QEP Phase 1: Institutional Report

Due 11 December 2015

The aim of the institutional report 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, reflect on the journey towards enhancement and assess the extent to which the efforts have resulted in improvements.

INTRODUCTION

In September 2014 each university produced an institutional submission in which it provided information about what it was doing in relation to the four QEP Phase 1 focus areas. This included information about what was successful and less successful than had been hoped, as well as plans for the next 12 to 18 months and ongoing challenges. Information in the institutional submissions provided a baseline against which changes can be measured as the QEP progresses.

The institutional report is intended to indicate what progress has been made in bringing about, or working towards, improvements in each of the four focus areas. It is recognised that a fairly short time has elapsed since the institutional submissions were produced. Nonetheless, in the submissions universities indicated that there were a number of activities that were just starting or about to start. In addition, there may be a number of other activities that have been undertaken or initiated since QEP Phase 1 began in February 2014 that were not mentioned in the institutional submissions. In the institutional report it should therefore be indicated whether an activity is complete, in progress or in the planning stages. If an activity is not yet in the planning stages, it should not be included in the report.

While the institutional submissions were not evaluative because they were intended to provide baseline information, the institutional reports are evaluative. In these reports, evidence should be provided to back up claims of success. Where activities are still in the planning stages, an indication of what evidence will be collected is needed.

Given the complexity of university structures, universities could easily produce what Vincent Tinto calls "laundry list" of hundreds of activities undertaken by numerous departments, divisions or other administrative units across the institution. Such an undertaking would be extremely time-consuming and be of questionable value to the institution or the CHE. If they are to be more than a laundry list of activities, efforts directed at bringing about enhancements need to emanate from a shared set of institutional values and goals, along with a clear direction. These efforts will be manifested through structures, policies, resources, practices and activities at various levels within the university.

The institutional report should not comprise a comprehensive list of every activity an institution has undertaken related to the four focus areas. Furthermore, it should not be a repeat of what was in the baseline submission in 2014. The report should focus on *enhancement*, what the institution has done, or is in the process of doing, to improve.

The four QEP focus areas for Phase 1 are all affected by central university policies and priorities and operationalized at other levels of the university through one or more administrative units, which may operate relatively autonomously or in concert with other units, be they departments, faculties or support divisions. The institutional report should present a view at institutional level of what has *changed* during Phase 1 of the QEP. Changes might include, for example, structures, policies, posts, procedures, facilities, resources, priorities, infrastructure and modus operandi. One or more exemplars may be included from levels deeper down in the institution, such as a faculty, division or department, to illustrate specific aspects of successful manifestations of the change. For example, an institution may have implemented changes to its promotion policy that enable academics to progress to higher levels on the strength primarily of their teaching rather than discipline-based research. An exemplar might be the practices in a particular faculty that has devised an effective way of assessing teaching quality, and been able to promote several people who were not eligible for promotion on the strength of their discipline-based research output.

Not all changes will lead to the hoped-for improvements. Many well-intentioned initiatives have unintended consequences. Examples should therefore be included in the report of changes related to the four focus areas that failed to achieve the desired outcome either at institutional level or at a deeper level in the institution and that therefore need to be rethought.

One of the goals of the QEP is to develop codes of good practice for quality undergraduate provision. There are undoubtedly universal good practices, but these can be so generic that they are of little practical use. South Africa needs its own good practices for the South African context. And while there is great diversity in institutional contexts, the wider social and political context within which higher education institutions in South Africa operate is shared. The challenge, then, is to identify promising practices — practices that have been shown to be effective in a particular context — and to then distil out core elements of these practices, try them out in a number of other contexts and evaluate. Where core elements of promising practices can be extracted from their context and then successfully recontextualised in a variety of different contexts, good practices emerge that can form the basis of codes of good practice. This is represented in Figure 1.
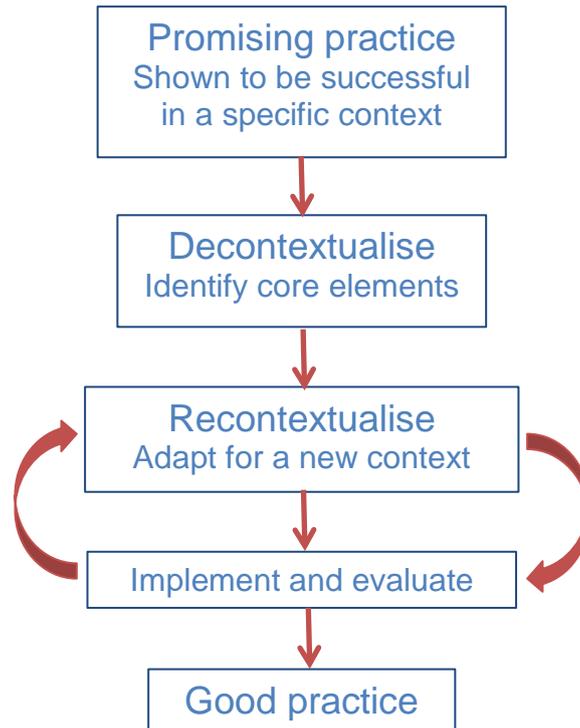
Figure 1: Diagrammatic representation of how good practices can arise from promising practices

In their submissions institutions should therefore describe promising practices — practices that have been evaluated and shown to be successful in their own context — and try to indicate what they believe to be the key features that make them successful.

In 2016 each university will receive individual feedback from peer evaluators on what it is doing well, how it has improved relative to its baseline submission, and where improvements are needed in relation to the four focus areas.

STRUCTURE OF THE INSTITUTIONAL REPORT

1. Introduction (suggested length 2-5 pages)

Indicate how the report was prepared. Include a list of the people that were involved, their designations and their roles in the preparation of the report.

2. Focus area 1: Enhancing academics as teachers (suggested length 10-20 pages)

Includes: professional development, reward and recognition, workload, conditions of service and performance appraisal.

This section of the report should make reference to all of the sub-topics listed above, either by discussing them individually or by integrating them. Note: it is not necessary to respond to each of the questions below for every sub-topic.

2.1 Summarise what the university considers to be the key issues in enhancing academics as teachers in one or two paragraphs.

2.2 During Phase 1 of the QEP, what changes at institutional level (a) have been made, (b) are in progress, or (c) are in the planning stages that relate to enhancing academics as teachers?

2.3 Provide one or more (but not more than 5) exemplars to illustrate specific aspects of the changes that are successful. Provide evidence for claims of success. Where an activity is in the planning stages, indicate what evidence will be collected.

2.4 Provide one or more (but not more than 5) exemplars of changes that have not been successful and suggest reasons.

2.5 If possible, identify one or more promising practices related to this focus area. Describe the practice and provide evidence for success. Suggest what the key features might be.

2.6 Identify the main challenges the university still faces in relation to this focus area.

3. Focus area 2: Enhancing student support and development (suggested length 10-20 pages)

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

This section of the report should make reference to all of the sub-topics listed above, either by discussing them individually or by integrating them. Note: it is not necessary to respond to each of the questions below for every sub-topic.

3.1 Summarise what the university considers to be the key issues in enhancing student support and development.

3.2 During Phase 1 of the QEP, what changes at institutional level (a) have been made, (b) are in progress, or (c) are in the planning stages that relate to enhancing student support and development?

3.3 Provide one or more (but not more than 5) exemplars to illustrate specific aspects of the change(s) that are successful. Provide evidence for claims of success. Where an activity is in the planning stages, indicate what evidence will be collected.

3.4 Provide one or more (but not more than 5) exemplars of changes that have not been successful and suggest reasons.

3.5 If possible, identify one or more promising practices related to this focus area. Describe the practice and provide evidence for success. Suggest what the key features might be.

3.6 Identify the main challenges the university still faces in relation to this focus area.

4. Focus area 3: Enhancing the learning environment (suggested length 10-20 pages)

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

This section of the report should make reference to all of the sub-topics listed above, either by discussing them individually or by integrating them. Note: it is not necessary to respond to each of the questions below for every sub-topic.

4.1 Summarise what the university considers to be the key issues in enhancing the learning environment.

4.2 During Phase 1 of the QEP, what changes at institutional level (a) have been made, (b) are in progress, or (c) are in the planning stages that relate to enhancing the learning environment.

4.3 Provide one or more (but not more than 5) exemplars to illustrate specific aspects of the change(s) that are successful. Provide evidence for claims of success. Where an activity is in the planning stages, indicate what evidence will be collected.

4.4 Provide one or more (but not more than 5) exemplars of changes that have not been successful and suggest reasons.

4.5 If possible, identify one or more promising practices related to this focus area. Describe the practice and provide evidence for success. Suggest what the key features might be.

4.6 Identify the main challenges the university still faces in relation to this focus area.

5. Focus area 4: Enhancing course and programme enrolment management (suggested length 10-20 pages)

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

This section of the report should make reference to all of the sub-topics listed above, either by discussing them individually or by integrating them. Note: it is not necessary to respond to each of the questions below for every sub-topic.

5.1 Summarise what the university considers to be the key issues in enhancing course and programme enrolment management.

5.2 During Phase 1 of the QEP, what changes at institutional level (a) have been made, (b) are in progress, or (c) are in the planning stages that relate to enhancing course and programme enrolment management.

5.3 Provide one or more (but not more than 5) exemplars to illustrate specific aspects of the change(s) that are successful. Provide evidence for claims of success. Where an activity is in the planning stages, indicate what evidence will be collected.

5.4 Provide one or more (but not more than 5) exemplars of changes that have not been successful and suggest reasons.

5.5 If possible, identify one or more promising practices related to this focus area. Describe the practice and provide evidence for success. Suggest what the key features might be.

5.6 Identify the main challenges the university still faces in relation to this focus area.

6. Reflection on Phase 1 of the QEP (suggested length 2-6 pages)

6.1 What has been the effect on the university of participating in the QEP for the past two years?

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

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.