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# Academic development for improved efficiency in the higher education and training system in South Africa

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# 1.   Introduction

In South Africa, academic development (AD) was introduced into the higher education system in the early 1980s in response to the perceived needs of the, then, small numbers of black students entering historically white, liberal universities. Volbrecht and Boughey (2004) note three 'phases' in the movement since that time. These phases, broadly termed 'Academic Support', 'Academic Development' and 'Institutional Development', are not distinct from each other and are indicative more of dominant discourses constructing what is appropriate as student support than actual periods of time. Following Chouliariki and Fairclough (1999), these formulations are understood to give rise to 'conjunctures' or relatively stable sets of social practices around specific projects (in this case student support). This is an important point as, in many respects, the student support practices which have characterised each phase (or each discursive formulation) have co-existed in many cases and, in some, continue to do so alongside dominant practices. The definition of AD as 'an open set of practices concerned with improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education' offered by Volbrecht and Boughey (*ibid*:58) attempts to capture this phenomenon with the word 'open' signalling that the student support practices which partly constitute contemporary AD work often stem from very different ideological and discursive positions.

The aim of this paper is to identify recommendations for the way academic development can be used to contribute to the improvement of efficiency in the higher education system in the medium (2020) to long (2030) term. Given the roots of student support practices in different ideological and discursive positions,  any recommendations will inevitably involve work in what might be termed the 'domain of culture' as discourses dominant in some institutional spaces will need to be challenged in order to allow for change. This is particularly the case given that it is mainstream academics, rather than AD practitioners themselves, who are usually most influential in deciding what can be introduced as student support at any number of institutional levels.

This paper will therefore begin by outlining the three phases of work in the South African AD movement, not only to make clear the assumptions underpinning each one but also to explore the conditions prevalent in the HE system over time, on the assumption that it is only through such a chronological analysis that substantiated recommendations for the future can be made.

# 2.   Academic support

## 2.1   Context and assumptions

As already noted, in the early 1980s, the historically white, liberal universities began to admit small numbers of black students as a result of 'relaxed state apartheid policies' (Pavlich and Orkin, 1993). In 1983, the apartheid government passed the University Amendment Act (Act 83 of 1983),

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also known as the 'Quota Act', in an attempt to control the number of black students these universities could admit. The universities resisted the Act vociferously maintaining their right to admit whomever they chose on the basis of academic merit and not any other criteria. Given this context, it is hardly surprising that these early AD initiatives were aimed at equity and equality rather than efficiency although, as will be seen, the extent to which they sometimes marginalised and 'marked' students as different raises questions about the achievement of these aims.

Torr (1991:624), gives an indication of the discourses underpinning early academic support programmes (ASPs) when she notes that they were 'developed to assist students without the necessary background to be able to benefit immediately from lectures and tutorials'. Key, then, to early ASPs was a deficit assumption about the students they served in the context of an assurance about the 'rightness' of the practices which characterised the institutions to which they had been admitted. Early initiatives were therefore inherently liberal in intent in that they focused on attempting to give black students 'equal opportunity' by filling the gap between their poor socio-economic and educational backgrounds and university.

## 2.2  Forms of student support

As a result of a review of AD literature, Boughey (2005) identifies a number of activities as characteristic of early academic support work, some of which continue to this day. The first area of work concerned access and admissions and attempts to identify students with the 'potential' to succeed in higher education in spite of their poor scores on the matriculation examination and disadvantaged backgrounds. Work in this area continues today and has resulted, most recently, in the development of the National Benchmark Tests (NBTs). Although problems in relation to the administration and use of tests at institutional level abound, overall it is fair to say that this strand of AD work has stood the test of time and considerable expertise has been developed in this area.

The second area of work identified by Boughey (2005) relates to attempts to address the phenomenon of 'disadvantage' or 'underpreparedness'. Widely held conceptions of 'disadvantage' or 'underpreparedness' tend to rely on commonsense assumptions in constructing students as: i) lacking skills; ii) experiencing gaps in conceptual knowledge areas; iii) in need of language development and iv) lacking the ability to think 'critically' although there is also some acknowledgment of the impact of social and personal factors in learning resulting in attempts to address 'personal growth' through the development of 'life skills'.

In the academic support phase, dominant assumptions were that these elements of 'disadvantage' could be addressed independently of mainstream learning by means of additional classes and tutorials and special courses and much of the early work in this area drew on popular, rather than 'academic', authors Tony Buzan (1974, 1984) and Edward de Bono (1970, 1971). Where academic research was

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used to inform practice in relation, for example, to work on approaches to learning derived from phenomenological research (Marton and Säljö, 1976; Entwistle and Ramsden, 1983; Biggs, 1987), as Haggis (2003) has shown, findings were often 'reconstructed' with the result that the constructs identified by the original researchers were shifted to something other than what was researched and the practices these shifts gave rise to were not underpinned by research. In the area of language development, the problems students experienced with reading and writing were usually understood in relation to their status as speakers of English as an additional language rather than in relation to theory which takes into account literacy as a socially embedded phenomenon (see, for example, Street, 1984, 1995) and which has the potential to provide richer and more satisfactory analyses of all aspects of students' experiences.

As already noted, the earliest initiatives were 'adjunct' in that they were located outside mainstream teaching and learning. Some of the earliest work went into 'bridging' and 'foundation' provision[1]. A study conducted by Pavlich and Orkin (1993) identified bridging and foundation work being conducted 'off campus' in technical and further education colleges, a phenomenon which speaks to the understanding of students deemed to be in need of support being 'other' to the students admitted for mainstream study in the Academic Support phase.

The earliest bridging and foundation work was located in non-credit bearing courses which 'prepared' students for tertiary study. Access to degree programmes was dependent on achievement in these 'stand alone' courses some of which took the form of short 'summer schools' while others were more substantial in length. In some universities (most notably Wits) the 'college' model was implemented in science faculties. This involved taking the first year of a standard BSc curriculum and teaching it over two years in order to allow for additional developmental activities to be infused into the curriculum. In some models, a certificated exit point was available to students judged not to be suitable for study beyond this foundation phase. Students who completed the two years of study successfully, however, were then able to proceed to study second year level courses in their third year of study.

Problems related to the difficulties students experienced once they left the foundation phase and needed to engage with mainstream teaching without any support were soon identified and, although there are no large scale studies, the AD literature abounds with observations regarding students beginning to fail once the foundation phase had finished. Writing in 1984, for example, Bradley notes that the progress of students once they have left a chemistry course is not good and observes 'the transition from Chemistry I (non-major) to Chemistry II (major) is another quantum leap... Frankly the failure rate of all students in Chemistry II is alarmingly high (p35).' In foundation

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1  For many AD practitioners, 'bridging' refers to a course which looks back into the school curriculum and attempts to upgrade students' performance on the school leaving examination. Foundation courses, on the other hand, look forward into the university in the acknowledgement that academic knowledge and academic learning are *qualitatively* different to school based practice.

courses, students were usually taught in small groups with lecturers using 'alternative' teaching methodologies intended to promote the construction of meanings rather than simply the transmission of knowledge. While students might have fared reasonably well in such nurturing environments, once into the mainstream they would frequently 'hit the wall' and began to fail. This concern is addressed by Kotecha and Rutherford (1987) amongst others.

Other 'adjunct' work took the form of tutorials, language development courses and skills courses and was often coordinated by a central unit staffed by practitioners who had been appointed on the basis of their expertise as teachers. The fact that these practitioners often had not achieved higher degrees and did not engage in research and publishing then affected their ability to engage with other academics on issues related to teaching and learning. As time has shown, the employment of teachers with little understanding of the way academic knowledge is constructed is also problematic given contemporary understandings of what it means to induct students into academic practices. In some of the earliest initiatives, there are complaints (see, for example, Tisani, 1991) that AD practitioners were forbidden to work with content by academic staff. The underlying assumption here would appear to be that i) the AD practitioners were not sufficiently qualified to work with mainstream content and ii) that skills and conceptual development could take place 'outside' content. This assumption has been shown to be deeply flawed as new understandings driven by both research and theory have emerged.

A final area of support in this early phase focused on students' social and psychological wellbeing with some institutions employing social workers and psychologists to work with them. Many academic support programmes also incorporated mentoring defined by Kitchin and Frame (1991:302) as '... a process whereby the student being mentored is *integrated* into the university and equipped to realise his/her potential as a successful and productive individual' (my italics). The focus in these early schemes thus tended to be on assimilating students into the academy and would thus be within the ambit of what Knoblauch and Brannon (1984) term a 'cultural literacy' model focused on the inculcation of western middle class norms and values.

## 2.3  Structural issues

In spite of the enormous energy, enthusiasm and financial resources put in to early student support work, it was not long before problems began to be identified. One of the first areas of concern related to students' attendance at the additional classes, tutorials and other teaching events. Several authors (including Yeld, 1986; Palazzo, 1987; Foggin, 1991; Dison and Selikow, 1992) report problems with student attendance particularly around test times and assignment submission dates. When other work was pressing, students would not attend tutorials. For some students, however, the need to sit a test or an exam appeared to prompt attendance with tutorial numbers rising as students sought assistance immediately before test dates. The effect of the adjunct nature of tutorial programmes on student attendance and commitment to developing the gaps they sought

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to address is something which plagued the AD movement through this early phase and was one of the factors in the call for 'mainstreaming' AD which characterised the next phase of the movement's history.

Most of the early student support initiatives were, of course, non-credit bearing and students deemed to be in need of support were required to enroll in these additional courses and activities. The need to complete the courses then meant that the time taken to complete a course of study was lengthened and this was perceived by many students as discriminatory. In support of the notion of compulsion, Scott (1984) argued that that fact that students in need of support frequently failed courses meant that the time taken to complete a qualification was lengthened in any case.

A solution to students' reluctance to engage with academic support requirements was to allocate credits to this additional learning. As Yeld (1986) pointed out, however if developmental work is credited *within the structure* of a 'normal' qualification by replacing some 'qualification' credits with 'development' credits then the overall 'value' or 'standard' of the qualification is ultimately lowered. The only way to overcome this phenomenon is to extend the length of the time taken to complete the qualification.

As already noted, the idea that students should be required to enroll in additional courses has been linked to discrimination. Compulsory attendance at additional tutorials and enrolment in additional courses also means that students are 'marked' as different in the eyes of their peers who are not required to attend. This marking is discriminatory in that it constructs students as less able and less 'clever' and when the marking is overlaid with issues related to race and social class, problems with this sort of student support become very clear.

## 2.4  Funding

As indicated at the beginning of this document, the earliest student support initiatives were directed at the small number of black students enrolling in the historically white liberal universities. Given this observation, it is not surprising that funding for the work came mostly from donors and that a great deal of effort needed to be put into fundraising by AD practitioners. This reliance on soft funding then meant that AD practitioners were mostly employed on a temporary basis with no prospects for career advancement. Over the years this has had a profound effect on the development of capacity in the field.

# 3.  Academic development

## 3.1  Context and assumptions

The seeds of the second phase of the development of the AD movement can be discerned in the mid-1980s in critiques which began to emerge of the universities themselves. In an article entitled 'White universities and the black revolution' published in a journal dedicated to the work of the

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academic support programmes at the historically white liberal universities, Vilakazi and Tema (1985) argued that it was not students who were in need of development but the universities themselves. This sort of statement needs to be contextualised within the understanding that, in a new political dispensation, the universities would need to adapt themselves to changed student bodies. As the decade came to an end and imminent change in the political order was signalled by the release of Mandela, the idea of 'institutional transformation' as the solution to the difficulties experienced by black students as they entered university increasingly took hold in the academic development movement.

Kraak (2001:87) terms the early 1990s as the 'pre-taking of power era' involving the 'mobilisation of the entire anti-apartheid movement behind the task of forging new policy propositions across the entire gamut of human existence'. For higher education, the most important policy document produced during this period was the National Education Policy Investigation (NEPI) Report (1992) on Post-secondary Education. The NEPI has been variously termed a unique 'civil society initiative' (Badat, 2003:6) and a 'people's education project' (Cloete, 2002:94). Given this background, equity was obviously a major issue and is defined in the documents as 'the improved distribution of educational resources to disadvantaged communities' (1992:11) and was constructed largely in quantitative terms. In higher education, this involved the provision of increased access for black students to institutions which still remained unequal in terms of resources and capacity. In the face of this overwhelming demand and need for equity, the relatively small and focused efforts of earlier academic support initiatives and the idea that academic support should cater to a 'disadvantaged' or 'underprepared' minority *rather than a majority* came in for major challenge (Mehl, 1988; Moulder, 1991).

The idea that 'underpreparedness' would eventually be a majority phenomenon was supported by the experiences of those working in ASPs which had been set up on historically black campuses (such as the University of Bophuthatswana) as the 1980s wore on. Partly as a result of the nature of South African society at that time but also because of important theoretical differences, by 1986 those working on historically black campuses had established a professional organisation named the South African Association of Academic Development (SAAAD). SAAAD existed alongside a group of practitioners from the historically white liberal campuses who had run an annual conference and who had published proceedings from that conference in a series named *ASPects* and another group who had formed South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education (SAARDHE) and who had set up a journal, the *South African Journal of Higher Education* (SAJHE). SAAAD became a rallying point for what, at that time, emerged as a vociferous and apparently radical opposition to dominant student support practices. Over time, a growing number of practitioners working at the historically white institutions came to adopt positions advocated by SAAAD and, eventually, to join the organisation which later became an overarching professional body for academic development practitioners.

Students' objections to ASPs and which manifested themselves in poor attendance at ASP tutorials courses have already been noted[2]. In a paper originally presented at the first SAAAD conference in 1986, Tema (1986) elaborates on the experiences which led to these objections noting that:

- 'Disadvantaged' students in the higher education system experienced themselves as survivors of an inferior educational system and, thus, as achievers rather than as victims who needed to be pitied and helped. The 'starting point is thus a student who is alienated by the very system that has been set up to help him' (p.29).

- The separation of academic support from academic subjects meant that many students were not able to perceive the benefits of academic support initiatives in their mainstream classes because of their 'diffused' nature. As Tema notes, this 'endorses the student's initial suspicion that someone is out to get him' (p.19) and 'becomes entangled in the general discriminatory ethos which prevails in the society at large' (ibid).

- Students experienced ASP as a function of the general deficiency model related to their social and cultural backgrounds. She goes on to argue that these backgrounds were simply different rather than disadvantaged.

In many respects, therefore, the shifts in thinking which characterised the second phase of the development of the AD movement is indicative of what might be termed a 'social turn' involving a movement away from a focus on individual behaviour and individual minds to a focus on the social and the cultural and the way these are implicated in power. Importantly it also involves a questioning of the attribution of agency to students as a means of determining their own success and acknowledges that disadvantage is not something students carry into the universities but is rather something which is derived from the institutions themselves. More significantly, however, it was also an acknowledgement that the student support practices which had characterised the first phase of the development were simply not sustainable in a context of massification.

At the beginning of this paper, the need to understand academic development as an open set of discursively constituted practices was pointed out and accompanied by the proviso that the identification of the history of the movement into three distinct phases was somewhat artificial given the co-existence of discourses and the practices these give rise to at any one time. Although a distinction has been made between 'academic support' and 'academic development' phases in this paper, it is important to note that much of theorising which led to the call for 'academic development' rather than 'academic support' and much of the sophisticated curriculum work characterising attempts to operationalise 'academic development' rather than 'academic support' was taking place from the earliest stages of the movement's history. The distinctions sketched in this paper must be understood, therefore, as crude and bald and as serving as analytical indicators rather than as definitive accounts of historical phases.

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2    Yeld (1986) provides an indication of the number of students early ASPs worked with and figures for attendance at ASP tutorials at UCT in 1982. Of the 100+ students registered for the ASP programme, fewer than 40 attended tutorials regularly, 20 attended erratically, 22 had dropped out and 35 never ever attended.

## 3.2  Academic development as institutional transformation

By the early 1990s, the academic development movement had engaged with a narrative focusing on the idea that institutions needed to be 'transformed'. Following on ideas presented by Walker and Badsha in a seminal paper published in 1993, this narrative took up the idea of 'infusing' student support into mainstream teaching and learning through staff development and curriculum development which would then contribute to a grander process of *institutional* development.

It is important to note that, at this point, discourses constructed AD work were still derived mostly from a concern with equity although the construct of equity arguably was not the same that had driven early student support initiatives which had drawn mostly on liberalism. By the early 1990s, the concern was the way structures such as curriculum, language, literacy and pedagogy intersected with race and social class in order to produce inequity. In line with this shift, AD practitioners increasingly began to draw on *social* theories to explain learning and theorists such as Gee (1990), Bourdieu (2002) and Vygotsky (1978) began to appear in the AD literature. Common to these theories was an understanding of academic life as a form of social practice to which some had more access than others because of previous social and cultural experiences. Also common was the understanding that access to academic practice was only developed over time through engagement with learning in the disciplines and through support which was embedded in those disciplines. Although the second phase of development of the AD movement draw on constructs of 'transformation' heavily, most of its work focused on giving students access to dominant practices through infused support rather than on, say, looking at how those practices could be changed in order to derive from a position which was not western, masculine and northern.

## 3.3  Infusion in action

The vision of institutional transformation outlined above clearly required a cadre of practitioners who could engage with mainstream academics and disciplinary structures. Given the constraints of the academic support phase which was characterised by the employment of practitioners on the basis of their ability to teach and the short term employment contracts associated with soft funding, capacity was in short supply. Very few AD practitioners had qualified at doctoral level and therefore had the status to engage powerful mainstream positions on the forms student support could take and very few had the capacity to produce the body of research which would be needed to challenge dominant thinking.

Nonetheless, thanks to more soft funding administered by the Independent Development Trust (IDT), the movement set about trying to achieve its aims through the development of AD units and centres which included individuals assigned to work with staff on curricula and on their development as educators in higher education. Some units established posts for research officers who were charged with conducting research on AD though the volume of research which resulted from these posts has not been established.

Much of the work in this second phase was 'project based' thanks to the nature of the IDT funding. Typical projects included attempts to 'embed' tutorials in mainstream teaching so that they became the responsibility of the department, a process which then allowed AD practitioners to focus on tutor development rather than tutoring themselves (see, for example, Davies and Tisani, 1993). Other projects centred on introducing new forms of pedagogy and curriculum structure (see, for example, Cornell, 1992; Cornell and Witz, 1993), on the development of language across the curriculum (see, for example, Boughey and Van Rensburg, 1994; Coetzee and Boughey, 1994; Motha and May, 1996). Critical to the success of these projects was the willingness of mainstream academic staff members to engage with the need for change as there was no structural need for them to do so. As a result, work completed during this second phase of development was patchy and had no guarantee that it would be sustained once individuals engaged in the projects moved on or when soft funding was exhausted.

One area of work which did not require the support of mainstream academic staff was student development work which took place in residence systems. Projects (see, for example, Mahatey and Kwenaite, 1994) aimed to improve the quality of life in the residences by setting up democratic structures which would address disruptive behaviour, counsel students on personal and other problems, and support learning through the establishment of study groups. Critical to work which focused directly on students was their involvement in setting up and evaluating the project and, for the first time, students began to appear at annual Academic Development conferences as participants in the AD movement.

## 3.4  Structural constraints

As already noted, funding in this second phase of development of the AD movement was from the IDT. As Fataar (2000) points out, budgetary reprioritisation rather than budgetary increase became the government's main mechanism in funding its commitment to equity in education following its failure to increase the total education budget in line with inflation in the three years from 1995 onwards. One of the most significant results of these constraints was that the 'redress funding' anticipated as a means of addressing historical imbalances in the higher education system as a whole and long awaited by historically black institutions (HBIs) in particular never materialised. The HBIs were then hit by another funding problem. In 1988, the standardised funding formula which, until then, had only been applied in relation to the historically white institutions (HWIs) replaced the 'negotiated' budgets which had previously been available to their historically black counterparts. The HBIs were happy to accept the application of the funding formula as it was linked to student numbers and they were experiencing considerable growth in this area at the time (Bunting, 2002a). When student numbers began to plummet from 1995 onwards (Bunting, 2002b), many HBIs found themselves in serious financial difficulties. As the HBIs fell into financial crises and as IDT funding was no longer available to support the 'transformation' initiatives, which had not always elicited

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much support from mainstream academics at the HWIs, became exhausted, the AD movement was hit hard.

A second structural constraint at this time was the collapse of SAAAD, the professional organisation which, thanks to funding secured in 1997, had developed a national structure, the Institute for Higher Education Development (IHEDSA) in South Africa, with the aim of driving the AD project at a national level. A corruption scandal in the IHEDSA national office resulted in the loss of funding and, as the Institute collapsed, so too did SAAAD leaving the AD movement with no structural support.

While the second phase of the development of the AD movement in South Africa offered much promise, in retrospect it can be seen to have failed because of failures at a structural level and because of conditions within the domain of culture. The lessons learned from both the first and second phases need to be borne in mind as the third phase, Institutional Development, is explored and a path for the future identified.

## 4. Institutional development

The third phase of the AD movement, as already noted, has been termed 'Institutional Development' (Volbrecht and Boughey, 2005) largely because of the way policy development at a national level since the early 1990s has the potential to impact on AD practice. Policy developments which have had implications for Academic Development include:

1. The introduction of the NQF and the outcomes based education (OBE) has led to possibility of 'aligning' entrance criteria, learning outcomes, associated assessment criteria, assessment tasks, pedagogical approaches, learning resources, credit values and more direct forms of student support in order to allow the programme to fulfill its purpose and produce the kind of graduates/diplomates/certificated individuals described in its purpose statement and indicated by its location on the NQF. Although OBE has been subject to strong critique because of its effect on what Muller (2008) terms the 'conceptual coherence' of some curricula, the construct of alignment provides institutions with a tool which can be used to ensure that students' needs are met and standards are maintained. Although this tool is available, it tends not to be used in institutions i) lacking capacity in the management of teaching and learning and where structures to manage teaching and learning are not in place, ii) lacking capacity in the field of AD itself iii) where cultural conditions mean mainstream staff are not prepared to engage with issues related to teaching and learning or iv) where mainstream staff lack capacity to work with curricular and pedagogical issues.

2. The establishment of new institutions and new institutional types as a result of the National Plan for Higher Education (NPHE) (DoE, 2001) has opened the way for i) a wider range of qualifications to be offered by single institutions and ii) specialisation and focus according to institutional type (traditional university, comprehensive university, university of technology). Although the

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delay in the development of the new Higher Education Qualification Framework has impacted on the way comprehensive universities and universities of technology in particular have been able to develop curricula which are relevant to their new roles, the availability of a range of qualifications from NQF Level 5 upwards in a single institution means that students can be placed in a programme which closely matches their learning needs and abilities. The ability to place students accurately is, of course, then dependent on  information about the students available on admission. If this information for placing were available and, if programmes were well aligned, this would have the potential to impact on success, throughput and graduation rates. Unfortunately, institutional procedures for placing students along with the lack of programme alignment mean that this potential is not always capitalised upon. Specialisation and focus by institutional type has the potential to impact in similar ways in that, for example, UoTs could be expected to develop the expertise to identify the students who could benefit from the types of programmes they offered and also to develop high quality specialised programmes which would support students through to completion. As Boughey (2010) has shown, however, the specialisation in teaching and learning required by universities of technology has not always been developed.

3. The long awaited finalisation of the HEQF means that all institutions will now need to review qualifications and the programmes leading to those qualifications in order to ensure they are aligned with the framework. This will entail a process of review which, ideally, should involve more than a paper exercise and which should take into consideration understandings of alignment outlined in point 1 above. For this to happen a number of things need to be in place at institutional level including  the will (on the part of management and mainstream staff) and capacity (on the part of AD practitioners and mainstream staff) to drive and implement the review process

4. The establishment of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) and the introduction of quality assurance to South African higher education. The HEQC is currently completing its first round of institutional audits. These audits have attempted to affirm an institution's own evaluation of the extent to which it has met criteria in a number of areas including teaching and learning. As Boughey (2009, 2010) has shown,  at an institutional level this has resulted in the development of quality assurance mechanisms including policies on teaching and learning and attempts to use feedback from students to enhance teaching and course design. Although quality assurance frameworks and mechanisms are in place to a greater or lesser extent at most institutions, the extent to which they are implemented in relation to teaching and learning varies enormously. In addition to audit, the HEQC also works in the area of programme accreditation. Institutions wishing to offer new programmes need accreditation from the HEQC before students can be enrolled. Programme accreditation processes require alignment of the curriculum noted in point 1 above. As well as accrediting new programmes, the HEQC has also conducted a number of national reviews of established programmes. Once again, the focus in the review is alignment of all elements of the programme in order to ensure that the programme is fit for the purpose it has identified for itself. A review of the work of the HEQC conducted in 2008

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(HEQC, 2008) identified national reviews as one of the most successful mechanisms for enhancing quality in teaching and learning. Since that time, no new national reviews have been conducted although a review of LLB programmes now appears to be underway. National reviews, like programme accreditation and institutional audit, depend on peer review and on the capacity of mainstream academics to make judgments regarding the quality. Although the HEQC has put a great deal of effort into the development of this capacity, arguably it is still not in abundant supply. The same review of the work of the HEQC cited earlier (HEQC, 2008) also called for more focused institutional audits. Given that the current cycle of institutional audits is now drawing to a close, the opportunity to develop institutional audit criteria focusing on teaching and learning which will drive the second round of audits presents a significant opportunity.

5.  The new funding framework related to three year rolling plans (DoE, 2004) allocates funding for teaching and learning on the basis of agreed enrolments and the extent and rate at which enrolled students then pass through an institution in order to graduate. Norms for success, throughput and graduation rates have been established and institutions with 'graduate shortfalls' (DoE, 2009:11) became eligible for a teaching development grant which replaces part of the output subsidy. Until now, although these grants have been earmarked and allocated to institutions for the development of *teaching*, no mechanisms have been in place to ensure that this development actually takes place. As a result, much of this funding has simply been used for institutional running costs. The recommendations of a review of teaching development grants in 2008 (DoE, 2008) have now been included in a recent Ministerial Statement on Funding (DoE, 2009) and, from 2011 a new system will be in place. This new system will make teaching development grants available to *all* institutions, not only those with performance falling 'below national output norms' (DoE, 2009:12). The grants will be allocated on the basis of plans submitted by institutions identifying i) programmes in which the graduation rates of disadvantaged students are significantly lower than those of advantaged students ii) what the DoE (*ibid*) terms 'killer' courses within those programmes (i.e. those courses in which large numbers of disadvantaged students fail) and iii) the interventions they would make to improve success rates in those courses. Annual progress reports would then be required on the way the grants had been used. This represents a significant improvement on the way teaching development grants have been allocated until now although the Ministerial Statement does not take into account the ongoing need for development in all courses if curricula are to remain relevant and if proactive measures are to be taken to prevent students failing. Most significantly, the change offers an important opportunity for AD work linked to the motivator of funding provided i) the will and capacity to manage grants at an institutional level and ii) the capacity on the part of mainstream academic staff and AD practitioners is available to drive curriculum development and the enhancement of pedagogy.

6.  Yet another funding mechanism impacting on Academic Development relates to the introduction of Foundation Programme Grants in 2000 as a form of earmarked funding. As noted in Section

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2.2 above, bridging and foundation courses were among some of the earliest forms of student support. As also noted, one of the problems with the earliest forms of this intervention related to the fact that these courses did not necessarily articulate with mainstream programmes. The DoE's foundation programme grants now require students to be admitted to 'Extended Programmes' or fully accredited programmes which have been lengthened by up to a year of additional study in order to allow for the inclusion of activities intended to support and develop students enrolled on them. In principle, this is a significant advance as it i) requires institutions to identify those students who could benefit from an extended programme and ii) design and offer programmes which include an 'integrated foundation phase. In practice, however, the potential of extended programmes is not always capitalised upon because of: i) poor placement procedures involving the identification of students who are weaker than students admitted to regular programmes when the success, throughput and graduation rates of the students admitted to regular programmes already fall far below DoE norms; ii) foundation provision based on commonsense rather than theory and research generated in the field of academic development over the last 25 years; and iii) the failure of the foundation phase to articulate with mainstream provision with the results that students continue to 'hit the wall' and fail once they exit the foundation phase. Once again, these issues related to management and capacity at institutional levels. Until now, the DoE has relied on the services of an expert group in order to award funding on the basis of a set of strictly applied criteria for funding. These criteria however only relate to the broad curriculum structure and not to course design. In addition, although the DoE analyse students' performance on Extended Programmes, no mechanisms are in place to identify those programmes where students still continue to fail. The CHE is currently exploring the idea of the introduction of a four-year 'extended' programme more generally. Such an initiative would have enormous implications for funding and other policies and is unlikely to be introduced in anything like the near future. A critical question, however, relates to the extent the higher education system would have the capacity to implement four-year programmes given some of the problems outlined above in relation to current extended programmes.

7. The use of HEMIS data as indicators of institutional performance linked to funding. In recent years, terms such as 'success rates', 'graduation rates' and 'throughput' have increasingly become part of institutional discourse as institutional leadership and management teams have tried to manage performance in order to maximise subsidy income. One effect of the inclusion of these terms in institutional discourse is very evident in AD related discourses where practitioners often construct their work within the need for improved efficiency measured by increased throughput and success and graduation rates. Linked to this phenomenon, and also to the work of the HEQC which has stressed the use of institutional data in managing quality in its audit processes, is the idea of 'tracking' which is increasingly gaining prominence. This involves the use of a data base to: i) track students' performance against the criteria used to admit them to the university in order to validate those criteria; ii) to identify students 'at risk' on the basis of their performance on assessment tasks in the courses they take in order

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to offer appropriate interventions; and iii) to identify courses with high failure rates in order to effect some sort of curricular or pedagogical intervention. Not all institutions have tracking mechanisms in place and, even where systems have developed, the structures which allow students identified as being 'at risk' are not always sufficient to provide the support and development required. Once again, development in this area requires the will and capacity to manage tracking and the will and capacity to effect improvement at institutional levels.

8.  Section 2.2 notes that admissions testing has a long history in the South African academic development movement. The latest tests, the National Benchmark Tests (NBTs), developed under the auspices of Higher Education South Africa (HESA) are the latest generation of a long line of tests developed thanks to the expertise of the Alternative Admissions Research Project at the University of Cape Town. The NBTs, which test students in the domains of Academic Literacy, Quantitative Literacy and Cognitive Academic Mathematical Proficiency, aim to identify three kinds of students: i) students who can be admitted directly into a regular programme and be expected to succeed without any additional form of support; ii) students who can be admitted into a regular programme and can be expected to succeed with support deemed appropriate by the institution; and iii) students whose learning challenges are so severe that they could not be expected to cope in regular programmes and would need to be admitted to some form of non-credit bearing preparatory programme. The NBTs have been piloted and are now offered at venues across the country in the year prior to that in which students seek admission to institutions of higher education. Although the NBTs offer a powerful mechanism for placing students in appropriate programmes, their administration at institutional level means that the mechanism does not always live up to its promise. At many universities, students 'walk in' to campus in February having made no previous application. This means that, if the tests were to be used, then they would need to be administered in February as students were on the campus unless institutions were willing to refuse all 'walk ins'. Alternatively existing structures to prepare students for university admission (career guidance, advice about applications, advice about programmes etc) would need to be enhanced so that they functioned effectively and students could be guided into taking the tests in the year prior to their admission and counselled on results. For the tests to be used optimally, there would also need to be a focus on the development of capacity in managing and developing teaching and learning at institutional levels and particularly on the ability to develop appropriate interventions at the level of curriculum.

# 5.  The way forward

## 5.1  Structures and capacity

As Boughey (2005, 2007) notes, the Academic Development movement has responded to policy and other developments at a national level by constructing its work as a form of institutional development. In practical terms, this means that former Academic Development Centres/Units

have become Centres for Teaching and Learning or Centres for Higher Educational Development. The dependence on soft funding in the two earlier phases of the movement and the concomitant effect on the development of capacity (measured by the extent to which practitioners 'stayed the course' and obtained the high level qualifications and research records to be able to engage with academic peers as equals) inevitably impacts on the current phase, however. This phenomenon continues today in relation to AD practice at foundation level where the grant based nature of DoE funding means that most institutions are unwilling to offer permanent positions to staff employed to teach on the programmes with the result that research and theory developed in the field is not capitalised upon as the capacity to do this is lost on an ongoing basis as practitioners leave the field for better employment prospects or is not developed because of the short term nature of their appointments.

At more senior levels, institutions have also responded to policy and development at a national level through the appointment of Deputy Vice Chancellors (DVCs) Teaching and Learning or other senior positions. In many cases, however, appointees particularly to DVC positions do not always have the expertise in teaching and learning to make informed decisions about managing these areas of academic work and are thus reliant on capacity lower down in the institution to do this.

## 5.2  Funding

In relation to funding, although Teaching Development Grants have been available since 2004, there would appear to be little to show as a result of their availability. Institutions which have established Teaching and Learning Centres or Centres for Higher Education Development have provided permanent positions for these structures although, in many cases, more posts are needed if the work of these structures is to be effective. The narrow focus on the use of the Grants in the recent Ministerial Statement (DoE, 2009) identified in point 5, Section 4 above, which was not identified in the report of the Task Team on Teaching Development Grants (DoE, 2008), possibly needs to be challenged especially as the Grants will amount to 20% of the teaching output allocation for 2010/11 and 2011/12 and given that money might need to be spent on institution-wide capacity to work with the development of aligned curricula rather than in programmes and courses. There is, however, a funding mechanism for work on teaching and learning available for the future.

In the same vein, the Reference Group appointed by the DoE to advise on the allocation of Foundation Programme Grants with the help of DoE officials has moved to structure Grant allocation into a format which will allow it to be part of the planning related to three year rolling cycles. If Foundation Programme Grants were to be formalised in this way, there would cause for institutions to appoint staff working at foundation level to more permanent positions[3] and which would thus allow for capacity in this area of work to be developed.

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3    Many practitioners are currently working on 11 month contracts.

The new Minister of Higher Education and Training has indicated that a review of the funding framework will take place. If this does happen, then clearly some input needs to be made to the process in relation to the use of Academic Development for improved efficiency along the lines indicated in this document.

One other area of potential funding, given the need for capacity development identified throughout this paper, exists in the Sector Educational Training Authorities (SETAs) although indications are that a review of their functioning and purpose will also take place. This point will be taken up in Section 5.3 below.

## 5.3 'Cultural' considerations

Although much has been learned in the 25 or so years since the inception of the AD movement in South Africa, the tendency to rely on commonsense rather than on theory and research is still evident amongst newcomers to the field and, even more significantly, amongst mainstream academic staff. The continued dominance of commonsense (and the calls for practice this gives rise to) is partly due to the status of the field of AD itself on the 'margins' of institutional life. It is only where practitioners have managed to acquire status by attaining doctoral level qualifications and researching and publishing that AD has moved from the margins although, even then, there is evidence (Boughey, 2009) that it still is not always central to the academic endeavour as understood by mainstream academics. The need for work in the domain of culture is clear but this will only be possible, given current conditions, if capacity is built in the field of AD itself.

Cultural conditions impact on teaching and learning in other ways. As Boughey (2009) has shown as a result of a study of 'research intensive' universities, the privileged position of research in institutional life (attributable partly to the nature of universities as producers of knowledge but also to the funding formula) means that academics' activities as researchers tend to be protected from those who would like to 'manage' teaching and learning in order to improve efficiency. The same study (Boughey, 2009) also shows this group of universities appealing to the construct of 'academic freedom' along with academics' argumentative natures in order to substantiate the use of a 'light touch' in relation to the management of teaching and learning.

In another study on teaching and learning in the universities of technology (Boughey, 2010) another set of cultural conditions have been identified. In contrast to their peers at so called 'research intensive' universities, academics at the universities of technology appear to be much more compliant. This does not mean, however, that they are willing to engage with what needs to be done in relation to the need to improve teaching and learning largely because of: i) lack of capacity; ii) the very heavy teaching loads which result from the technikon legacy; and iii) ways in which teaching, learning, teachers and students are constructed. The universities of technology are battling with the need to upgrade the qualifications of their staff in order to make the shift to becoming: i) universities;

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and ii) universities of *technology.* At the same time, there is cause to enhance the capacity of staff as professional educators in higher education. Demand for change is thus complex and multidimensional and needs to be understood within a set of cultural conditions.

In other institutions, most particularly HBIs and those universities which have resulted from mergers and incorporations (Boughey, ongoing) the legacy of apartheid has left staff demoralised and exhausted. Material conditions due to the lack of funding and the lack of management expertise mean that many academics have to work under extremely difficult conditions and, in these cases, the culture is arguably one of survival rather than of striving for enhancement.

## 5.4 Structural conditions

The institutional mergers which took place from 2004 onwards have resulted in many multi-campus institutions. Thanks to the legacy of apartheid, there are often huge discrepancies in provision across these different sites of delivery. Often this is most evident in the material conditions of residences and teaching facilities. Clearly, students cannot be expected to learn unless the material conditions for them to do so are in place.

Recent protests regarding free education for all have also highlighted student funding and a review of the National Student Financial Aid Scheme (NSFAS) has recently been completed. Finances are critical to students' ability to study. Work in this area needs to continue if improvements in learning are to be achieved.

## 5.5 New initiatives in academic development work

As already noted in Section 3 of this document, calls for the development of staff as professional educators in higher education were characteristic of the 'Academic Development' phase of the development of the AD movement. Very few formal initiatives were developed to meet this call although AD practitioners consulted widely with academics on issues related to curriculum design, assessment and pedagogical approaches. In the last ten years or so, formal programmes leading to qualifications such as the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education (PGDHE) and Master's in Higher Education have been developed. In addition, there has been a focus on developing the capacity of academic staff as assessors of student learning and a number of short courses are offered by the public universities and private providers in this area.

Many Teaching and Learning Centres/Units have desires/plans to run formal programmes on teaching and learning in higher education although capacity issues often mean that these do not come to fruition. Where formal programmes do exist, then there is evidence (Boughey, ongoing) that material and cultural conditions at institutional level mean that the take up of these programmes does not merit the investment in them. Given these observations, there would appear to be a case for collaboration, both nationally and across regions, in relation to the professional development of academic staff as educators in higher education.

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## 5.6 Academic development for improved efficiency

This concluding section of this document aims to bring together the many points raised in the discussion so far into a framework aimed at promoting Academic Development for improved efficiency for the medium (2020) and long (2030) term. It begins by identifying some of the key elements needed to take the field forward.

### 5.6.1 A national coordinating structure for capacity development and research

Throughout this document, the need for the development of capacity in relation to the enhancement of teaching and learning and the management of teaching and learning has arisen repeatedly. In South Africa, attempts to promote and manage capacity building and research have been the domain of professional organisation such as SAAAD (see Section 3.4 above), the South African Association for Research and Development in Higher Education (SAARDHE) and more latterly of the relatively newly established  Higher Education Learning and Teaching Association of Southern Africa (HELTASA). Although a capacity building directorate has been part of the HEQC since its establishment, this has not functioned as well as it might arguably because of the capacity problems the directorate itself experiences.

In developed countries, the development of capacity and of research on teaching and learning has also been an issue which has been addressed through the establishment of a national coordinating structure. A case in point would be the Higher Education Academic in Britain. The range of policy and other developments available to structure improvements in teaching and learning has been outlined in Section 4 above. Arguably what is needed is a national structure which will contribute to the development of  capacity at institutional level to work with policy and other developments to maximise their effects. A number of options exist in this regard. It would be possible to strengthen existing structures within the HEQC or establish a new structure harnessing the interest and support of professional organisations as this is done.

| National coordinating structure | |
|---|---|
| Medium term | • Establish national structure to coordinate capacity building and research in relation to teaching and learning in higher education through discussion with existing structures and all stakeholders<br>• While a national structure is being developed, support the work of HELTASA as a professional organisation involved in capacity development |
| Long term | • Develop and build the effectiveness and efficiency of the structure |

### 5.6.2 Sustained development of the work of the HEQC

As Sections 2 and 3 attempted to show, student development and support is not dependent on adjunct activities but rather on the structure and quality of programmes themselves. Given that the HEQC uses the definition of 'fitness for and of purpose' in relation to quality, in the context of

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this understanding, its work in programme accreditation, national reviews and institutional audit is clearly critically important for teaching and learning.

Although there is much still to be done, the structures to assure and enhance quality in teaching and learning are in place and the HEQC arguably has an excellent record in what it has done so far. Most significantly, its work does not appear to have led to the bureaucratic excesses reported in relation to quality assurance in some of the international literature. Equally significantly, the HEQC is aware of this risk and commissions research on and evaluation of its work on an ongoing basis.

The HEQC functions under the auspices of the Council on Higher Education which, in recent years, has experienced a number of changes in leadership at the highest levels. A new Chief Executive Officer has now been appointed and some stability can now hopefully be expected. In the long term, the development of the HEQC as a structure which can contribute to the efficiency of teaching and learning needs to be supported.

A number of opportunities present themselves for the short term. As already noted, the current round of institutional audits is coming to an end and a review of the HEQC has argued for a more focused approach on teaching and learning in the next round. If this is to happen, then new criteria need to be developed and this presents an opportunity for changes at a number of levels. Criteria, for example, could identify *inter alia* the need for the development of capacity in relation to teaching and learning at institutional level particularly in key positions such as programme coordinators or the need for staff on probation to complete a qualification in the assessment of student learning as part of their own professional development and 'fitness to practice'. Clearly, these criteria would need to be developed as a result of collaboration with stakeholders from across the sector, a practice which the HEQC has always employed.

It would appear that a national review of LLB programmes is likely. More reviews need to be planned in the future possibly focusing not on the qualifications to which programmes lead but on other features such as the extent to which programmes incorporate large classes, distance learning and so on. The higher education system has been working with the need and proceedures for programme accreditation for some time now and the HEQC is aware that, at times, there have been backlogs and problems in this area. Work on programme accreditation and review clearly has the potential to contribute to teaching and learning.

| Higher Education Quality Committee | |
|---|---|
| Medium term | • Develop new criteria for institutional audit focusing on teaching and learning<br>• Identify areas for national reviews of programmes<br>• Refine and develop procedures for the accreditation of new programmes |
| Long term | • Support the development of the work of the HEQC |

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### 5.6.3 Implementation of the HEQF

Although the new HEQF has been finalised, clarity on its implementation is not always evident at institutional level in spite of the fact that the need to conform offers enormous opportunities for recurriculation and, thus, for the programme alignment.

| Higher education qualifications framework | |
|---|---|
| Medium term | • Develop and disseminate clear guidelines regarding the implementation of the framework<br>• Use HEQC audit criteria to promote the principle of alignment in relation to the registration of programmes |
| Long term | • Institutions, particularly UoTs and comprehensives, to develop specialised understandings of the programmes they offer and what it means to offer them.<br>• These understandings to draw on sophisticated models of curriculum and knowledge structures. |

### 5.6.4 Extended programmes/four-year programmes

The recent investigation by the CHE on the feasibility of introducing four-year, or extended, programmes on a wider basis than that currently available as a result of the introduction of Foundation Programme Grants is clearly an important step in ensuring that the learning opportunities offered to students are aligned with their readiness as they enter higher education. The more widescale introduction of four-year programmes is clearly a long term goal. In the meantime, however, there is much to be done in relation to the current programmes funded by Foundation Programme Grants.

| Extended programmes | |
|---|---|
| Medium term | • Link the funding of current extended programmes with an integrated foundation phase to three-year rolling cycles in order to facilitate more stable employment for AD practitioners working at foundation level<br>• Coordinate development of capacity building in relation to curriculum and pedagogy in order to feed in to the more widespread introduction of a four-year programme |
| Long term | • Widespread use of well designed, planned and funded four year programmes |

### 5.6.5 Develop the capacity of academic staff as professional educators

One of the most important lessons to be learned from the academic development movement is that student development cannot be achieved separately from mainstream teaching and learning. Clearly the development of academic staff as professional educators in higher education is critical in this regard.

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| Professional development of academic staff | |
| --- | --- |
| Medium term | • Explore regional collaboration in order to offer/develop professional development programmes<br>• Focus on staff development in HEQC audit criteria<br>• Continue to develop capacity of AD staff to work in professional development |
| Long term | • Change in cultural conditions at institutional level in order to facilitate acceptance of the need for academics to develop expertise in teaching and learning |

### 5.6.6 Placement testing

The NBTs are now available nationally as a means of placing students in appropriate programmes. Work on registering qualifications on the HEQF and developing programmes leading to these qualifications opens up a wider range of opportunities for placement.

| Placement testing | |
| --- | --- |
| Medium term | • Promote the use of NBTs as placement tests<br>• Develop capacity at institutional levels to place students on the basis of test results<br>• Develop capacity at institutional levels to align programmes so they meet the needs of students on the basis of test results |
| Long term | • Develop more effective structures to guide and counsel students into higher education |

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# Discussion – 17 April 2010

A presentation based on the paper prepared for the DBSA, Academic Development for Improved Efficiency in the Higher Education and Training System in South Africa (Boughey, 2010), was made and extensive discussions followed. The key issues raised included:

## 1. Progress over several decades

It was noted that over the last two decades, starting in the 1980's academic support was born in response to the "perceived needs" of a small number of "black" students into historically white institutions. Over time this has evolved into academic support, academic development and then into Institutional development. They deal essentially with improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education. A host of structural advances and the massification of institutions post-1994 have influenced their nature. These structural advances include introduction of the NQF/OBE; new institutional types; the HEQC and HEQF; and funding of teaching and foundation programme grants (see details in the paper). Currently Foundation Programme grants and Teaching Development Grants are available for this function. Currently efforts are made to test students and assist them with placements, but for a variety of reasons, this process is not yielding results and much work still needs to be done.

## 2. Scale of the challenge

It was noted that the challenges are deep systemic issues and would take a long time to resolve. That with increased access and the large growth in enrollments significant numbers of students require support. Participants said that 70% of all students, of all races, required support; even "at Venda". In order to facilitate participation in some courses, some institutions offered courses to enable students to pursue a course of study they would otherwise not be able to do, e.g. maths for those who only did maths literacy at school to enable students to do engineering related courses.

It was noted by the participants that at least half of the students that enroll drop out and most of these students are African causing race distortions in the numbers that complete and resulting in loss of the gains made through access. The range of students who need support is from 70% of enrollment in some institutions/campuses to 100% in others.

It was noted that entry levels are low, the admissions criteria allows students to register for courses they will not cope with. The selection and placement processes are challenged by the criteria and by many students "walking on" to campuses early in the year. This leaves no time for counselling and even those students who are counseled are adamant about their choice. Potential of students is lost and frustrated by inappropriate choice of course/level (e.g. a student may perform better if choose to do a diploma instead of a degree).

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## 3. Learning and teaching is key

It was noted that "academic development" would be more appropriately referred to as teaching and learning, as these are the key activities.

The challenges to learning include better information, perhaps in grade 9 so that subject choices are appropriately made; selection and placement into courses enhanced by guidance; arrangement of finances for accommodation, travel, food and fees before the first year starts. The need to take on additional courses and support through the demands of university expectations then need to be integrated over the years.

The challenges of teaching include qualifications of academic staff; ability to deal with diversity; language issues and the methods through which teaching occurs. Academic development practitioners, support staff and teaching staff have roles to play, hence the concept "institutional development".

It was noted that in addition to teaching and learning, issues of safety and security are very important and are a serious concern, more especially for women students.

What is required is appropriate teaching and learning, and this requires all staff, both academic and non-academic to incorporate new ways of doing things. (It was noted that this was not about content or technical proficiency).

## 4. Schooling related

Participants raised a number of issues related to school and commencement at the HEI's. It was noted that matric results are not a reliable indicator for selection and that some additional process is required. Students need better information on what subjects they choose for the courses they wish to undertake (at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology, all engineering students have to do maths, before commencing their courses).

There is a hierarchy to which institutions students apply to and courses they wish to study based on general perceptions. Often when offered advice on suitability of their choice, they decline to take up the advice given to them. This situation is not helped by the admissions criteria, which are low and enable (did not get to sufficiently explore why criteria are low and can't be moderated in some way to enable access but mitigate negative consequences) students to register for programmes they will not cope with.

A four-year programme without changes in teaching and learning is not the solution on its own – it will just be more of the same.

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## 5. Way forward and interventions

*Academic development practitioners* need to be organised in a national structure to professionalise, share learning and manage issues. In order to support and build the discipline of research in academic development practice needs to be encouraged. Is there a role for DHET to strengthen the status of academic development? through e.g. establishing Chairs on scholarship of teaching and learning. Would the requirement of a teaching and learning report from institutions help focus issues? This aspect should be included in institutional reviews. It was noted that an expert network needs to be built.

There needs to be more consistency in *funding*, perhaps a three-year rolling funding of the Foundation Grant, which will enable the retention of experience and people who provide academic support (currently there are 11 month contracts in place).

*Upgrade capacity* of non/academic staff, to support students, by changing the way things are done through a change in culture at institutions. Perhaps improving teaching needs to be incentivised. For support to postgraduate students there is need to improve supervision skills. Language, maths and science are issues from school through to university, impacting on conceptual skills. This is a responsibility for every lecturer to remedy.