practical training sessions.

A project to develop such a system has been launched under the auspices of the Registrar, and with approval from Institutional Management. The specifications for the design of the system are currently being considered and all faculties are being made aware of the need for participation in the project to ensure that

their needs in terms of the recording of work-integrated learning and service learning will be adequately addressed in the system.

### 5.3.2 Development of a careers services management solution

While this matter could be discussed under focus area 3, it is placed here as it could be seen as part of NWU's strategy to develop an information system that is used to support student success, through the provision of relevant information on students' interactions with employers, as well as employment trends, and graduate tracking.

The Career Centre needs to expand and optimise its career services delivery to its clients – students and employers. A major facet of the service delivery strategy focuses on the utilization of a digital platform to facilitate online service delivery, namely the Career Services Manager (CSM) which is a comprehensive web-based career services management solution for Career Centre staff, students and employers. CSM addresses most of the needs that the Career Centre has identified in its strategy in a singular application, uniting all facets of the services that the Career Centre provides under one customizable application, branded with NWU's look and feel. Its state-of-the-art features will enable the Career Centre to provide more services to employers and students than ever before while increasing efficiency and reducing operating costs. The CSM platform is a proven product and it is utilised widely by university career centres globally, and specifically in the USA. This system will allow the Career Centre to assist students even better in future in terms of aspects such as CV development, access to employer profiles, access to online career resources, and the ability to connect with employers more quickly, while it will also provide an extremely professional service to employers in terms of aspects such as job postings, participation in career fairs, and on-campus recruiting. CSM also will provide the ability to track graduates in employment, thus enhancing the University's ability to conduct graduate tracer studies which can be used for programme review and redesign.

### 5.3.3 Admissions and placement assessment

Following discussions and decisions at the Senate meetings of 27 August 2014 and 11 March 2015, the University is in the initial stages of a research project to develop an effective admissions and placement assessment system. The purpose of the project is firstly to ensure that there are consistent admission and selection criteria for similar qualifications across the University, and secondly to review current admission and selection criteria in terms of the APS and NSC (and NCV) results in specific subjects in order to ensure that they are appropriate in terms of the risk profiles of entering students. Thirdly, the project will conduct a situation analysis with respect to current practices relating to admissions and placement testing across all faculties, in order to make recommendations on the implementation of an effective system for placement assessment, taking into account differentiated campus needs, student profiles, and needs for differentiated learner support. This research project will take previous research that the University undertook into the predictive value of the NBT in comparison to the NSC into account, including the recommendation which was approved by Senate in 2011 that based on the pilot project for the NBT in 2011, the University would not continue to participate in the NBT as the NSC is seen to be a better predictor of student success and indicator of student risk profiles, and student academic support needs.

### 5.3.4 Alignment of recruitment, application and admissions processes

The NWU has embarked on a project across the campuses in order to align and streamline the recruitment, application and admission process as part of the university's preparation to get ready for the integration of the University's processes with the Central Application System.

## 5.4 Exemplars to illustrate specific aspects of the change(s) that are successful[11.]

### 5.4.1 Electronic programme approval system

Section B.4.4.(c) of the Institutional Submission discussed the development and implementation of an electronic system to support qualification and programme development, management and review as an example of an activity that was in the planning stages. It is pleasing to report that the electronic system went live in 2015, accommodating applications for the first time from April 2015 to the end of July 2015. Regular training sessions were held on all three campuses and ongoing assistance was available throughout the period.

Valuable lessons have been learnt during this implementation phase with regard to the management of time schedules and workflow, and the responsibilities of the different role players within the system. Some key advantages of the system are:

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[11] Provision is made for the inclusion of evidence where claims of success are made. Where an activity is in the planning stages, it was indicated what served as evidence.

- The role players in the programme development and approval system have a much clearer awareness of their responsibilities, and faculties take greater ownership of the process, thereby improving the quality of decision-making;
- The system necessitates cross-campus and inter-faculty consultation concerning proposed amendments to aligned cross-campus modules or programmes, or service modules used within different faculties;
- The system ensures that accurate and consistent information on modules and programmes is maintained in one database that interfaces with the student academic administration system to ensure that information contained in the yearbooks is accurate. The system will also serve as the source for all programme information that is published to the University's website thus promoting the quality of information provided in marketing and recruitment material.

The electronic programme approval system thus contributes to course and programme enrolment information by providing a reliable database on all programmes and modules that can be used for the management of admissions and registration, as well as for enrolment planning and management.

## 5.5 Exemplars of changes that have not been successful

### 5.5.1 Online application and registration processes

Online application and registration processes have been implemented since 2012, and relative success has been achieved in encouraging potential and returning students to make use of the systems, with an uptake of approximately 40% at the Potchefstroom Campus, but a lower uptake on the other Campuses. However, the process is not optimal. For instance, students who have to repeat modules are not able to complete the registration process online, and have to make an appointment in order to do so. Thus, improvements are needed in regard of continuous change-management strategies, turn-around times, automated responses to students.

## 5.6 Promising practices related to course and programme enrolment management

This discussion reports on two activities that could be described as promising practices, although it is acknowledged that much more work needs to be done in terms of institutional research capacity to build on these developments.

### 5.6.1 Enrolment monitoring

Since 2013, the DVC: Teaching and Learning has begun with a process for presenting an annual enrolment monitoring report to Senate, providing information on enrolments and student success at the institutional, campus and faculty level, and commenting on trends relating to enrolments for qualification levels and types, major fields of study, modes of delivery and race groups. The enrolment monitoring report compares actual enrolment trends with the DHET approved enrolment targets over a three year period. The Management Information Unit has developed a template for the provision of the enrolment monitoring data, and the format of the enrolment monitoring report could be used to develop greater institutional research capability to monitoring enrolment trends on an ongoing basis.

### 5.6.2 Cohort studies

It is commonly acknowledged that cohort studies are the most reliable method for understanding trends with respect to student throughput and retention. While the University is able to produce cohort information from the HEDA system, it has not yet developed a system for regular reporting on student cohort studies in order to inform planning around student support interventions. During 2015, the DVC: Teaching and Learning worked with the Management Information Unit to conduct a cohort study based on cohorts from 2007 to 2010, for different qualification types, different delivery modes and race groups (Only "White" and "Black" – with the latter including "African", "Coloured" and "Indian"). This study produced important information on drop-out and completion rates, including differences in these indicators for qualification types and racial groups. Admittedly, this study has not been disseminated with the University community, and during 2016 discussions will be held with the Management Information Unit so that the necessary system design can take place so that cohort studies can be conducted on a regular basis. In the design of this system, it will be important to provide for the disaggregation of information to the level where it provides a basis for monitoring and review and student support at the programme level.

## 5.7 Main challenges the university still faces in relation to course and programme enrolment management.

### 5.7.1 Financial Aid

Despite successful and professional recruitment campaigns and conditional offerings to prospective students, the realities of financial needs, insufficient NSFAS funding opportunities, and other financial

constraints have a negative effect in securing access and success. This situation contributes to the fact that the NWU continues to struggle to meet its enrolment targets.

### 5.7.2 Student tracking system

As remarked in section 5.2, NWU's ability to establish an integrated and comprehensive tracking system requires that the academic administrators at faculty level adopt a consistent approach to the timely capturing of reliable student performance data.

### 5.7.3 Late availability of NSC results

The late availability of the NSC results, which is of course a national problem, adds to additional challenges for admissions, especially in instances where applicants no longer meet the minimum requirements for a specific programme after the release of the National Senior Certificate results. Such a situation leaves too short notice for any kind of contingency planning.

### 5.7.4 Strategic enrolment management

As noted in the Institutional Submission (section B 4.2(a)) NWU has an effective system for enrolment planning in terms of a largely bottom-up process by means of which faculties determine enrolment targets at the programme level, based on historical trends, as well as analyses of student success and graduation rates. However, as the Institutional Submission noted, the University needs to develop a more strategic approach towards enrolment management, one in which there is greater steering of the enrolment planning process in the light of the University's desired size and shape, as well as more effective planning and implementation capacity in order to monitor the external environment but also to make informed decisions about institutional academic programme priorities.

### 5.7.5 Curriculum advice

Curriculum advice is currently only made available to students at registration, and is provided on an ad-hoc basis by experienced academics within certain faculties, but there is not a formalised, unitary system for the provision of such advice. To support student success it is important that a more integrated approach should be developed, and that such an approach should be informed by reliable data on students' academic profiles.

# 6  REFLECTION ON PHASE 1 (2014-2015) OF THE QUALITY ENHANCEMENT PROJECT

## 6.1  The effect on the University of participating in the QEP (2014-2015)

The QEP Process has afforded the university the opportunity to reflect on a range of systems, policies, practices and procedures relating to teaching and learning in a systematic and structured manner. In particular the adoption of the task team approach, with representation from across the University, has promoted inter-institutional collaboration as colleagues have met and worked to compare, document, discuss and evaluate practices associated to the focus area for which they were responsible. In this manner, it has been possible to make recommendations on the implementation of more consistent institutional approaches that draw on good practices at specific campuses, and take the context of the different campuses into account. The QEP also helped to create an appreciation for the interrelatedness of the four focus areas, and how they all contribute to the creation of an institutional environment that supports student success.

## 6.2  In what ways did the university's involvement in the QEP promote or strengthen collaboration with other universities on specific issues?

Participation in the QEP has allowed the NWU to benchmark strategies, policies and practices. The organized QEP workshops and seminars have provided an opportunity for University academic and support staff at senior levels to share their approaches and practices with colleagues from across the sector, and of course to learn about innovative projects relating to the identified focus areas within the QEP framework. This comparative benchmarking process provides invaluable insight into the shared challenges that institutions face, but also to the need to develop strategies that are authentic in terms of the NWU's specific context. However, it should be acknowledged that while the QEP has provided useful opportunities for inter-institutional cooperation, it is more difficult to determine how the structure of the QEP itself has promoted or strengthened collaboration. In other words, the NWU will seek to work with other institutions on areas such as the academic promotion policy, the first-year experience, professional development for academic staff, the design and redesign of learning spaces and so forth, but such collaboration has not necessarily been strengthened by the structure of the QEP – it may have occurred as part of the institution's process for promoting excellence in teaching and learning. In terms of the structure of the QEP, it is suggested that a more project oriented approach in which more systematic support is provided to institutions for collaboration on specific themes may be a more conducive strategy for promoting institutional collaboration.

## 6.3  Looking back over the past two years, in a page or two, summarise the university's main triumphs, improvements, changes and challenges related to the four QEP focus areas.

The main triumph is the fact that the University has embarked on the project for the Transformation of Teaching and Learning, as discussed in Section 1.3 of the report. The QEP provides a key reference point for this project, and will assist the NWU as it maps the lifecycles and systems that stand at the heart of teaching and learning. In this manner, the insights generated by the QEP will become part of a process for ensuring that there are effective governance arrangements for teaching and learning (strategies, policies and structures), that the university creates an enabling environment for its staff and students, that processes relating to programme development, approval, implementation and review are effective, and that optimal support systems for teaching and learning are in place.

Significant improvements in the development of academics as teachers are the changes to the Institutional Course for New Lecturers, the revision of the Institutional Teaching Excellence Awards, and the greater institutionalisation of work on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning. A key challenge for focus area one is to develop a coherent strategy for the professional development of staff through the introduction of a coordinated range of capacity development strategies that includes appropriate short courses as well as a formal qualification in higher education, linked to appropriate recognition systems. In this regard, it is important that the results of meta-analyses of the findings of programme reviews are used to inform planning for professional development. Other challenges include the review of the promotion policy to ensure that it gives adequate recognition to excellence in teaching and learning at all levels, and the development and implementation of an appropriate framework for academic workload models. Within the restructured university, the roles and responsibilities of the faculty teaching and learning committees need to be clarified in order to ensure that they have a clear mandate, and that they create a climate in which effective student learning is promoted. There is also strong support for the consistent implementation of a mentoring programme for members of academic staff, so that they are able to develop a coherent career path, and to plan and monitor their development. The University's approach will be to first develop a mentorship framework and also to use some established guidelines for the mentorship of young and new academics. Finally, there are promising opportunities to draw on the example of the pedagogical academy, as discussed at the CHE national workshops in June 2015, to recognise members of academic staff for their achievements

in the area of teaching and learning and to provide them with incentives to make continued contributions in this area. The idea for creation of a Centre for Higher Education Development and Research that supports communities of practice, as well as individual work, will be taken forward in 2016.

The key challenge for focus area two is to develop and implement a comprehensive framework for student access, retention and success. While there are many good practices in terms of student support, such as supplemental instruction, and promising practices relating to mentoring and academic advising, they need to be linked to a clearer understanding of what the support needs of students are. The University will need to make a significant investment in its learning analytics capability, linked to various projects such as the enhancement of the LMS, the use of STARS, the *StudyWell* project and the first-year experience, supported by the development of effective admissions and placement assessment, in order to develop robust profiles of its pre-entering and entering student body. This information set should inform and guide not only student support systems such as mentoring, academic advising, tutoring and supplemental instruction, but also the continuing revision of the contents of the academic literacy modules, and the support provided by the writing centres and the reading laboratories. A far greater sense needs to be established of how various support and development strategies work together and complement each other, and the University needs to develop a policy on student development that addresses this holistic approach. Furthermore there is a strong need for clearer role clarification between various academic and general support services, so that they work together optimally as part of a holistic student development strategy – linked to the student lifecycle. The restructuring process in which NWU is currently engaged presents an ideal opportunity for this exercise.

In focus area three, the significant improvement in the collaboration between the campus libraries is a key improvement, as this has supported a more strategic view on the role that the library and information services plays in supporting the academic project, and in terms of the QEP, teaching and learning. The investments in the redesign of the library spaces, as reported on in the Institutional Submission, continue, with a commitment that all the campus libraries will provide an optimal learning environment. Furthermore, the libraries are redefining their role so that they are more actively involved in students' learning experience, as demonstrated by the implementation of the Smartboards at the Potchefstroom library so that library staff can facilitate the development of information literacy skills amongst ODL students. A key challenge is to develop an adequate library budget model, to support the integral role of the library in the core academic work. Good progress is being made with the development of ICT capability and many promising projects are underway to develop technology that will support innovative teaching and learning designs. The process for moving towards the greater use of interactive e-guides is well underway, with various successful pilot projects that can be drawn on. A key challenge in this area is the creation of greater capacity in the form of instructional design to assist academic staff in the design of interactive learning material, as well as the creation of an institutional repository that contains learning objects relevant to all the University's programmes. Going forward it will become more important to ensure that infrastructural planning is embedded in planning for teaching and learning, so that decisions on the creation of spaces for blended learning are informed by appropriate stakeholder consultation. Another area that calls for integrated infrastructural and facilities planning, is the manner in which the learning environment at all campus provides for the needs of staff and students with disabilities.

The key improvement in focus area four is the successful implementation of the electronic system for programme development, management and review, as this will ensure that the University has a reliable programme information system to support enrolment planning, marketing and recruitment, and admissions and registration. Many challenges remain, including the capacity to conduct institutional research that supports student tracking, academic planning and enrolment management, the development of consistent approaches to admission and recruitment, the further development of the online application and registration process, and the creation of consistent administrative procedures that support the performance monitoring of students.