



Original Article

# Teaching in Academic Promotions at South African Universities: A Policy Perspective

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A tension exists in universities where the recognition and rewards related to research and teaching in academic promotions are contested. Does teaching play a role in academic promotion and, if so, to what extent? This article examined these questions across South African universities by conducting an analysis of promotions policies and institutional self-reports. The findings show an increasing tendency to recognise teaching on par with research in academic promotions at all ranks, including full professor, especially by research-focussed universities. This mainly occurs via single-track promotion pathways with different emphases on teaching and research. Teaching portfolios that encapsulate multiple criteria are the prevailing method for evaluating documented evidence. The most common measures of teaching are student evaluations and peer evaluations, followed by reflective statements about teaching and evidence of innovative teaching practices. Two teaching criteria were important for promotion to full professor: postgraduate supervision and curriculum design.

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## Introduction

The past two decades have been characterised by sweeping changes in the South African public higher education sector. Major university mergers have been undertaken and student enrolments have nearly doubled (DHET, 2015), but these changes have not been matched by concomitant growth in staff numbers or government funding allocations (CHE, 2016a). Furthermore, student outcomes are characterised by slow progression, and high attrition and low graduation rates (Dhunpath and Vithal, 2013; CHE, 2013). Thus, the changes to the higher education system have put pressure on universities to rethink mechanisms to incentivise academics to teach (Majcher, 2008). In such contexts, the recognition and rewards for teaching are key to attracting and retaining suitably qualified academics. Arguably, one of the best ways to reward university teaching is through



promotion (Meyer and Evans, 2005). However, the appropriate balance between research and teaching is often questioned.

Academics express discontent with the promotion criteria used in their institutions because there is a widely held view that research productivity enhances promotion prospects to the professoriate and that teaching is not as important for rank progression (Young, 2006; Hassan, 2013). ‘Publish or perish’ is a common adage in universities around the world and among academics in South Africa (Soudien and Gripper, 2016). This raises the question: Does teaching play a role in academic rank progression? One way of answering it is to scrutinise universities’ policy documents on academic promotions. This article thus examines whether teaching does in fact feature in academic promotions at South African universities, and if so, at which ranks, how it is being considered and which teaching criteria are being appraised.

### **Relationship Between University Teaching and Rank Progression in the Academy**

Several studies have argued that university teaching is seldom considered for academic promotion which in many cases is solely dependent on research accomplishments (Meyer and Evans, 2005; Majcher, 2008; Parker, 2008; Chalmers, 2011; Soudien and Gripper, 2016). This is particularly evident among research-intensive universities which focus mainly on research accomplishments in their core missions and for institutional status in university rankings (Altbach, 2015).

One explanation for the limited recognition of teaching is that while there is widespread agreement on the criteria, indicators and benchmarks with which to evaluate research for promotion purposes (Soudien and Gripper, 2016), the same cannot be said for teaching. The evaluation of teaching is deemed more complex and difficult to measure for promotion purposes. Compounding this is the perceived subjectivity of teaching appraisals that serves to further marginalise the role of teaching in promotions decision-making at universities (Chalmers, 2011; Vithal *et al.*, 2013).

An outcome of the perceived low status of teaching in informing promotions decisions is that if academics believe that only research matters for career progression, they will devote their time to research projects (Soudien and Gripper, 2016) and neglect their teaching obligations. Perceptions abound that while poor teaching quality is tolerated, compromising research quality is unacceptable. Even those academics that are keen to teach may not prioritise their teaching activities because of its lower status (Young, 2006; Obers, 2014).

Nevertheless, many universities have started to introduce teaching as an area for promotion in their policies (Parker, 2008; Chalmers, 2011; Cashmore and Cane, 2013; Probert, 2013). This has been approached via two pathways: single-track or

multiple-track. In the former, both teaching and research are evaluated for promotion but with different emphases. The latter, multiple-track pathway allows for either ‘teaching-focussed’ promotions or ‘research-focussed’ promotions (Cashmore and Cane, 2013; Probert, 2013). Among universities that use a dedicated teaching-track for promotion to full professor, concerns have been raised that teaching professors are not accorded the same esteem as their research counterparts and are less portable internationally (MacFarlane, 2011; Probert, 2013).

However, the literature shows that promotion policies that recognise teaching, especially those using single-track promotion pathways, are typically only applicable for promotion at the lower academic ranks. Promotion to the higher ranks of the professoriate is still largely dependent on research productivity (Parker, 2008). Other challenges include persistent doubt among staff about whether teaching is really being taken into account and valued on par with research (Parker, 2008; Hassan, 2013; Subbaye and Vithal, 2015) and the lack of clarity on the evaluation of teaching, often resulting in ineffective promotion policy implementation (Chalmers, 2011; Cox *et al.*, 2011; Cashmore and Cane, 2013).

## **Contextual Factors Guiding the Focus on University Teaching in South Africa**

Since 1994 (post-apartheid), the South African higher education landscape has been characterised by major restructuring with universities having been merged and differently categorised. The country currently has 26 universities comprising three institutional types: traditional, comprehensive and universities of technology. The difference between these institutional types lies in the mix of offerings ranging from purely academic to vocation-oriented programmes (CHE, 2016a). Furthermore, research targets for traditional universities are higher than the other institutional types (CHE, 2016a).

Between 1994 and 2013, student headcount enrolments in higher education nearly doubled (DHET, 2015). Moreover, equity-driven targets to increase university access have resulted in sweeping demographic changes at universities (DHET, 2015). The increase in student numbers has resulted in escalating student-to-staff ratios (CHE, 2016a). Academics are often encouraged to enhance students’ learning experiences by engaging in ‘technologically supported pedagogy’ (Blewitt, 2014), as one way to mitigate the challenges of teaching large classes comprising a diverse student body.

However, poor academic performance, slow progression, and low graduation and high dropout rates among university students (Dhunpath and Vithal, 2013) have brought university curricula and teaching under the spotlight (CHE, 2013). Quantitative gains in access to the academy have not been matched by progress in creating institutional cultures where all students and staff can thrive and succeed in



equal measure (HESA, 2010). Current challenges faced by public universities include: demands for increased access to higher education; students protests regarding fee increases (Fees Must Fall), mediums of instruction that do not cater for the majority of students and pressures to address racial and gender inequities in staffing profiles, among other less publicised concerns. As a result, there are rising student demands for curriculum reform and a decolonised higher education with opportunities for all (Heleta, 2016). The content and structure of university programme offerings, student learning experiences and academics' capacity to deliver high-quality teaching that is relevant, have been questioned (CHE, 2013).

In response to these contextual changes and demands on university teaching, national oversight bodies in the higher education sector began placing emphasis on interventions to improve and support university teaching. Since 2010, the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) has provided the teaching development grant (TDG) to enable the implementation of teaching and learning development activities that would result in improved student outcomes by supporting staff capacity development to enhance teaching quality (Vithal, 2016).

In response to poor student performance across the higher education sector, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) appointed a Task Team to investigate the feasibility of amending the undergraduate curriculum as a means of substantially improving graduate outcomes. It made several recommendations for quality improvement, including the need for 'curriculum and course design, the development and implementation of educationally sound placement policy and mechanisms, continuing development of effective teaching and learning approaches and, student and staff support systems' (CHE, 2013, 25).

More recently in 2014, the CHE initiated the national Quality Enhancement Project (QEP). Phase 1 of the QEP examined public universities' achievements and challenges in four focus areas related to undergraduate teaching and learning with respect to: enhancing academics as teachers, student support and development, the learning environment, and course and programme enrolment management. As part of the QEP project, universities were required to make evidence-based institutional submissions on their progress in the focus areas. In addition, university representatives were invited to attend workshops and seminars to facilitate collaborative efforts, share best practices and identify common challenges relating to undergraduate teaching and learning (CHE, 2014). In planning for the QEP, the CHE conceded that 'university reward and promotion criteria often act as disincentives for academics to put time and energy into developing teaching skills, since research output is often the main criterion' (CHE, 2014, 7).

The literature review demonstrates that the expansion of the South African higher education has placed immense pressure on universities (at macro-level) and academics (at micro-level) to focus on teaching. While national oversight bodies have put macro-level mechanisms in place to support and recognise university teaching in the form of additional funding, collective leadership and collaborative

opportunities, it is unclear whether this emphasis finds expression, at a micro-level, in the recognition of teaching through academic promotion across South African universities. Therefore, this article examines the extent to which South African public universities recognise teaching in academic promotions, if at all. The critical questions addressed for the higher education sector are:

1. Whether teaching is considered in academic promotions in universities, and
2. if teaching is considered:
  - a. At which ranks is teaching being considered?
  - b. How is teaching being considered?
  - c. What teaching criteria are being considered?

## Methodology

To address these questions for universities across the South African public sector, a policy analysis was conducted of academic promotions documents. Document content analysis is the process of summarising and reporting the main contents of written data (documents) and their messages. It uses categorisation to reduce large quantities of written text and is suitable for describing patterns and trends in documents (Cohen *et al.*, 2011). The first step in the analysis began with identifying instances and quantifying certain content (words and phrases such as criteria for promotion, teaching and promotion procedures, and teaching and academic rank) in the text to explore usage. The next step was the grouping of the content into categories. This was followed by descriptions and interpretations of the categories. The initial categories were based on the research questions, and subsequent interactions with the data guided the modification of the categories. Directing the document content analysis in this way was also used to guide the discussion of the findings.

University academic promotions are captured in a range of what may be considered regulatory documents. Since the purpose of regulatory documentation is to officially declare in textual representation 'what is' sanctioned in institutions (Samuel, 2017), the first category included available university-promotions regulatory documents such as policies, procedures and guidelines, frameworks and standing orders obtained from 12 universities (see Table 1). Some of these regulatory documents (RD) were publicly available on university websites ( $n = 7$ ), and others were obtained directly from universities' chief information officers, registrars and human resource departments in early 2015 ( $n = 5$ ). Due to the different dates on which the regulatory documents were approved at their respective institutions and to allow for document comparison, all documents effective in 2014 were considered. The year was verified by sending requests to confirm the effective date via telephone calls and emails to institutions. Those universities that granted access to their



**Table 1** Public universities in South Africa and documents in the analysis

<i>Type</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Institution name</i>	<i>DHET Research output ranking<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Institutional reports (QEP)</i>	<i>Promotions regulatory documents (RD)</i>	<i>Type of promotion pathway</i>
Traditional universities	1	University of KwaZulu-Natal	1	×	×	Single
	2	University of Pretoria	2	×	×	Single
	3	University of Cape Town	3	×	×	Multiple
	4	University of Stellenbosch	4	×	×	
	5	University of Witwatersrand	5	×	×	Multiple
	6	North West University	7	×	×	Single
	7	University of the Free State	9	×		
	8	Rhodes University	10	×	×	Multiple
	9	University of Western Cape	11	×	×	Single
	10	University of Fort Hare	14	×	×	Single
	11	University of Limpopo	15	×		Multiple
	12	Sefako Makgatho University	21			
Universities of technology	13	Tshwane University of Technology	13	×		
	14	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	17	×	×	Single
	15	Durban University of Technology	18	×	×	Single
	16	Vaal University of Technology	20	×	×	Single
	17	Central University of Technology, Free State	22	×		
	18	Mangosuthu University of Technology	24	×		

**Table 1** *continued*

<i>Type</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>Institution name</i>	<i>DHET Research output ranking<sup>a</sup></i>	<i>Institutional reports (QEP)</i>	<i>Promotions regulatory documents (RD)</i>	<i>Type of promotion pathway</i>
Comprehensive universities	19	University of South Africa	6	×		
	20	University of Johannesburg	8	×		
	21	Nelson Mandela Metropolitan University	12	×		
	22	University of Venda	16	×		
	23	University of Zululand	19	×		
	24	Walter Sisulu University	23	×		
	25	University of Mpumalanga	25			
	26	Sol Plaatje University, Northern Cape	–			

<sup>a</sup> Data source: (DHET 2016, p. 23)

regulatory documents were assured of anonymity (ethical clearance number: UKZN-HSS/1425/014D).

However, due to the limited response from universities, a second document source was analysed. This consisted of all the publicly available<sup>1</sup> institutional self-reports submitted to the CHE for Phase 1 of the Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) (Table 1). These reports were downloaded in 2015. All universities were obliged to report on evidence-based activities and practices relating to rewarding and recognising academics as teachers and, in particular to report on ‘...the extent to which teaching is taken into account and valued in hiring and promotion...’ (CHE, 2014, 18). These 23 QEP institutional self-reports (Table 1) provided additional information about academic promotions policies and also identified the factors acting as enablers or barriers to recognising teaching in academic promotion, given the reporting structure that was required for each submission.

Hence, the complete data set analysed included a total of 35 documents. The 12 institutional regulatory documents were analysed to establish the main areas considered for academic promotion, and the promotion processes and procedures. The QEP institutional self-reports were examined to complement and triangulate

<sup>1</sup> QEP institutional submissions available on [http://www.che.ac.za/focus\\_areas/quality\\_enhancement\\_project/institutional-submissions](http://www.che.ac.za/focus_areas/quality_enhancement_project/institutional-submissions) [accessed 3 June 2016].



data from the regulatory documents and to address the gaps in the data to analyse how teaching is being considered across the sector. In the findings section, institution's names have been assigned random letters of the alphabet. Data referenced from the regulatory documents of a particular university are prefixed with RD, and institutional self-reports are denoted QEP.

The literature review shows that teaching is seldom considered for academic promotion among research universities. Hence, the DHET (2016) institutional research rankings are reported as a reference point (Table 1) to examine whether high research output universities in South Africa recognise teaching in their academic promotions. In 2014, the top five universities ranked by research output, all traditional universities were the Universities of KwaZulu-Natal, Pretoria, Cape Town, Stellenbosch and Witwatersrand (DHET, 2016).

## Findings

### Teaching as an area for academic promotion

A main finding from the document analysis is that irrespective of institutional type, teaching and research are both considered for promotion at the majority of South African universities ( $n = 18$ ). In addition, there is varying use of two other areas for promotion, namely community engagement ( $n = 14$ ) and leadership/service ( $n = 11$ ) (12 RD and 6 QEP). Overall, these four promotion areas were broadly aligned with university mission statements obtained from each institution's website.

Given that globally many research universities are reported to privilege research over teaching in academic promotions (Cox *et al.*, 2011), an unexpected finding was that despite their higher research targets (CHE, 2016a), ten of the twelve traditional universities, including the top five most research productive institutions (see Table 1), take teaching into account in their promotion regulatory documents. However, a number of the universities' QEP reports refer to challenges in finding the right balance between research and teaching in promotion decisions ( $n = 9$ ) and in dealing with institutional cultures where financial incentives for research productivity outweigh those for teaching, leading to staff perceptions that research matters more for promotion despite the concurrent recognition of teaching ( $n = 2$ ):

There is still need to work on the institutional culture with regard to teaching and learning. In fact, a paradigm shift towards valuing teaching to the same extent as research, especially in terms of incentives and rewards provided, may be required. (QEP: Institution U)

Post-2014, two universities noted that eligibility for promotion tends to rely heavily on disciplinary research outputs and therefore undertook to revisit the balancing of the criteria:

A review of the promotion criteria for academic staff members has taken place and awaits final consideration and approval. The revised criteria aim to create an appropriate balance between performance measurement in teaching and learning, research on teaching and learning, subject specific research output as well as participation in community engagement. (QEP: Institution E)

However, at the three universities of technology (UoTs), research excellence is deliberately emphasised for promotion to the professoriate, as shown in the unequal weightings between the areas for promotion (RD: All UoTs). It has been argued that South African UoTs' emphasis on research productivity, particularly in the professoriate, is a recent phenomenon (CHE, 2016a) and is used as strategy to uphold the public image and status of these newly designated universities, thus distinguishing them from their previous status as technikons (RD: Institution C).

### **Academic ranks at which teaching is considered for promotion**

South African academia is generally composed of four ranks: lecturer, senior lecturer, associate professor and full professor. Therefore, there are three rungs to rank progression via academic promotion. Eighteen universities have adopted formal parity in the recognition of research and teaching for senior lecturers. In addition, there is a common expectation of demonstrable achievements in research for promotion to the professoriate. Both these findings are consistent with practices elsewhere in the world (Young, 2006; Majcher, 2008; Parker, 2008; Cashmore and Cane, 2013).

Some universities consider applications based on teaching activities for promotion to associate professor ( $n = 8$ ) and full professor ( $n = 6$ ), in their regulatory documents. Moreover, post-2014, four more universities have started putting mechanisms in place to recognise teaching in awarding promotion to full professor (QEP: Institutions N, Q, R and U).

There have been a number of additional developments aimed at elevating the importance of teaching in the university. These include: changes in the promotion criteria, which [will] enable academic staff to weight teaching more heavily. All staff members are now required to submit a teaching portfolio ... (QEP: Institution R)

Thus, taken together ten South African universities, comprising six traditional universities; two universities of technology; and two comprehensive universities, officially recognise (or are beginning to recognise) teaching for promotion to full professor. This finding is contrary to studies elsewhere, which show that universities, especially those that are research-focussed, almost exclusively require research excellence for promotion to full professor (Parker, 2008; Azman *et al.*, 2016).



Among those universities that recognised teaching for promotion across all ranks ( $n = 6$ ) in 2014, there was a tendency to focus on actual teaching practice at the junior ranks and on teaching–leadership as an attribute for promotion to the senior ranks.

### Teaching and academic promotion pathways

While teaching is increasingly being recognised at all rank levels, academic promotions pathways are handled in differently nuanced ways. There are two main types of academic promotion pathways in South Africa, namely single-track and multiple-track. Nine universities have a single-track pathway with different emphases for teaching and research. The balance that must be struck between the promotion areas varies between institutions and in the academic ranks within them. In almost all cases, there is an expectation of acceptable performance in both teaching and research. Overall promotion may be awarded on the basis of ‘sufficient’ performance in one area and ‘excellent’ performance in the other.

Applicants need not excel in all categories, nor meet criteria that are not appropriate to their situations; but evidence of achievement in either teaching and learning or research must be a core feature of every application. (RD: Institution H).

Vithal *et al.* (2013) argue that having to demonstrate competency in both teaching and research and then excellence in one or more areas, helps strike a balance between teaching and research by not pitting one against the other.

An alternative to the single-track promotion pathway is the multiple-track one which includes a teaching-track, and is evident at four traditional universities. In the teaching-track, research is either weighted less than teaching or is not considered for promotion. At two universities, the teaching-track is applicable for promotion to senior lecturer and terminates at this level. For example:

As part of an institutional strategy to elevate the status of teaching, provision has been made since 2010 for the appointment of staff on a ‘Teaching Track’, and to allow ad hominem promotion to the level of senior lecturer. Currently 13 academics have opted to follow the teaching track because of their passion for teaching, and to remove the pressure to do research and focus on teaching. (QEP: Institution L)

At the third university, the teaching-track caters for promotion to adjunct professor. This is applicable to academics in professional disciplines where staff registration with an external professional body is required. The rank was created to recognise the distinction between teaching excellence in professional and academic disciplines (RD: Institution D).

While the teaching-track for promotion facilitates rank progression, concerns have been raised that this type of career track does little to elevate the status of teaching on par with research at institutions, as evidenced in the following excerpt:

From a teaching perspective, the ceiling of senior lecturer in the teaching track has also been identified as a barrier to elevating the status of teaching within the institution. (QEP: Institution L)

The fourth traditional university addresses the twin challenges of elevating the status of teaching and its contribution to rank progression into the professoriate, by permitting teaching-focussed promotions up to full professor.

In 2013, the University approved an alternative route for promotion to the position of Associate Professorship and Full Professorship using one's contribution to teaching and learning in higher education. (QEP: Institution S)

These findings suggest that the two main reasons for implementing teaching-tracks are catering for differences between teaching in professional and academic disciplines and teaching and research linked to individual work priorities.

### **Documenting evidence for the evaluation of teaching in academic promotions**

In order to facilitate the evaluation of teaching for promotion, universities highlighted the importance of having promotion policies which are clear on the requisite teaching competencies for promotion ( $n = 10$ ) and specifically what counts as teaching excellence ( $n = 9$ ). To this end, 11 universities (RD and QEP) required that academics submit evidence-based teaching portfolios as part of their promotion applications.

Excellence in teaching and learning may be demonstrated by an evidence-based teaching portfolio, supplemented as necessary with documents such as course outlines, student and peer evaluations. (RD: Institution I)

The policies at these 10 universities stipulate the criteria, contents and length of the portfolio, and guidelines for their assessment by promotions committees. The universities contend that capacity-building workshops on developing teaching portfolios expedite the recognition of teaching in academic promotions (QEP). Capacity development extends from constructing the portfolio (by the individual) to rigorously evaluating it (by promotions committees). A counterpoint made in the QEP reports ( $n = 3$ ) is that there was limited staff capacity to support academics in developing and evaluating these teaching portfolios. A concern reported at one institution was that academic staff tend to develop teaching portfolios only when the portfolios are linked to extrinsic rewards such as promotions:



Enthusiasm seems to have dwindled primarily because compiling a teaching portfolio is a time-consuming and protracted process... Surveys indicate that academics rarely think of teaching portfolios as an opportunity for critical reflection but tend to link it to easily identifiable incentives such as promotion to higher ranks or teaching excellence awards. (QEP: Institution A)

One of the ways recommended to enhance more effective usage of teaching portfolios was to align the measures encapsulated in teaching portfolios across institutional probation, appointment, promotion and performance processes (QEP: Institution E).

Two institutions indicated that academics are reluctant to construct teaching portfolios because it is time-consuming (QEP: Institutions A and O). Arguably, it could be for this reason that institutions not using teaching portfolios for promotion purposes ( $n = 7$ ) limit the number of teaching criteria for appraisal.

### **Teaching criteria and associated evidence being appraised for promotion**

While an extensive array of measures is being used to appraise teaching, it is possible to categorise them into 11 broad criteria in order to demonstrate the breadth of their coverage across universities. These overarching criteria are: evaluation of teaching by others ( $n = 12$ ); self-evaluation of teaching ( $n = 12$ ); teaching methods ( $n = 8$ ); recognition for teaching ( $n = 7$ ); curriculum development ( $n = 7$ ); academic professional development (6); approaches to student assessment and performance (6); postgraduate supervision ( $n = 6$ ); research about teaching ( $n = 5$ ); personal attributes regarding teaching ( $n = 3$ ); and income generation related to teaching ( $n = 1$ ) (see Table 2 for detailed listing).

By far the most common measures for the criterion 'evaluation of teaching by others' were student evaluations ( $n = 12$ ) and peer evaluations ( $n = 12$ ). Student evaluations were generally limited to surveys of students' satisfaction with lecturers' performance ( $n = 8$ ), while at some universities student evaluations comprised students' perspectives about both lecturer performance and course/module content ( $n = 4$ ). Six universities (QEP: Institutions D, F, I, J, K & T) indicated that dedicated structures or entities for teaching and learning, institutional analysis or quality assurance were responsible for operationalising student evaluations, from data collection to the analysis of the evaluations. A reported concern with this particular arrangement was the need to further strengthen university mechanisms such that the academics received and used the evaluations timeously to improve or enhance their teaching practice, in addition to applying for promotion ( $n = 3$ ) and that students were given an opportunity to respond to the evaluation results ( $n = 2$ ):

Particular attention needs to be paid to strengthening student evaluation mechanisms, especially towards closing the 'feedback loop' between student

**Table 2** Teaching criteria and measures for academic promotion

<i>No.</i>	<i>Teaching criteria</i>	<i>Measures and evidence</i>	<i>No. of HEIs</i>
1	Teaching evaluation by others	<u>Peer evaluations of teaching</u> ; <u>student evaluations</u> ; course evaluations; reports from — external examiners, external assessors or senior colleagues	12
2	Self-assessment of teaching	<u>Reflections of teaching</u> ; statement of teaching philosophy	8
3	Teaching methods/ practice	Evidence of <u>innovative teaching approaches</u> ; description of teaching responsibilities; teaching workload; using new and emerging technologies	8
4	Recognition of teaching	<u>Recipient of teaching awards and or honours</u> ; recognition of developing/implementing academic development programmes	7
5	Curriculum development	<u>Designing</u> , revising, renewing and/or evaluating curricula; developing <u>teaching and learning materials</u> ; involvement in curriculum-building activities	7
6	Professional and academic development	<u>Professional development in teaching</u> ; sharing teaching expertise with others; mentoring junior staff with regard to teaching; developing and maintaining teaching-related networks; conducting workshops on teaching	6
7	Approaches to student assessment	Methods of <u>assessing student performance</u> ; giving students feedback; appointment as an external examiner; monitoring student retention and pass rates	6
8	Postgraduate supervision <sup>a</sup>	<u>Number of Masters and Doctoral students supervised</u> ; numbers of masters and doctoral students graduated; securing postdoctoral fellows; guiding students with regard to research methodology	6
9	Research about teaching <sup>a</sup>	Conference presentations and generating <u>publications about teaching and learning</u>	5
10	Personal attributes with regard to teaching	Communication and human relation skills, encouraging active learning among students, exceptional knowledge of subject matter, sensitivity to gender and transformation issues in teaching	3
11	Income generation	Fund-raising related to capacity building for teaching or research into teaching	1

Underlined measures refer to the most frequently occurring measure for a particular teaching criterion  
Data sources: RD and QEP reports

<sup>a</sup> Some universities use these measures as research criteria for promotion

feedback and the integration of this feedback into teaching and learning planning and practice. (QEP: Institution I)

Allied to student evaluations, another commonly used measure evident at 12 universities was peer evaluations of teaching. Peer evaluators were academic peers or senior colleagues, either from within or external to universities. Broadly, peer evaluations ranged from appraisal of the candidate's skill and knowledge in



materials development and student assessment practices ( $n = 5$ ) to comments about the candidate's personal ability to contribute to the discipline's teaching responsibilities ( $n = 2$ ). External examiners' reports were also being used as an auxiliary measure ( $n = 3$ ). At two universities, it has been recommended that peer evaluators extend their role to include classroom observations of the candidate's teaching practices (QEP: Institution K; RD: Institution H). At another institution, peer evaluators are also called upon to comment on the comparability and rigour with which curricula are developed and implemented by the candidate (RD: Institution G). Finally, one university signposted their policy on 'Teaching, module and peer evaluation' as a guiding framework for peer evaluations of teaching (QEP: Institution C).

Six universities' promotions processes require candidates to demonstrate favourable student and peer evaluation outcomes. Two institutions also take into account the candidate's reflective responses and actions to these evaluations. For example:

[Student evaluations are] positive and regularly conducted... The candidate has responded constructively to the evaluations... There is evidence of reflection and action based on the evaluations. (RD: Institution J)

The second most common category appraised by universities ( $n = 8$ ) was 'self-assessments of teaching'. Universities typically require candidates to develop a teaching statement explaining their understanding of how students learn coupled with evidence showing how the candidate's teaching facilitates this learning. These explanations do not necessarily have to be linked to 'formal' educational theory. In addition, six universities emphasised that candidates should adopt a 'scholarly approach' to teaching. This involves the enactment of teaching which is based on reflections about practice, informed by relevant literature, and contributes to research about one's teaching. For example:

Self-evaluation of teaching 'provides candidates with an opportunity to highlight, for example: theoretical and pedagogical principles that inform their teaching practice, contributions to education innovation, important achievements in their teaching practice and outputs and the impact of their teaching on student performance. The self-evaluation report should be supported by appropriate evidence of teaching outputs'. (RD: Institution F)

Two institutions argued that these self-assessments provide a valuable opportunity for staff development through evidence-based reflection on elements of good practice and those in need of improvement (QEP: Institutions E & F). At two other institutions, self-evaluations of teaching are used as a supplementary mechanism for programme review and teaching-quality enhancement (QEP: Institutions G & E).

Another second most common category assessed by universities ( $n = 8$ ) was 'teaching methods or practice'. Measures include evidence of innovative teaching approaches including the candidate's responsiveness to the opportunities presented by using new technologies in their teaching ( $n = 8$ ) and descriptions of teaching responsibilities and teaching workloads ( $n = 3$ ). At one university, the rationale for innovative teaching has been incorporated into its strategic plan and is also a criterion for academic promotion (QEP: Institution H).

The third most commonly cited category as a criterion for promotion, 'recognition for teaching', was used across seven universities. A key measure was faculty, university or national awards for teaching. It was observed that the criteria for the South African national teaching excellence awards (CHE, 2016b) seem to be contributing to an emergent and official discourse of what constitutes recognition for 'teaching excellence'. Five universities indicated that aligning their institutional awards with criteria used for the national teaching excellence award facilitates 'what about' and 'how' teaching is being evaluated for academic promotions. The measures used for the national award are: peer feedback, student feedback, student retention rates, student success data and artefacts such as brief extracts from study guides, multimedia, online materials, innovative student assessment and photographs (CHE, 2016b).

Another third common category was measures associated with the criterion 'curriculum development' ( $n = 7$ ). For this particular criterion, it was expected that candidates applying for promotion to senior lecturer supply evidence demonstrating involvement in activities related to curriculum development or revision of teaching and learning materials. At the rank of the professoriate, it was expected that candidates would play a leadership role and have experience with higher-order tasks related to curriculum building, design and evaluation activities.

Some variation was observed among universities with regard to two criteria that are appraised for promotion, namely postgraduate supervision ( $n = 6$ ) and research about teaching and learning ( $n = 5$ ). While both are important for promotion to the professoriate, they are considered as part of the teaching evaluation in some universities and at others they are evaluated as part of research. This difference in where these criteria are appraised is not necessarily problematic and could be suggestive of the transgressive nature of teaching and research in breaching or bridging the teaching–research nexus (Azman *et al.*, 2016). For example, at one university postgraduate supervision is assessed in both research and teaching evaluations. Measures related to the quality, competency and amount of supervision are assessed as part of teaching and measures regarding the number of students supervised and postgraduate throughput are assessed as part of research (RD: Institution J).

Measures for other criteria such as academic professional development ( $n = 6$ ), student performance ( $n = 6$ ), personal attributes with regard to teaching ( $n = 3$ ) and income generation for teaching ( $n = 1$ ) featured to a lesser extent in



promotions considerations among universities. Finally, an overview of the teaching measures that are evaluated showed that institutions tend to focus on the immediate practical context of teaching and overlook the wider social, economic and political environment in which it is located (Skelton, 2004).

### Overview of the promotion process and procedures

The findings reported in this section are mainly sourced from the 12 regulatory documents and show that calls for promotion applications occur annually ( $n = 10$ ). Moreover, Deans play a key role in receiving applications and/or making recommendations for staff to apply for promotion ( $n = 12$ ). However, the decision to submit an application is left to the individual. Eligibility for promotion is dependent on academic staff having completed probationary periods of up to 3 years ( $n = 12$ ). The regulatory documents also make explicit distinctions between assessments for performance and assessments for promotion ( $n = 10$ ).

There was some variance in how promotions criteria are applied across the sector, where they are either faculty-specific ( $n = 5$ ) or university-wide ( $n = 3$ ). Academic promotions committees tend to be centralised and multidisciplinary, comprising of peers, senior colleagues and university administrators ( $n = 6$ ). Academic promotion procedures at two universities are based on discipline-specific peer reviews and in one they are handled by a centralised Senate appointments committee. These committees are chaired by a Dean or senior management figure at all 12 universities, while levels of adjudication and moderation of applications differ across the sector.

Once a promotion decision has been made, written feedback on the outcome is mandatory ( $n = 11$ ) and candidates have the right to appeal unfavourable decisions on procedural grounds ( $n = 10$ ). Promotions are awarded on an *ad hominem* basis ( $n = 15^2$ ) meaning that they are made on the basis of merit and personal achievement and are independent of the availability of a vacant post.

### Discussion

The findings show that while both teaching and research are considered pivotal criteria for academic promotion, at several institutions research was still weighted more heavily in determining favourable promotions outcomes. Nonetheless, a growing number of universities have begun to revise their criteria to address the imbalance in weightings post-2014. Mandatory participation in the QEP has seemingly created an impetus for a sector-wide focus on reflecting, revising or re-envisioning promotions criteria to recognise teaching in more balanced ways.

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<sup>2</sup> Data sources: 12 RD and 3 QEP.

Moreover, there is evidence that an increasing number of traditional universities are beginning to recognise teaching for promotion to full professor. In contrast, UoTs emphasised the importance of research productivity, especially for promotion to full professor. In this regard, South African UoTs are similar to their counterparts in other countries where comparable institution types (such as technical universities or universities of applied sciences) are redirecting their focus to research as they become eligible to access historically untapped, research-related public funding (Parker 2008).

The dominant approach among South African universities is to use a single-track promotion pathway for all ranks with different emphases for teaching and research. Subbaye and Vithal (2015, 1) argue that a single-track pathway which uses multiple criteria to assess teaching ‘contributes to its credence and currency in academic promotions’. Furthermore, from a gender perspective, including teaching and research (with equal weightings) in a single-track promotion system facilitates the parity of reputational esteem between research and teaching and consequently better serves women’s rank progression to the professoriate by minimising scepticism about their abilities as scholars (Subbaye and Vithal, 2016).

Similar to universities elsewhere (Probert, 2013; Cashmore and Cane, 2013), some universities in South Africa have multiple promotion pathways with different approaches to implementing teaching-tracks. In other contexts, teaching-tracks cater for teaching-focussed appointments — allowing for promotion to full professor — and often distinguish academic work along the lines of disciplinary research and teaching (Nunn and Pillay, 2014). However, there is ongoing debate regarding the efficacy of teaching-tracks. Opponents argue that teaching should be closely integrated with a significant contribution in disciplinary research and that this research should manifest in classroom teaching (Nunn and Pillay, 2014). Furthermore, a negative consequence of multiple tracks which bifurcate teaching and research is the lowering of teaching’s status in relation to research (Macfarlane, 2011). Proponents maintain that teaching-focussed promotions contribute to enhanced teaching quality and offer equitable career progression opportunities for academics who focus more on teaching excellence and the scholarship of teaching rather than disciplinary research (Probert, 2013).

Contrary to established conventions where research productivity is the dominant criterion for promotion to full professor, especially at research universities (Parker, 2008; Chalmers, 2011; Soudien and Gripper, 2016), traditional universities in South Africa are increasingly recognising teaching for promotion to full professor. Two teaching criteria were especially important for promotion to full professor: supervision and curriculum design. Aligning these criteria with institutional and national targets, or benchmarks, could have implications for the wider social context. Firstly, supporting professors to meet postgraduate supervision targets set out in promotions criteria which are correlated with institutional targets (linked to national targets) could expedite doctoral production in the country (Cloete *et al.*,



2015) and collaterally enhance university rankings. Secondly, given the current discourses about curriculum reform in the country (CHE, 2013, 2016a), the leadership role of the professoriate in designing undergraduate curricula has implications for what is being taught in university curricula. More so than lower-ranked academics the professoriate has the power to initiate and lead curricula change.

Broadly, the findings also show that promotions policy, processes and decision-making by committees are similar across public universities irrespective of institutional type. This tendency towards institutional isomorphism in academic promotions, it could be argued, may be a result of the coercive forces of external pressures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1983). When institutions face multiple external pressures and their external environments are interconnected, their success is often dependant on their responsiveness to these demands and expectations. Hence, institutions tend to conform to collective norms (Oliver, 1991). The convergence in regulations governing academic promotions policies signals that South African universities may be ‘conforming collectively’ by moving towards greater recognition of the importance of teaching in response to several imperatives such as the sector-wide growth in student enrolments, demographic changes in universities, poor student performance (Cloete, 2016) and the increased attention being paid nationally to university teaching through the QEP (CHE, 2014). Institutions are recognising the social worthiness of valuing teaching in academic promotions in a dynamic, rapidly changing higher education context. Moreover, universities could be seeking stability and predictability in how they award academic promotions to cater for transfers of staff between institutions — especially in a system where the number of suitably qualified academic staff at the ranks of the professoriate is predicted to be decreasing as they approach retirement age (HESA, 2010; Cloete *et al.*, 2015).

However, there is some variation in the way promotions decisions and criteria are regulated at each institution. The divergence in the choice between applying university-wide or faculty-specific criteria and the varying levels of adjudication for promotions decision-making may be influenced by institutional habit and convention. These traditions may be underpinned by values which are not explicitly agreed to or written down (Samuel, 2017) and may vary among departments. Thus, academic promotion is subject to the disciplinary-influenced customs, traditions and practices of those charged with making decisions about promotion (Olivier, 1991; Ornstein *et al.*, 2007). This has the potential to maintain a deeply embedded inequitable status quo and subvert institutions’ attempts to change promotions processes and criteria in order to address equity concerns.

Evaluation of promotion applications is conducted by committees comprising peers, senior colleagues and external referees from whom independent assessments and letters of support are solicited. However, these evaluations are subject to favouritism and bias especially if the promotion committee members are in the

same academic networks (co-authors, thesis advisors, research collaborators, etc.) as the applicant (Zinovyeva and Bagues, 2015). Therefore, stipulations in policy documents on including senior university academics, university administrators, academics from other institutions and academics from disciplines unrelated to the discipline of the applicant, are indicative of some of the strategies South African universities are using to try to minimise the effects of ‘old boys’ networks and patronage in academic promotions decision-making.

## Conclusion

This article has shown that teaching is gaining ascendancy as a complementary criterion to research in academic promotions policy. In South Africa, contemporary demands for curriculum reform and a decolonised higher education are shaping notions of ‘what is’ valued as academic work (Heleta, 2016). The idea that full professors work almost exclusively on research is being challenged by these contextual realities. Hence, more universities, especially traditional universities, are beginning to recognise teaching in academic promotions policy across all academic ranks. However, the formal recognition of teaching in promotion policy does not imply that is enacted in practice. The literature showed that the articulation of policies in practice was problematic because successful promotion outcomes are largely determined by research productivity (Chalmers, 2011).

Recommendations for further research include studies examining how other criteria such as community engagement, service and leadership feature in academic promotions and whether these criteria influence promotion outcomes in relation to the different promotion pathways in South Africa.

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