The New Qualifications Framework for Higher Education:

a second reader

May 1999

HIGHER EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS IN RELATION TO THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

CONTENT PAGE

INTRODUCTION TO THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK

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Certain critics of the report by the National Commission and the subsequent White Paper on higher education charges that both documents "are silent on curriculum transformation". The opposite has also been argued, namely that "the government wants to interfere in institutional autonomy through the introduction of the National Qualifications Framework (NQF)". What is incontestable is that for the first time in decades there is a heated debate and some remarkably innovative activities occurring in the area of curriculum transformation and its corollaries; programme and faculty restructuring. These changes are having enormous implications for higher education in terms of how curricula are accredited, structured, funded and ultimately, how knowledge and institutions are organised.

The First Chet Reader (June 1998) aimed at providing "questions - and - answers" regarding the NQF, gave some examples of new qualification development and started skirting around some issues and contestations.

This Second Reader is compiled from two workshops organised by Chet in collaboration with the eastern seaboard Association of Tertiary Institutions (esATI) at the University of Durban Westville (14 September 1998) and with the Eastern Cape Higher Education Association (ECHEA) at Rhodes (22 October 1998). These two workshops tackled in a more up front way than the first workshop some problems, issues and disagreements that are beginning to emerge around both the NQF and "programmes". It contains some of the papers presented at these workshops, a report on the workshops and an analytical commentary on issues such as defining programmes, interdisciplinarity, coherence, cognacy and relevance. It also flags major emerging problems such as a possible decrease in portability and a widening gap between the technikons and the universities and between historically advantaged and disadvantaged institutions.

THE NQF IN HIGHER EDUCATION: POLICY, PREMISES, PRICE AND POSSIBLE PROGRESS

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CHET is to be thanked for widening and deepening the debate about the implementation of the NQF in South African Higher Education. The more-or-less bloodless democratic transformation of 1994 brought to power a government that had previously used a variety of policy incubators to shape its agenda for reconstruction and development: out of many of these came a policy commitment to a national qualifications framework (NQF) that would serve

> **retrospectively,** to provide redress generally and proper opportunities for promotion through recognition of knowledge and skills acquired in an apartheid system full of access blocks and inequities, and
>
> **prospectively,** to integrate education and training, to increase portability of qualifications and to promote life-long learning, to enhance quality, to remove the separate, closed hierarchical systems in which structured power bases of the few laid down the law to many other stakeholders, and generally to strengthen the skills base for growth in the economy.

Establishing a comprehensive NQF is therefore firm government policy, and the SAQA Act of 1995 represents its enabling legislation, with the recent Skills Development Act following in the wake.

The implementation of developed and legislated policy is always problematic in the changing context of history where the only certainty is that the future will not be what you expect it to be. The more comprehensive the scope of a policy is, the more inertia it encounters. Combining these two considerations, one can conclude that the more the context changes and the more inertia accumulates, the more the premises on which a

policy is based will be subject to challenge. Strong leadership is therefore required to prevent policy from faltering under these conditions, but it is wise leadership which continually checks the premises on which policy is based, and adapts the details or the implementation pathway when this is necessary.

Some of the premises on which NQF-related policy is based are:

> the NQF must be comprehensive to achieve the set retrospective and prospective objectives;
>
> the needs for horizontal and vertical portability (articulation) and life-long learning are at a very high priority level compared with other needs;
>
> quality standards must be uniform throughout the system;
>
> and they must be outcomes-based where performance can be assessed objectively as "applied competence";
>
> and they must be agreed to by multiple shareholders in the Education and Training/Business/Labour and general societal system.

The continued currency (nearly five years after the passage of the SAQA Act) of each of these premises can be supported by many arguments and challenged by others. In some cases, the arguments and the challenges can be located in theory and evidence, in others they concern cost (not only financial but also opportunity) and practicability. Some of the debate is reflected in this volume. Much further debate is needed, and more of it must involve Business and Labour, Government Departments and their policy chieftains, and Economists.

Possible progress? The NQF is slowly emerging from its almost conspiratorial world of arcane acronyms and inaccessible terminology and more and more persons are becoming comfortable enough with the basically simple conceptual framework to re-examine its value as a policy, its premises and its price. The possibility is increasing that the NQF will be "made by walking the road" rather than through the forced implementation of abstract ideology. Much was wrong with the pre-1994 education and training system in South Africa, including its higher education component; much is still wrong nearly five years later. We must think and talk this through, sooner rather than later, in order to create a better system that delivers crucial value to a country still on a knife-edge of success or failure.

18 MAY 1999

THE MAIN DEBATES AROUND THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK:

A TECHNIKON PERSPECTIVE

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1. INTRODUCTION

The response of higher education in South Africa to the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and all its attendant issues, has been diverse. The implied outcomes-based approach to learning, in particular, is the source of most discussions. At some level, the value and appropriateness of outcomes-based education is still being debated, while at another the approach is already being applied.

As a general statement it could be said that technikons have in principle accepted the NQF, its principles, concepts and approaches, and are engaging with them. One reason is that many of the concepts and principles are not entirely new. For instance, technikons develop qualifications on a consensus basis. This includes agreement on the learning programme for a qualification, its subjects and levels, and the credits associated with subjects. An outcome of this approach is that learners have considerable mobility between technikons. Importantly, technikon programmes, because of their career focus, have always focussed on the competence associated with a particular career path, offering programmes that integrate theory and experiential training. The challenges that the NQF poses for technikons may therefore be different to those for universities and colleges.

2. SOME CURRENT ISSUES FOR TECHNIKONS

The current approach of technikons to meet with the requirements of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) for the registration of qualifications, provides a perspective on how some elements of the paradigm shift associated with the NQF is challenging the technikon movement. For many there is the concern that precisely those elements which are meant to transform education and training, could end up affecting the quality of education negatively. Some of these concerns are highlighted.

2.1 The need to change the technikon qualification structure

The regulations of the SAQA Act (1995) define certificates and diplomas in an effort to establish a norm for, and generate a common understanding of, these qualifications. For technikons, this has significance for their existing and established National Certificates and Diplomas. The current technikon diplomas are, within government bodies and industry, considered as equivalent to first degrees. If the SAQA definitions are adopted, it means that technikons have to either offer first degrees after 360 credits, or omit this exit level and retain the professional degree (the current B Tech-degree) at 480 credits, or have both first and professional degrees. Whatever the outcome of this debate, it will mean coping with the confusion over diplomas in industry and the broader public. The altered structure therefore implies significant redevelopment work over the next eighteen months, in order to have technikon qualifications ready for final recording with SAQA by June 2000. This adjustment to the structure is much more than changing the names of the qualifications. Higher Certificates will not simply become diplomas, and degrees the former diplomas. The qualifications will have to be reconsidered in view of the level descriptors, and these are not yet defined.

2.2 Whole- or unit-standard-based qualifications

The career-focused nature of technikon qualifications means that the development of technikon qualifications are always accompanied by an analysis of the roles and competences for which a qualification is intended. For this reason the unit-standards-based definition of qualifications seems the obvious route. There is, however, concern that this approach may lead to a very utilitarian approach. Rather, technikons would like qualifications to prepare learners for the whole of life, and particularly for that unknown part of life that lies in the future. Technikons provide the environments that foster cognitive and value development that transcend mere utility and accountability to the State and community. To this end, qualifications then perhaps need to be a combination of career-focussed unit standards and broad outcomes focussed on life skills, that is, something between a “whole”- and “unit-standard-based” qualifications.

2.3 The effects of control

As a general statement it could be said that technikon qualifications are centrally controlled by the Department of Education, both through the publication of the instructional programme and all its requisites as input to learning, and the associated subsidy to institutions. Further control is exercised over the input through the requirement that a programme be expressed in terms of the so-called A, B, C distribution which refers to how psychomotor skills, application of knowledge and theoretical knowledge of the specialist field/discipline is distributed across and within the subjects of the instructional programme. The current central control of learning programmes does not encourage innovation, creativity and diversity, even though deviation of up to 30% is currently

allowed in the delivery of instructional programmes. It does have the benefit that learners have a high level of mobility between technikons, with subjects forming the basis for articulation.

Within the new paradigm, outputs, as defined for every qualification, will be controlled. In principle, the focus on the control of the outputs of education and training is welcomed, as it allows for far greater flexibility in developing and changing learning programmes to keep pace with local, national and international trends and changing information, without necessitating the redevelopment of the qualifications. There is, however, concern that the current high articulation potential may be affected as the currency for mobility shifts to the acquired credit for an outcome.

The structures and procedures introduced by the South African Qualifications Authority, particularly concerning National Standards Bodies (NSBs), raise considerable concern about the effect that such bodies and their procedures will have on the response of technikons to changing needs in industry and society. In principle, the wide consultation that will be effected through SGBs and NSBs is supported, but the process of consultation and submission of new qualification proposals could become so lengthy that it may be more controlling than the current process, particularly in the interim when NSBs are not yet fully functional. Currently it takes about 18 months from initiation to the implementation of a formal programme, and the concern is that if the new process increases this lead time, technikon qualifications may be outdated even as they are introduced. There is also concern that the constitution of NSBs does not make them imminently qualified to judge qualifications, and that, as a group, they currently lack the experience to do so.

2.4 The lack of progress with level descriptors

Level descriptors are particularly important for the process of restructuring technikon qualifications. The slow pace at which this fundamental issue is being addressed by SAQA could impede preparation for the June 2000 final registration of qualifications.

2.5 Articulation

It is accepted that credit for outcomes will be the basis for articulation, but how this is applied is important for technikons and higher education in general. Those that feel most secure with ‘consensus’ learning programmes would argue vigorously that articulation would at best be inhibited, and at worst impossible. The counter argument is that if learners move with credits for recorded outcomes, it does not matter that different providers use different learning programmes to enable achievement of the required outcome. The perennial argument of whether learners would have the same standard of learning at different institutions is not solved by offering the same learning programme.

Exit level qualifications are seen as the best option for articulation. Mobility between providers before the completion of a qualification could be problematic in the absence of

agreement on learning programmes. Learners may therefore be encouraged to persevere until some meaningful conclusion to learning is reached, thus acquiring credits that would be useful toward continued learning at the same or another institute, or in another course. The focus would be personal development, not satisfaction of subject requirements in different learning programmes.

Regarding the way in which credits for outcomes will feature in articulation, technikons do not foresee that unit standards will necessarily be translated directly as curriculum, but rather that a combination of unit standards will form the basis for learning modules. Consequently, incremental progression per unit standard, as may be relevant and applicable at lower levels, is not envisaged as the norm in higher education. What is envisaged is short courses that address a selection of unit standards and which can articulate with formal qualifications.

3. ARE THERE REAL BENEFITS?

Criticism of the new education approach abounds and this ground is therefore not covered again. There are, however, significant benefits to be gained if higher education providers are open to change.

3.1 Reflection on qualifications and their curricula

One of the greatest benefits of complying with the requirements of a single qualifications framework is that providers have to reflect on the qualifications they offer. This affords an opportunity to consider the merits of particular qualifications and to rationalise or consolidate qualifications that are outdated or overlap significantly. In addition, the learning programmes can be reviewed to ensure alignment between them and the defined outcomes that describe the qualification. It provides an opportunity for every provider to respond in innovative and unique ways in designing cross-disciplinary learning programmes.

3.2 Changing the roles of lecturers and students

In the new approach, lecturers could assume an enabling, supportive and facilitative role, focussing on the creation of environments where learners are encouraged to be more self-reliant, in stead of the traditional role of transferring knowledge.

4. WHAT ARE TECHNIKONS DOING NOW?

The net effect of the new approach and the NQF has been that comfort zones have been severely disturbed. The predictions of failure are clearly of no consequence and the hope that this will all go away quietly, unrealistic. Mostly there is now a sense of urgency and the realisation that constructive work is required. To this end, technikons have, as a sector, developed a plan of action, which consists of:

a phase of building capacity in developing outcomes;

a review of all technikon qualifications, together with the partners from industry;

a review of the learning programmes for the different qualifications by every technikon;

submission of technikon qualifications for final recording on the NQF by June 2000.

A network has been established across the technikon sector to co-ordinate these actions and to use the available curriculum expertise to the benefit of all technikons. In this way the technikon sector aims at developing a common understanding of the outcomes-based approach and its attendant concepts, and contributing to the national process of outcomes development in a meaningful way.

This initiative has also led to ancillary issues such as recognition of prior learning and extended curricula and quality assurance, being explored. Most technikons are considering or already developing and offering different forms of bridging for new learners. For many this is more than just reinforcing basic concepts and principles in the disciplines, but rather ways in which life skills such as thinking, reasoning, solving problems, and developing meta-cognitive skills (such as reflection on personal learning styles) can be developed. Programme quality will be a central concern, since external quality assurance will use the outcomes of a qualification as norm for evaluating the learning programmes, and ‘consensus’ learning programmes can no longer be blamed for inferior provision of learning opportunities.

TRANSFORMING HIGHER EDUCATION: LEARNING PROGRAMMES & ACADEMIC RE-ORGANISATION

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This paper is based on a discussion document that the University of Durban-Westville's Strategic Planning Task Team introduced to the university community for debate and deliberation as it tries to respond in an innovative way to conflicting demands on the University. Two such demands are the implementation of key higher education policies (such as programme based education) and the academic reorganisation of the University given diminishing resources as well as new challenges and opportunities. The Strategic Planning Task Team decided to deal with these imperatives by linking our emerging conception of "programmes" to different ways in which academic units (faculties, departments) could be reorganised. This strategy is done through the presentation of three scenarios. For each scenario we present its core organisational elements as well as its institutional consequences.

1. INTRODUCTION

The appointment of Professor Mapule Ramashala as Vice Chancellor and Principal in January 1998 accelerated the restructuring process at the University of Durban-Westville. This restructuring process was informed by three imperatives: new higher education policies (such as programme based education and quality assurance), changing resource demands placed on the university (e.g., declining enrolments and subsidy reductions) and new challenges and opportunities in the broader education landscape. In March 1998, the Vice Chancellor appointed an eight-person Strategic Planning Task Team (SPTT) comprising members of senior management, senior academic staff and a student representative, to investigate various models for restructuring the institution in the context of these pressing imperatives.

The **first phase** in institutional restructuring involved a comprehensive academic audit of all departments and units on the campus. The audit revealed, amongst others, the following academic weaknesses and strengths: declining pass rates as a result of large numbers of ill-prepared students; a skewed staffing model with some departments being

over-staffed and others under-staffed; declining revenue base in terms of government subsidy and fees; limited post-graduate training; academic training not geared to address market needs; regional competition from both public and private institutions of higher learning; a low public perception of the credibility of the institution; a lack of racial and gender diversity in the staff profile; low morale amongst staff; an organisational structure of departments and faculties determined by political rather than academic criteria.

The audit further indicated that there were pockets of excellence at the institution, providing eminently rated and unique teaching and research programmes. It also provided evidence of highly trained and committed staff often working against insurmountable odds to produce graduates that fulfil human resource needs and who are committed to the reconstruction and development of the country.

The **second phase** took-on the notion of programmes based education by trying to develop a sophisticated and yet workable conception of a "programme" and by linking our emerging conception of "programmes" to different ways in which academic units (faculties, departments) could be reorganised.

2. WHAT IS A PROGRAMME?

It is important to recognise that there is no stated definition of "programmes" within higher education policy even though the broad parameters for "programmes" are implied in these different documents. As a consequence, many higher education institutions have developed their own conceptions of programmes. However, there are broad parameters set down in policy for guiding our thinking about programmes. The first is academic coherence in the courses and degrees offered; the second is social or occupational relevance of the curriculum; and the third is the application of knowledge expressed in articulate outcomes which specify what students (learners) should be able to demonstrate at the end of a process of learning.

The University of Cape Town has defined a programme as an area or field of study from the first-year of entry into that field (e.g., BSc Environmental Education) to the highest qualification associated with that field of study (e.g., PhD Environmental Education). In other words, Environmental Education represents "a programme".

The South African Pharmacy Council, widely regarded as the frontrunner in working through the practical implications of new higher education policies, defines a 'programme' as "inputs required to achieve specified learning outcomes…." In other words, the broad learning outcomes should be specified first for a particular course (e.g. the capability to read and evaluate a prescription) which, together with the kinds of training and resources (inputs) identified, constitute a learning programme.

The M.L. Sultan Technikon, another leader in these debates, defines a "programme" simply as a qualification e.g. the BTech degree. In other words, a programme is

understood as a conventional qualification, which is typical of how universities organise their academic degrees and diplomas.

While these different institutions use different programme definitions, note that in each case they appear to satisfy the broad parameters for programme-thinking which we specified earlier: academic coherence, occupational relevance and knowledge application.

3. TOWARDS A UDW CONCEPTION OF PROGRAMMES

After much deliberation, the SPTT proposed, for debate within the wider university community, the following working definition of a "programme":

> *" A programme is a coherent set of courses and/or modules which advance knowledge and collectively skill individuals with particular competencies thereby making them more marketable".*

This definition encompasses four key features:

- The establishment of a coherent collection of courses and modules
- The advancing of knowledge
- The empowering of individuals with particular competencies
- The enhancement of the employability of our graduates

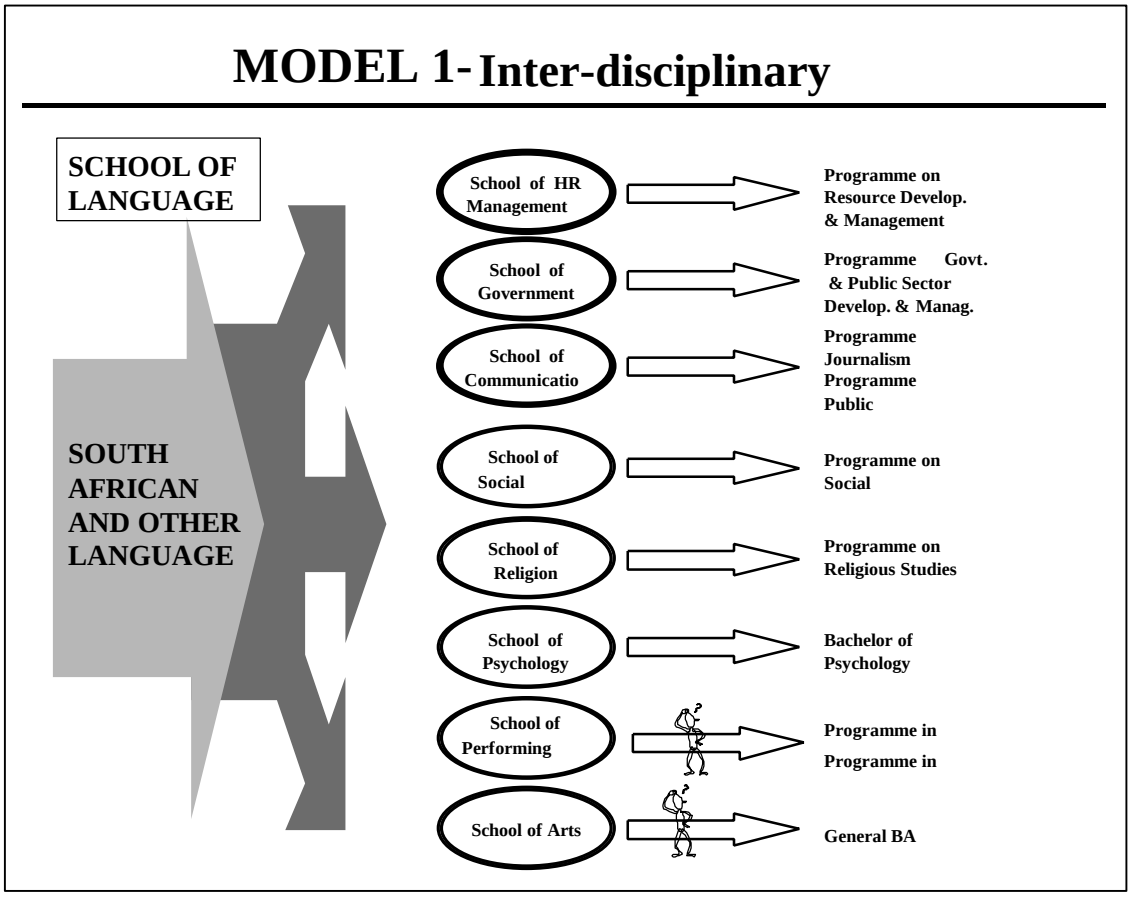
4. ORGANISATIONAL RESTRUCTURING OF THE ACADEMIC SECTOR

The **third phase** of academic planning saw the SPTT engaged in discussions and debates around various organisational models for restructuring the academic sector. The central question addressed in this phase was how to reorganise the academic sector in a way that would allow for greater financial efficiency and more effective governance, while at the same time ensuring greater relevance and appropriateness in the content and form of knowledge production within the context of a developing economy. Three models were identified, albeit each with associated strengths and weaknesses. The three models identified are as follows:

- Inter-disciplinary Model
- Conventional Discipline Model
- Market-Driven Model

It should be noted that the three models described in greater detail below all use the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities as an example. This Faculty was chosen deliberately because it is perhaps the most difficult to reconfigure to programme design, in part because it does not offer professionally-based but rather discipline-orientated

training, the latter accomplished within a formative degree structure with students having to decide on how best to achieve programme (degree) coherence. Faculties with professionally based disciplines, for example, the Health Sciences and Engineering, are easily reconfigured because their current offerings already conform to programme design.

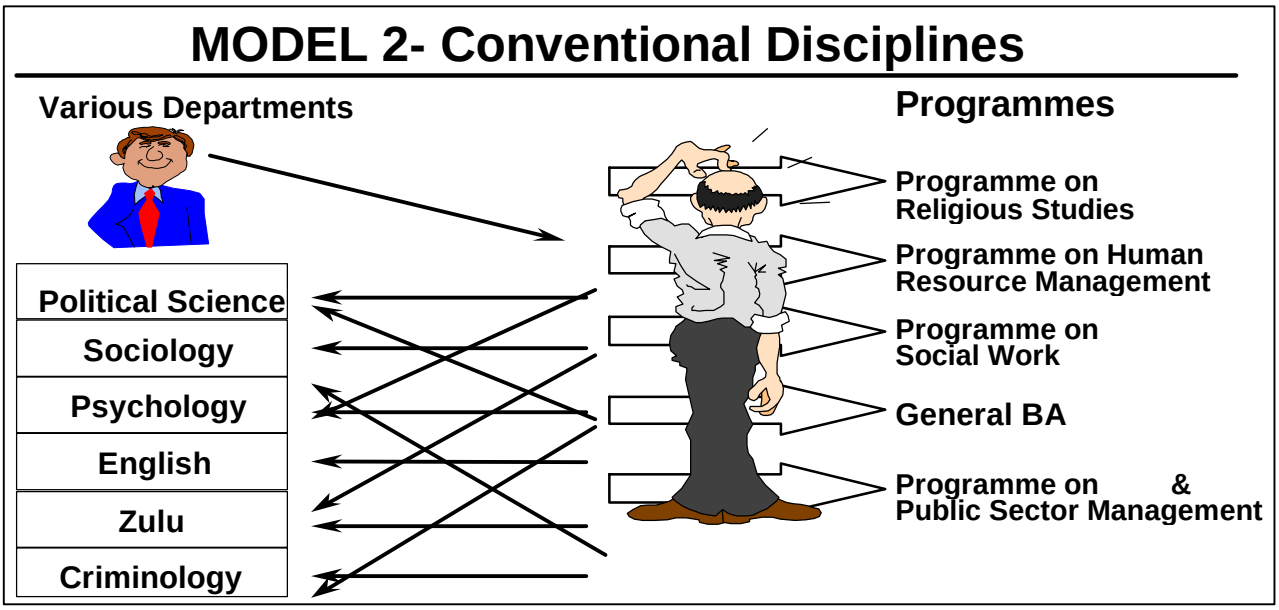


Model 1: Inter-disciplinary

This model identifies the Dean as the academic and administrative manager of the Faculty. Within the Faculty, schools will replace departments as the primary academic and administrative unit of construction, with the former (i.e. school) defined as an administrative unit comprising groups of scholars whose teaching and research share distinctive characteristics. All departments will be abolished and the academic staff re-deployed into schools. Each school will be organised around at least one academic programme. The staff of the school will be identified primarily by their teaching and research skills and interests vis-à-vis the programme/s and not as is the current practice by their academic discipline. In practice, this implies that a school could consist of a group of staff from a range of academic disciplines, provided that staff within the school all share similar teaching and research interests as defined by the programme.

Most programmes will be inter-disciplinary. This model envisages that discipline-based training, especially those that do not lend themselves to a professional qualification (e.g. political science, history, sociology etc) will no longer be offered at an under-graduate level. Instead inter-disciplinary programmes that are organised around a particular set of employment fields will replace them. For example, a programme on human resource development and management will provide graduates with a particular set of competencies that enable them to be employed in the fields of industrial relations, organisational development, and personnel management. A programme on Government and Public Sector Management would ideally provide graduates with competencies that enable them to function as effective civil servants. The model also envisages the establishment of a School of Languages comprising South African and other languages. Such a School will be responsible for offering service language modules to all programmes in the Faculty. Such a school may also offer an independent programme/s provided that it fulfills all elements of the definition of a programme cited above.

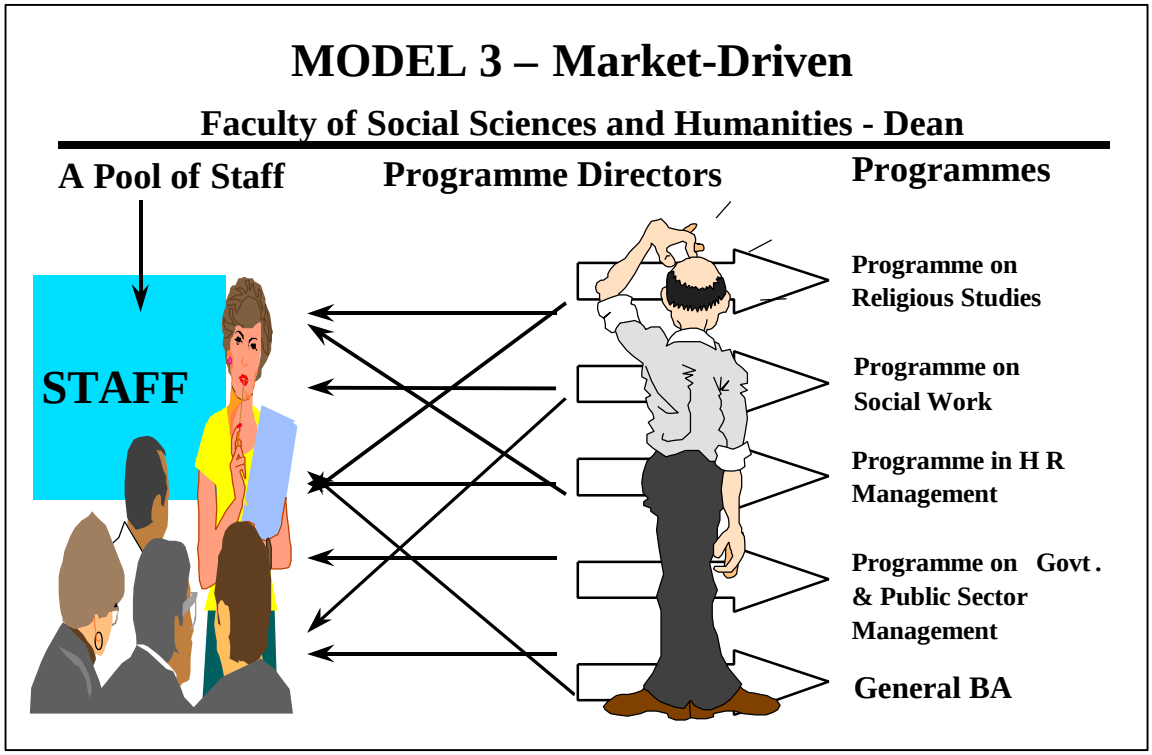
Model 2: Conventional Disciplines



This model also identifies the Dean as the academic and administrative manager of the Faculty. Within the Faculty, however, departments (albeit in a reconfigured form to ensure greater efficiency and rationalisation of resources) will be retained as the primary academic and administrative unit of construction. For the purposes of this model, a department is defined as a specialised division devoted to a particular branch of learning. In addition to the appointment of Heads of Department whose primary responsibility is to the academic discipline, programme directors will be appointed with the responsibility for

development and management of inter-disciplinary programmes. Hence, in this model two distinct types of programmes will be offered, viz. discipline-based programmes and inter-disciplinary-based programmes, the latter involving staff from two or more academic departments. Academic staff will, however, continue to be located in departments organised along the lines of their own academic disciplines and will offer modules in discipline-based and/or inter-disciplinary programmes. Inter-disciplinary programmes will be similar to that described in Model 1.

Model 3: Market-Driven



As with Models 1 and 2, the Dean is retained as the academic and administrative manager of the Faculty. The Faculty however serves as the administrative unit. There is no school or departments envisaged in this model. Instead the Faculty will simply retain an undifferentiated pool of staff. The academic unit in this model is the programme, which in each case will be managed by a programme director appointed by the Dean. The programme director and teaching staff for the programmes will be drawn from the general pool of academic staff located within the Faculty. Note that all programmes will be inter-disciplinary as per Model 1. That is, no provision is made in this model for discipline-based training at the under-graduate level.

5. COMPARATIVE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF EACH MODEL

The strengths and weaknesses of the 3 models are assessed along the following indices:

- Financial efficiency
- Governance
- Knowledge Production
- Relevance

FINANCIAL EFFICIENCY

The financial efficiency of Model 1 is dependent on the successful organisation of schools. To be efficient the schools will have to be relatively self-sustaining, rationalise common core-offerings, and choose among programmes. Financial efficiency in Model 2 will depend on how successfully departments make discipline-based knowledge more efficient. To achieve this, departments would have to, amongst others, rationalise common core offerings, choose among disciplines and reconfigure departments. Model 3 could be the most efficient because programmes offered could be directly related to market needs. Expenditure on personnel could be reduced drastically, rationalisation could be increased, and the institution could utilise casual specialist labour more effectively. The weakness of this model is that it undermines the tenure of academic staff, requires a flexible knowledge of the labour market and tends to favour a private university model.

GOVERNANCE

Model 1 has a distinct advantage in that it links the administrative unit (school) to an academic unit (programme). This linear relationship, coupled with the possibility of a smaller number of administrative units, would be easier to manage. Model 2's implementation of inter-disciplinary programmes may lead to increased contestation among departments and among Heads of Departments and Programme Directors over content and form of knowledge production, territoriality and authority. It may also increase the administrative responsibility for Deans. The matrix management of Model 3 would probably be the most difficult to manage, particularly because there is very little clarity on the allocation of resources among programmes and the line responsibilities within the Faculty.

KNOWLEDGE PRODUCTION

The primary focus of Models 1 and 3 is on inter-disciplinary (or what Peter Scott and Ahmed Bawa, (1997) refer to as trans-disciplinary or Mode 2) forms of knowledge production. These models neither allow for discipline-based training or for the deepening of knowledge within specific disciplines during the formative years of university education

(i.e. Mode 1 form of knowledge production). These models thus call into question the need for discipline-based forms of knowledge production, and if such a need is identified then 'how and when does one acquire this form of knowledge?' By comparison, Model 2 allows for both Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge production. Thus it caters for market related responsiveness without becoming dependent on the whims of the market place.

RELEVANCE

Models 1 and 2 create the organisational space for programmes to be both socially relevant and market relevant, with Model 2 placing somewhat greater emphasis on social relevance. Model 3 bears a more direct relationship between programmes and the market relevance. Its weakness is that market needs often fluctuate and that there is a tension between perceived needs and the reality of employment possibilities, a situation that is even more acute given South Africa's developing economy.

6. CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper is not to lend support for one or other of the models identified above. Rather it is intended to reflect the range of thinking that is currently taking place within the University's Strategic Planning Task Team around organisational and academic restructuring. In the final analysis, the institution's adoption of a preferred model will ultimately depend, we believe, upon the satisfactory resolution of the contestation between academics and management over the centrality of financial efficiency, governance, knowledge production and social relevance in the restructuring process; and (2) the satisfactory resolution of the contestation between advocates of Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge production. The resolution of this contestation will of course have to take into account the particular needs of South Africa as a developing economy in a new globalised environment.

7. SUGGESTED QUESTIONS FOR FACULTY AND DEPARTMENT WORKSHOPS

As you discuss programme-based education and academic reorganisation as developed in this document, you might find the following questions (among many others) of value:

a. What is useful and/or problematic in the way UDW has conceptualised the notion of "programmes"?

b. Which of the three models or scenarios are more appropriate given the institutional mission of UDW?

c. What kinds of concerns do you have about each scenario given how departments and faculties are currently organised and funded?

d. To what extent can an interdisciplinary orientation work for your department or faculty? What are the areas or fields or disciplines in which this is more likely to succeed, if at all?

e. Do the different models adequately balance academic mission versus financial viability? Should they balance?

DATE: 20 November 1998

FROM THE REGISTRATION OF QUALIFICATIONS TO CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

By: Kathy Luckett,
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If one adopts the Action Research Cycle model of curriculum development for the meso- (programmes) and micro- (modular) levels, and uses the OBE method of curriculum design, then as implementation proceeds, I believe that there are certain key pitfalls to avoid, if in HE we are to operate within an interpretive rather than a technical paradigm of CD.

OBE is just one educational discourse:

- throws light on some aspects of curriculum development and shadows on others;
- makes it possible to talk about some aspects and silences others.

1. PLANNING & DESIGN

- Don't mistake the "planned Cm" for the "understood/ "co-created Cm". OBE could result in "Cm as prescription" with LOs standing in a deterministic relationship to T & L practice.

- OBE can be a useful planning tool if avoid over-specification of LOs & assessment criteria - allow students to negotiate & (re)interpret them for themselves & don't impose a universal interpretation (standardisation). Cm planning should have a dialectic rather than a prescriptive relationship to implementation.

- In OBE there is a danger that knowledge becomes objectified, its structure violated; fragmented into discrete units, unit standards - (the quality of education is sacrificed for the sake of transferability and portability of credit).

- Design holistic, multi-dimensional LOs requiring a range of assessment methods. Avoid a behaviorist approach to assessing performance (a checklist of behaviors). Let

a performance of understanding be a visible demonstration from which competence / capability is inferred, via subjective professional judgement (see student assessment).

- OBE assumes that organising frameworks of rationality are universally available, the "ideal knower" is interchangeable with all others; knowledge is purged of its origins in experience and the site of production, knowledge is assumed to be timeless, spaceless and neutral.

- Understand knowledge to be socially constructed and situated, avoid assuming that we can prescribe exactly what learners will learn, put context back into knowledge construction. Leave space in the Cm for surprises and unintended consequences.

- OBE has been accused of being based on an instrumental view of knowledge, a linear, cause & effect rationality (Habermas: technical knowledge-constitutive interest and strategic rationality - concerned to predict & control the (educational) environment, leading to instrumental action).

- Understand education from within the interpretive/ hermeneutic knowledge-constitutive interest - focus on meaning-making through interaction based on communicative rationality.

2. IMPLEMENTATION - TEACHING & LEARNING

- OBE understands Cm as product or output (outcomes), learning process remains invisible (how you get there doesn't matter). Assumes T to automatically result in L, the process of L is unproblematic.

- Put the learner and the learning process back into the equation! Cm is accomplished interactively by teachers & learners, Cm is a "contextualised social process" (Cornbleth, 1990)

- T & L not part of the OBE discourse. Technical rationality assumes that T is the unproblematic transmission of unitised fragments of information (and the practice of decontextualised skills) - i.e. that L is objectively pre-specifiable, quantitative & measurable.

- T & L should be consciously based on a theory of L, e.g. the constructivist theory: L results in a qualitative change in the learner's view of reality, new concepts are constructed by the learner; L is cyclical & cumulative, not additive and linear. The learner's understanding, thinking and reflective processes should be the focus of the Cm. L is tricky, it is relational and dialogic - & the social context and power relationships within which L takes place are critical factors. The results of T cannot be tightly pre-specified.

- Cm planning & design & implementation should be based on explicit theories of learning and on a knowledge of the learners.

- OBE stresses importance of reading external context (education should be relevant and useful) but ignores reading the internal context, the "lifeworld" of the learner.

- For learning to occur, the Tr needs to engage meaningfully with the learner's prior knowledge, pre-understandings, culture, primary discourses, attitudes and values etc. through which new L is mediated. Knowledge construction needs to be understood as situated and context-dependent.

- OBE coupled with human capital discourse makes it possible for that state to suggest that education should be used instrumentally for economic and social ends.

- An instrumentalist view of education is likely to produce Lrs with instrumentalist attitudes - they will learn to pass, gain credit, get jobs and are likely to adopt a surface approach to L. In education, if the means are not educationally sound, the ends will not be educational (the social project will not be achieved).

3A. ASSESSMENT

- OBE could result in the atomisation and trivialisation of knowledge.

- Assess holistic complexes of LOs via a range of A methods (see "integrated assessment"). Some A tasks should be situated in authentic contexts. Allow L choice, let Lrs choose the means by which they provide evidence of achieving competence (LOs).

- SAQA - NQF framework will establish external "registered assessors".

- In all assessment & evaluation the ultimate goal should be dependable and credible self-assessment (the hallmark of a professional). Let the external experts audit the A/ E process, but not be responsible for the assessment judgement.

- Cm reform & development depend on professionalism of teachers, they are key agents of Cm; - keep T, L & A linked - as far as possible in HET, let the lecturers do the assessing (importance of staff development)

- Use self-A to develop Lr autonomy and meta-cognition, a deep rather than surface approach to L.

- Some approaches to OBE assume that Lrs can be objectively measured against pre-specified criteria, that A can be de-contextualised and that the results will be reliable (generalisable) across different contexts.

- This (over) concern for reliability results in the standardisation and homogenisation of A tasks. This understanding of reliability is inappropriate for higher education,(based on a psychometric, positivist epistemology). Instead, A should be contextualised and understood as a communicative event (put the context, text and reader back into A). Let A be site-based, locally controlled, context sensitive and accessible to all stake-holders. Let assessors knowledgeable about the context agree on an interpretation of the evidence through dialogue. Replace reliability of results with dependability and comparability.

- Focus on validity rather than reliability. (Are we really assessing the LOs we say we are?) In designing A methods, ensure "fitness for purpose", inappropriate methods will skew the results and undermine construct validity. Also take consequential validity into account (the uses to which the A or evaluation is put, and the consequences thereof). Let the assessees be involved in considering and using the A criteria against which they will be assessed/ evaluated. Let stakeholders make decisions about consequential action.

- Feedback should be acknowledged as subjective, but justified on the grounds of evidence for the A criteria.

3B. EVALUATION

- An outcomes driven curriculum provides clear criteria against which to evaluate educational provision, but:

- Need to balance Q assurance with A improvement (i.e. use E for both formative & summative purposes).

- Lecturer E should be based on a collegial approach within the critical reflection paradigm (i.e. take into account the ways in which relations of power frame and distort all educational processes, and also enable critically reflective practitioners to question taken-for-granted assumptions and practices).

- Use triangulation - a range of E methods and different perspectives - e.g. autobiography, peer E, student E and expert E. This gives a more accurate diagnosis leading to meaningful prescriptions for improvement.

- Improvements take place in highly personal, particular and meaningful contexts. Emphasise the validity of the results over their reliability.

- Primary responsibility for E should lie with individual Lrs.

- Involvement of an impartial party increases the credibility of the E, but outsiders and experts should not be the primary “owners” of the exercise.

- Use of E data should require the agreement of the persons evaluated. Staff evaluated should be supported and have opportunities for continuing professional development.

4. DECISION-MAKING

- E & A must be followed by reflection leading to decision-making around concrete action to be taken for improvement at each level of the institution - modular, programme, School, Faculty and institutional. At a national level, this action-for-improvement in built in via the functions of the ETQAs and NSBs.

- To be effective, decision-making about action for improvement should be ideally negotiated with all stakeholders concerned.

- The process of decision-making should ensure that the different lifeworlds and values of stakeholders are taken into account.

- As far as possible, lifeworld processes and system functioning need to be brought into harmonious, supportive relationships at both national and institutional levels.

HIGHER EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

(ARE WE WHERE IT'S AT?)

Presented By: John Boughey
University of Zululand

At an institutional level, the University of Zululand has not yet begun to wrestle with the implications of the NQF with regard to the adoption of a programme-based approach. On the ground, a small but growing number of individual departments, individually and in groups, are pressing ahead with the task of aligning their degree structure to the requirements of SAQA and the NQF, and an initial discussion document has been drawn up (although not yet widely circulated) on the possible restructuring of the University's six Faculties. In the continuing process of orientating staff members to the concept of the NQF, a workshop and seminar programme has been running this year, with the assistance of staff from other institutions with experience in programme design and recurriculation.

However, this affords me the opportunity to raise a more fundamental issue which appears to have gone largely unproblematised, namely the readiness of our institutions of higher education to perform within the paradigm of what has become known as "lifelong learning" - a philosophy which underpins the whole concept of the NQF. At the same time, it raises the question of the forces and mechanisms in play which impact on the speed and direction of change in the structure and curriculum on the teaching-and-learning function of institutions of higher education. To what extent do universities and technikons *create* their own environment rather than simply respond to the perceived requirements of society and the marketplace?

Strategic planning is very much in vogue at the moment, with the Department of National Education's recent request that all institutions complete a three-year rolling plan. Smit & Breebaart (1998), in a survey of models used to teach strategic management at tertiary institutions in South Africa, trace the shift in the strategic management paradigm from a traditional "predictive" model, based on the assumption that the future can be predicted through analysis, through a "learning" model, which responds to *present* changes in the environment in a continuous manner, to the "transformational" model, which "postulates an environment that changes so rapidly that the best way to survive in it is to create, and even force, change in it" (p. 123). The first two models are essential reactive and

evolutionary. (An example of the reactive model is the universities' almost knee-jerk reaction to the market and pleas for relevance of offering diploma courses in all sorts of "really useful" skills and topics). The last is proactive and revolutionary. "Transformation" and "proactive" are well-worn terms in the vocabulary of Higher Education, but how are they manifested in our strategic planning? In shorthand, we can ask the question posed by Woodhouse & Hall (1997): who has the authority to say what a university [or any HEI] is for? (If a programme is put together for a purpose, who decides that purpose?).

That the government, at least, sees the environment of Higher Education as the market place and the labour force has been clear for some time.

Only higher education can deliver the requisite research, the training of highly skilled personpower, and the creation of relevant, useful knowledge to equip a developing society with the capacity to participate effectively in a rapidly changing national and global context.

(Green Paper on Higher Education, 1997).

Longworth and Davies (1996) extol the virtues of lifelong learning and, at the same time, throw down a challenge to Higher Education to live up to its potential.

One of the most powerful philosophies of our time is lifelong learning. Its influence in opening up new opportunities and new horizons, empowering people and expanding ideas, concepts and actions makes it a prime target for research. The university which does not want to be a part of that scene is indeed an ivory tower, fossilized, full of its own intellectual self-importance - and irrelevant....

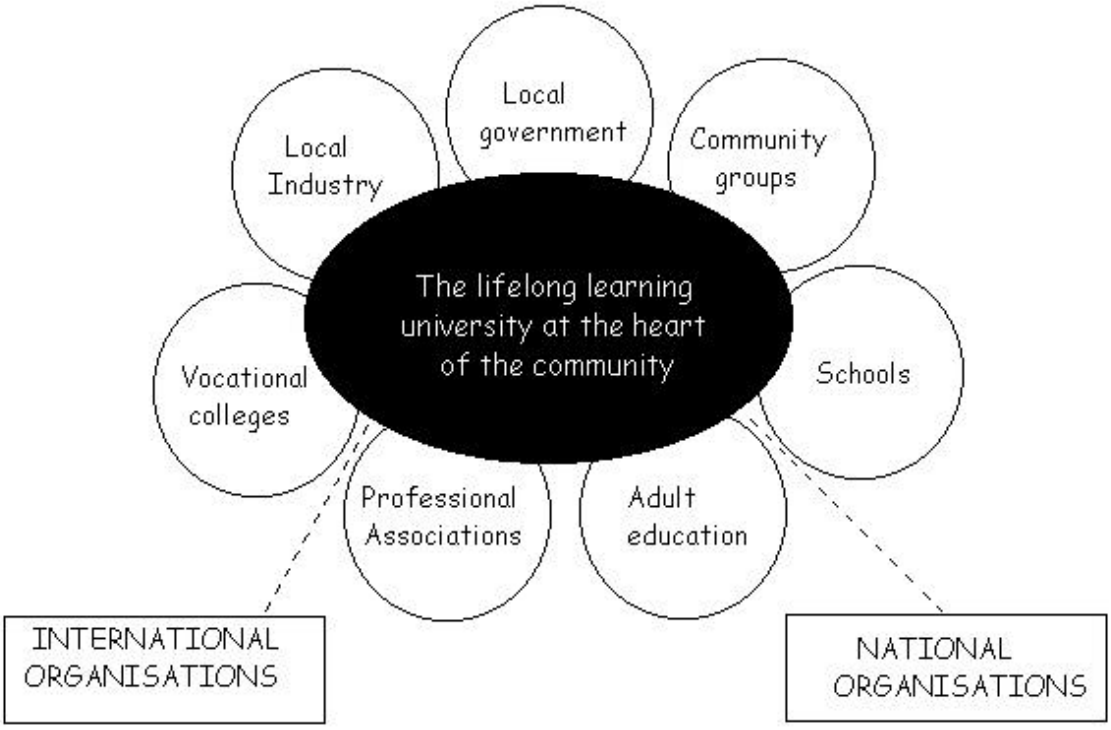
..... "universities should treat the whole community as comprising past, or present, or future students"..... How that would open up new perceptions of the purpose of the university and provide a challenge to the more entrenched and immobile..... If we believe in the power and the value of learning, and if we can create the sort of society in which learning is natural and pervasive, that is the way the traditional university must go....

What may be in doubt is the extent of the university's willingness to change, its ability to manage, its vision to discern, its openness to discover, its dynamism to act and its humility to share. It poses radical questions about the definition, role, function, responsibilities and accountability of higher learning....

Universities may choose to isolate themselves or try to define a restricted role based on ancient traditions, or they may pick up the gauntlet of leadership and use their power and their reputation to move into the 21st century.

They portray a vibrant picture of Higher Education as the hub of the lifelong learning community (figure 1 below).

Figure 1:



Longworth & Davies (1996)

The image in figure 2 (below) suggests a different picture, with leadership residing rather in outside forces and sectors rather than being proactively generated from within.

As Lemmer (1998) neatly expresses it:

The reconstruction of university systems worldwide is taking place around the concept of "performativity" in an increasingly competitive international economic world. University knowledge is being redefined by governmental insistence on a certain kind of "product" from universities. The outcomes of this for universities are the redefinition of the university's function as instrument of economic development...

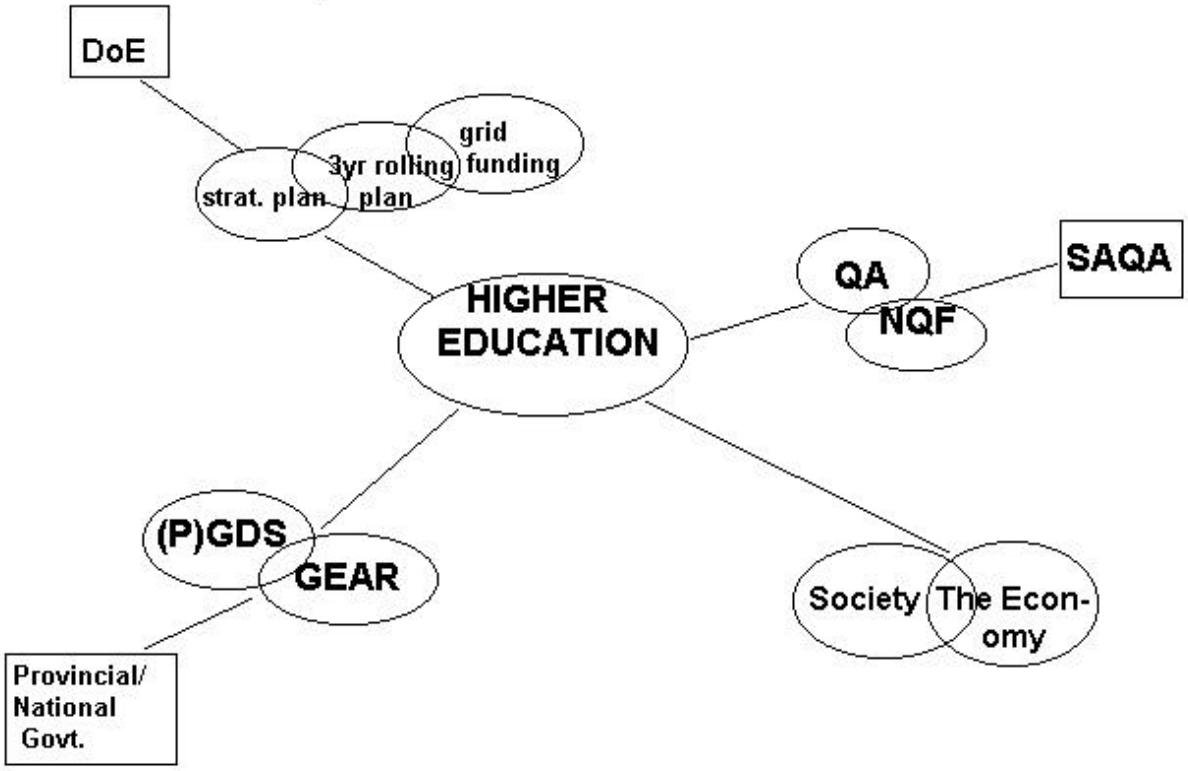


Figure 2 Pressures and influences on H.E.

The economic imperative has clearly replaced the moral imperative and, as a result, certain sections of the traditional university (for example, Science and Commerce) are feeling more buoyant and confident than others (notably, the Humanities). No doubt the pendulum will swing back at some stage, as the absence of the moral and the aesthetic makes itself felt.

My concluding point is this, and no doubt betrays my Higher Education *locus* as Academic Development (AD). We may accept, if we like or must, that the economic imperative currently holds sway and we may also argue that it is sufficient to respond to societal and market needs shaped outside of our institutions, rather than determine them ourselves. But if this is the case, there

then remains the question of just how competent and effective our responses are. The programmes we design may appear to be purposeful, structured and coherent on the surface but may still suffer from the shortcomings of their predecessors in terms of what our students know, can do and *are* when they leave us.

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WHOLE QUALIFICATIONS AND UNIT STANDARDS: ISSUES FOR COMPARABILITY AND TRANSFERABILITY

Where should we focus our energies?

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Academic Development: Curriculum Development, ML Sultan Technikon

This paper was presented at a seminar on *'The National Qualifications Framework and Programme Structures'* held at the University of Durban-Westville on 14th September, 1998

1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the conversation around the choices for the registration of qualifications on the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the implications of these choices for comparability and transferability of qualifications. The views expressed here are our personal perspective, based on our experience at M L Sultan Technikon. Thus although we will draw some tentative conclusions these are personal and will be subject to further refinement.

The main thrust of our paper is an exploration of the two choices: qualifications based on unit standards; or whole qualifications. Our perspective has emerged from, and has been shaped by, interactions with stakeholders at various forums at M L Sultan Technikon (Cooke and Naidoo, 1998). There has been a shift in the predominant view held by these stakeholders with regard to the two choices. Initially there was strong support for choosing to develop whole qualifications. This opinion was based on disquiet which stemmed from a reaction to the 'bite-sized', task-based unit standards which were being offered by industry as exemplars. The lack of development of unit standards for higher education has, on the one hand frustrated discussions of how appropriate unit standards might be for higher education. On the other hand, until a critical mass of unit standards have been generated it may be difficult to appreciate what a qualification based on unit standards might look like. However, whilst this may be so, we believe

that the opportunity for the development of qualifications based on unit standards should not be lost.

SAQA (1997) defines the purpose of a unit standard as providing: an assessors document; a learners guide; and an educators guide for the preparation of learning material. Furthermore SAQA defines a unit standard to mean '...registered statements of desired education and training outcomes and their associated assessment criteria together with administrative and other information as specified in these regulations' (SAQA, 1998). In defining a unit standard through a process of consensus the essential embedded knowledge is established. Thus, the unit standard document does *not* prescribe 'content[1]' or 'syllabus' but it is a template for the design of the learning experience.

Through actively engaging with the curriculum process at M L Sultan Technikon some support for qualifications based on unit-standards is beginning to emerge. This support is based on the interpretation of a unit standard as the registered statement of learning outcomes given above from which a 'chunky' coherent learning experience can be designed and developed. We have also realised that the unit standard approach has more potential than the whole qualifications approach for opening up opportunities for comparability and transferability.

An exciting challenge for curriculum liberation is offered by both the development of whole qualifications and the development of whole qualifications based on unit standards. In the Technikon sector this affords the opportunity to take ownership of the process and become involved with decision making at national and institutional (local) levels in a way that was not possible in the past. The challenges associated with the development of the NQF together with the demand for transformation articulated in other policy documents should lead to increased innovation and responsiveness in learning programmes. This sense of excitement is in part rooted in the opportunity to close a chapter in the history of curriculum development within the Technikon sector. It would seem to be appropriate to share some of this history at this point with colleagues from the Universities and other institutions.

2. PAST CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN TECHNIKONS

Curriculum control and decision-making in South Africa could be envisaged as a spectrum ranging from rigid, bureaucratic national control to complete autonomy (see Figure 1). Up until 1994 the technikons were firmly anchored at the point of national control on this spectrum because 'experts' in the Department of National Education determined syllabus-based Technikon curricula. Since 1994 there has been a slight shift along the spectrum with a system of 'convenor technikons'

[1] Content as 'transmitted knowledge' in the traditional paradigm of the past

established to take the responsibility for individual instructional programmes. However, although the curriculum was no longer prescribed to the same extent, many academic staff continued to use the old national syllabi. The process of curriculum design and development for revising qualifications focused on the production of lengthy documentation. The nature of such nationally determined qualifications largely facilitated comparability and transferability between technikons, and permitted some transferability between technikons and universities. So, for example, a learner with a National Higher Diploma: Medical Technology could, with specific arrangements, enter a Masters programme at a local university.

3. POSSIBILITIES FOR CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT IN THE FUTURE

The advent of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the NQF has created the opportunity for curriculum processes in technikons to shift from the kind of rigid national control of the past to a greater degree of autonomy at the institutional level of curriculum control. The old nationally determined syllabi of the past are being replaced by nationally determined future-focussed outcomes which should open up the opportunity for comparability and transferability. The fundamental difference is that learning expressed as outcomes liberates us from the past emphasis on the transmission of subjects and content to the freedom to design appropriate learning experiences for the achievement of the learning outcomes irrespective of the choice of whole qualifications or unit standards or the location of learning.

Let us try and expand these ideas. The first SAQA bulletin presented two options for the registration of qualifications on the NQF: unit standards-based programmes; or qualifications not based on unit standards (whole qualifications)

- The proposes of unit standards-based programmes will be required to construct, through appropriate rules of combination of selected unit standards registered at different levels, qualifications which have exit levels that are a function both of the particular component unit standards used, and a process of integrating the overall outcome, again considered as reflecting the extent (on a scale of 1-8) to which knowledge, skills and values in a sub-field have been acquired and the critical cross-field outcomes incorporated, into the assessable performance

- The proposes of qualifications not based on unit standards will be required to construct combinations of learning outcomes which have exit levels that are a function of the most advanced outcomes included and of a process of integrating the overall outcome,

> considered as reflecting the extent (on a scale of 1-8) to which knowledge, skills and values in a sub-field have been acquired and the critical cross-field outcomes incorporated into the assessable performance as a whole (SAQA, 1997 p 17)

In a previous paper (Naidoo & Cooke, 1998) we explored these possible scenarios for Higher Education. Our arguments stemmed from a belief that it is possible for these two options to come together as a hybrid. This means that we see the two options as being neither dichotomous nor mutually exclusive. Figure 2 shows that across a spectrum of curriculum control and decision-making there is a point where these two options can co-exist.

4. POSSIBLE APPROACHES TO PROGRAMME DESIGN FOR COHERENT QUALIFICATIONS

Approach A to programme design would represent the choice offered by SAQA for the registration of unit-standards based programmes. At a national level Standards Generating Bodies (SGB's), comprising all six stakeholder groups, would determine the exit level outcomes and possible unit standards for a qualification pegged at a specific level on the NQF.

The unit standard will give details of the purpose, the capability, the specific outcomes, the assessment criteria and a statement of the range of complexity and contexts for the demonstration of the learning outcomes within the unit standard. The structure and the role function of the National Standards Body (NSB) should maximise the opportunity for a holistic 'helicopter' view of the field (for which the NSB has responsibility) irrespective of which SGB is generating the unit standard(s). To ensure that the fragmentation of learning is avoided it is thus imperative that the NSB's ensure that their SGB's develop unit standards with worthwhile learning outcomes.

At the institutional level the provider would be free to make decisions about the development of an integrated learning programme, based on the planned sequences of unit standards to ensure coherence and progression. The underlying principle of flexibility would be upheld because an institution could also draw on specific unit standards that have been developed outside the context of a coherent learning programme to add value to the qualification, for example a computer unit standard from a private provider. The caveat here is however, that the NSB's must ensure that the unit standards generated by industry-led SGB's are not *just* based on operational performance (i.e. skills based). Alternatively, this programme structure could provide for these unit standards to be offered to learners from outside the Higher Education and Training Band on the basis of short course provision.

So, in terms of transferability Approach A would permit greater access for learners with specific capabilities to obtain credit for prior learning. It would seem that Approach A makes decisions about the comparison of a learner with a qualification based on unit standards a lot easier than a learner with a whole qualification because the unit standard provides more information than just a statement of the exit level outcomes given for whole qualifications.

Approach B would represent the choice offered by SAQA for the registration of whole qualifications (and exit level outcomes) not based on unit standards. At a national or institutional level a team of academic staff, industry representatives, professional board representatives, students and alumni would draw up a purpose statement for the qualification together with the exit level outcomes which embrace competence in terms of the knowledge, skills and attitudes of the graduates at the exit level. The assessment which will integrate the exit level outcomes must also be made clear. The relevant NSB will then approve the qualification together with the exit level outcomes and will make a recommendation for its registration on the NQF. At the local level of the provider the exit level outcomes would provide the basis for the design and development of a coherent learning programme. For the purposes of transferability and comparability it is imperative that the provider takes responsibility for the publication of the specifications of the programme elements[2] including their alignment to specific NQF levels.

Figure 3 attempts to unpack Approaches A and B in terms of a possible relationship between a whole qualification with exit level outcomes and a qualification based on unit standards. Whilst the model as depicted in Fig.3 appears to be linear, and the process mechanistic, we understand the process in practice to be iterative, messy, complex and consultative (Naidoo and Cooke, 1998).

In Approach A through using the 'future-focused design down[3]' curriculum process the purpose and exit level outcomes would be nationally defined by stakeholders. Each Exit Level Outcome could be unpacked into its cluster of one or more constituent capabilities, and each capability could be further unpacked into its specific outcomes. These specific outcomes or groups of specific outcomes would be the basis for determining assessment criteria and the range statements which define the context and complexity of the performance.

[2] For the purposes of this paper the term 'programme elements' could refer to courses, subjects, modules, or unit standards

[3] In a series of workshops held at M L Sultan Technikon in June 1998 the concept of a 'future-focused design down process' was refined by Bill Spady, Roy Killen, Jim Rand and the authors of this paper. Publication forthcoming.

The significance of this approach is that the provider enjoys autonomy in terms of facilitating the achievement of the capability of the unit standard. The provider makes decisions in terms of delivery of the learning programme and the selection of appropriate content and assessment tasks subject to internal and external Quality Assurance mechanisms.

At a national level the process is similar for Approach B in that the purpose statement and exit level outcomes for a qualification are nationally defined by stakeholders. National decision making ceases at this point. At the institutional level the provider enjoys autonomy in terms of facilitating the achievement of the overall competence embedded within the purpose of the qualification. The provider makes decisions in terms of delivering the learning programme based on the Exit Level Outcomes rather than on the unit standard, and will select appropriate content and assessment tasks subject to internal and external Quality Assurance mechanisms. Furthermore, if the provider has an internal policy which requires that the Exit Level Outcomes are unpacked into capabilities with specific outcomes, transferability between qualifications based on unit standards and whole qualifications will be facilitated.

A central tenet to our argument is that a combination of qualifications developed through either Approach A or B may co-exist in both universities and technikons and indeed within an individual institution. We have attempted to explain our perspective that the two approaches are neither dichotomous, nor mutually exclusive. Indeed the approaches run parallel to one another if the process of unpacking a whole qualification to develop a learning programme as we have suggested is followed.

5. WHERE SHOULD WE FOCUS OUR ENERGIES?

We have discussed the structural framework with its associated notions of qualifications (either Approach A or B) above. We believe that one of the ultimate purposes of the transformation espoused by SAQA, the Higher Education Act and other major national policy imperatives should be to transform learning. So, for real transformation of education it is essential that a focus of change is at the micro level interface between learning and teaching. We think that such change at the micro level will be critically influenced by issues other than the NQF structural framework, for example the general policy environment and policies relating to credit, levels, and quality assurance. We suggest that a multi-dimensional relationship should develop between these influences such that developments in one aspect inform the developments in another and ultimately focus at the micro level of learning. These should be guiding regulatory frameworks developed at both an institutional and national level rather than prescriptive frameworks.

6. A MULTI-DIMENSIONAL RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN REGULATORY FRAMEWORKS

The development of the NQF and the bodies associated with SAQA will have a considerable impact on the way that higher education is provided in South Africa and on the structures and mechanisms which are used to regulate quality and academic standards. A study by the United Kingdom Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) revealed that academic practice is regulated by six discrete frameworks which support, guide and control practice in respect of the curriculum, level, award, credit, student assessment and quality management (HEQC, 1997). This family of regulatory frameworks could provide a conceptual aid to understanding the nature and scope of such regulations in the context of South African higher education and is outlined below:

- Curriculum framework: the principles, policies and guidelines which determines the size shape and type of programme elements
- Level framework: defines the levels at which programme elements will be taught and assessed thus influencing progression
- Assessment framework: regulates assessment of programme elements
- Credit framework: regulates the award of credit for learning within the curriculum framework
- Awards framework: defines the award conferred on successful completion
- Quality management: controls academic and administrative practices and quality control procedures

It could be argued that these frameworks operating within a multi-dimensional relationship (i.e as a family) should have both internal and external spheres of influence on an educational institution. From the external perspective components of these regulatory frameworks can be readily identified in the structures and functions of SAQA and the NQF. From an internal perspective, at the provider level these regulatory frameworks should shape and support the highest academic standards of professional practice in the planning, design, approval and delivery of learning programmes. Here the frameworks would be supporting self-regulation and decision-making.

We posit that if this regulatory frameworks are properly developed but more importantly, *implemented* at an institutional level, the questions about inter and

intra institutional programme comparability and transferability would be answered. However some of the questions that might arise can be identified through briefly exploring, for example, the credit framework. One important question could be 'credit for what?'

7. APPROACHES TO CREDIT

The United Kingdom HEQC suggests that there are three approaches to the definition of credit:

- impositional credit which *imposes* credits upon an existing structure
- compositional credit which *composes* credits from notional hours of student learning
- competence-based credit which is awarded for the successful demonstration of a competence

It would appear that the current discussions around the award of credit in either whole qualifications or unit standards in South Africa are at present focusing on the notion of compositional credit based on notional hours rather than the notion of credit based on competence.

There is a danger that in attempting to compare credit for two similar qualifications institutional practice might vary. For example, one institution could interpret credit only as notional hours and another could interpret credit as credit for competence. The awarding of credit for competence also subsumes credit for notional time but places the emphasis on the competence and not on 'time served' (even notional time). How is comparability going to established when such tensions exist? If notional learning time is the currency in which educational learning time is calculated this has inherent limitations (Winter, 1993). This notion of time (even notional) based credit is not in keeping with an outcomes based system. The implication for any institution is that the internal credit framework *must* link competence to notional time. But, there is another danger that comparability based on credit could be further compromised where 'credit drift' occurs. For example an institutional policy for notional time may allow a qualification to be loaded from 360 credits (3600 notional hours) to 384 credits (3840 notional hours) at a given level. This could arguably add little value in terms of the achievement of competence with serious implications for the individual learner.

It is possible that on one hand, given our familiarity with whole qualifications based on time, there may be a tendency to skew the awarding of credit more towards notional time than competence. The habitual referral to time, for example a 'three year diploma', and the reluctance to convert that *contact* time even into notional time is evidence of this entrenchment. On the other hand, a

unit standard is a new concept and the idea of credit for *competence and notional* learning time may, therefore, be more readily accepted.

8. APPROACHES TO LEVELS

SAQA has begun to create the framework for the levels of qualifications and unit standards. Although preliminary level descriptors have been developed and circulated stakeholder interaction at M L Sultan with these descriptors suggests that much further refinement is required. It would appear that the application of level descriptors to peg whole qualifications on the NQF is relatively straightforward compared with assigning individual unit standards, especially those which are not developed within the context of a planned programme, which will be more complex.

The nature of the multi-dimensional relationship between the family of frameworks begins to emerge because credit by itself is meaningless it has to be credit at a given level. Unless the level of credit is established one does not know, for example whether 30 notional learning hours are to accredited towards a Senior certificate or a Masters qualification. This therefore seems to support the argument in favour of credit for competence at a given level.

9. TENTATIVE CONCLUSIONS

We advocate that we should put the discussions of whole qualifications *versus* unit standards to one side and focus our energies on the development of high quality learning outcomes. Ultimately whatever route is chosen the design down curriculum process of outcomes based education demands that we engage with learning outcomes. The experiences of Programme teams at M L Sultan has shown that it is only when stakeholders grapple with generating learning outcomes that they make the shift away from subject and content driven curriculum. We agree with Robertson (1994) that learning outcomes provide a template against which achievements may be compared and then recognised for credit towards an award and against which other programmes of study and other awards may be measured. Thus by focusing on learning outcomes higher education institutions can build bridges between different programmes and enhance mobility and flexibility of entrance to their programmes. To this end we need to actively pursue the goals of mutual co-operation and recognition of programmes of study and awards to facilitate free movement of students and working people.

Learning outcomes developed within a multi-dimensional support framework will mean that instead of talking about comparability and absolute equivalence we can talk about approximation and mutual recognition. Again we draw on Robertson (1994) who says

> [there is a]... ' need to recognise that although things may not be the same they may have equivalence and consequently to accept approximation. Issues of jurisdiction must not be allowed to cloud the potential gains of mutual recognition based upon openness and accessibility of information. This style will evolve only if we are prepared to be pro-active and pragmatic, to experiment and try things out while at the same time maintaining standards of quality against which we judge our efforts. A guiding principle... is mutual trust and confidence in academic judgements made by staff in other institutions. There is a commitment to maximum flexibility and the avoidance of rigid rules which hinder student mobility" (p. 155)

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REPORT ON THE WORKSHOPS ON THE NATIONAL QUALIFICATIONS FRAMEWORK (NQF) AND PROGRAMMES STRUCTURES HELD IN DURBAN AND GRAHAMSTOWN

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The workshops held in Durban and Grahamstown revealed varied approaches to programme development and to the NQF, as well as ongoing doubts and confusions. Several participants at the Grahamstown workshop indicated that programmes were leading to less articulation rather than more and there was concern about the lack of clarity around funding. At the Durban workshop there was considerable discussion around outcomes based education (OBE) and concern that neither it nor the NQF would be able to affect the changes in teaching and learning which were needed at all levels of education.

It was decided at the end of the Grahamstown workshop that a national workshop, involving the National Department of Education as well as the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA), should be arranged.

This report will focus on key issues at both workshops. The Durban workshop was held at the University of Durban Westville on 14 September. It was organised by CHET in conjunction with the Eastern Seaboard Association of Tertiary Institutions (ESATI) and attended by delegates from various higher education institutions in Kwazulu-Natal. The Grahamstown workshop was held at Rhodes University on 22 October, organised by CHET and the Eastern Cape Higher Education Association (ECHEA) and attended by representatives of Eastern Cape institutions, from Umtata to Port Elizabeth.

VARIED APPROACHES TO PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

The workshops revealed varied approaches to programme development and various stages of development. At the Grahamstown workshop, representatives of the Universities of Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Stellenbosch and Vista

universities gave detailed presentations on the state of programmes at their institutions.

At the University of Cape Town, where programme development seems to be relatively far advanced, the development of programmes had been driven by strategic transformation goals, said Prof Ian Bunting, Dean of Social Sciences. Faculties were required to work within 'a production model of higher education' and programmes had to fit into this model.

We must have a clear notion of planned student intake, what sort of properties or characteristics we want our graduates to have. A programme is a function of your planned intake and output.

In terms of UCT's transformation strategy, all faculties were required to:

- Recruit talented students;
- Implement equity-based student access policies;
- Emphasise centrality of critical scholarship;
- Instil life-long knowledge, skills and versatility in students;
- Contribute to regional and national, social and economic development.

The new Humanities Faculty, created out of 4 other faculties, developed the following set of goals as part of the transformation strategy:

- The student body (undergraduate and postgraduate) must be representative of wider South African society and be capable of performing well in programmes.
- Educational processes must take account of student diversity and must ensure that all graduating students reach required exit standards.
- Graduates must:
    - have basic grounding in one of the Faculty's broad disciplines;
    - have sound understanding of methodological issues;
    - have the critical reasoning, conceptual and communication skills expected of UCT graduates;
    - be effectively numerate and computer literate;
    - have the professional skills required by the labour market.

In 1999 this faculty would be introducing 19 new undergraduate programmes with 60 streams, Prof. Bunting said. The programmes had been divided into four clusters called 'bins' and new undergraduates would enter a bin, from which different streams flowed. Making provision for the movement of students between the 19 programmes and 60 streams – an 'amazing conceptual lattice' – had been difficult within the constraints of timetables and degree rules.

In addition provision had to be made for students who were already registered for undergraduate degrees according to the old rules. They had full contractual rights to demand what they had been offered on registration. All this had caused resource (including staffing and timetabling) problems and was a 'bureaucratic nightmare'.

From 1999, quality assurance mechanisms would have to be introduced at faculty level to ensure that the new programmes were academically strong, Prof. Bunting said. Programmes would need to attract a diversity of students and sufficient numbers and to produce graduates who were marketable. If a programme started to attract insufficient students then there had to be a mechanism in place to close it down.

At the University of Port Elizabeth (UPE) there were plans to weed 'strong' from 'weak' programmes right from the start, said Prof. Piet Naude, Dean of Arts. Programmes at this university would not only have to meet certain criteria, they would also have to be based on a 'proper research foundation', he said. 'Not everything will fly.' The basic criteria for programmes at UPE were: they had to encourage the ideal of a learning community, have a development focus, be academically excellent, fundable and promote democracy.

Prof. Naude said UPE's recent proposals for a new mission statement and strategic priorities which had been workshopped throughout the organisation were in line with national thinking and clearly accepted programmes 'as the basis of a new education model for the university'.

Prof. Michiel Levin of the Faculty of Management, Vista University, said his institution had decided to 'rendezvous' with 'curriculum based outcomes' and 'purpose focussed degree programmes' before moving to a fully transformed curriculum by 2003. He said he did not see the institution having the muscle and energy to make the move to 'full-bodied OBE' in one leap. The institution now has the standard B Com degree plus 31 purpose-focussed degrees where the purpose of the degree is put into the title of the degree qualification. These degrees had been recorded with SAQA and were outcomes-based in that they had been designed backwards from culminating outcomes.

At the University of Stellenbosch there had been concern about what to do with the degree BA (General), reported Prof. Rudy Botha. For decades it had been the academic mainstay of the Faculty of Human Sciences and was taken by the majority of students in the Faculty. In 1997, it was awarded to more than half the students who completed an undergraduate degree course in the Faculty and many of the more than 20 departments in this faculty had done all their teaching within the framework of the BA (General) course.

However, it was unacceptable in future because it gave students an excessive measure of freedom to combine widely diverging subject courses, Prof. Botha said. It allowed students to cobble together subject courses into combinations that lacked focus and coherence. During the past year his faculty had worked hard at developing a BA Programme in Human Sciences which was at once broad, focused and coherent.

At the Durban workshop Angina Parekh of the University of Durban Westville (UDW) gave a detailed presentation on programme thinking at her institution. She said an academic audit of that institution showed: declining pass rates, large number of ill-prepared students, ill-equipped academic staff, a skewed staff model, declining revenue base, limited post-graduate training, academic training not geared to market needs, regional competition.

She envisaged three possible 'scenarios' for progamme development: the first she called 'radical interdisciplinary', the second 'reconfigured' and the third 'radical market'.

While Scenario 1 depended on efficiency criteria, Scenario 3 did away with faculties and did not provide for discipline-based training. Scenario 2 allowed discipline-based training as well as transdisciplinary programmes with both Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge production.

She concluded that there was contestation between management and academics over the centrality of indices and tensions between Mode 1 and Mode 2 forms of knowledge production, particularly within the context of developing economies, and around the concepts of autonomy and transferability.

Kathy Luckett of the University of Natal said her institution had opted for a combination of Scenario 1 and 2. Departments were being disestablished to form schools and staff had been redirected, not as individuals, but as departments.

John Boughey, of the University of Zululand, said UNIZUL, at an institutional level, had 'not yet begun to wrestle with the implications of the NQF with regard to the adoption of a programme-based approach'. However, on the ground, a small but growing number of individual departments, individually and in groups, were pressing ahead with the task of aligning their degree structure to the requirements of SAQA and the NQF, and an initial discussion document had been drawn up (although not yet widely circulated) on the possible restructuring of the University's six Faculties. In the continuing process of orientating staff members to the concept of the NQF, a workshop and seminar programme had been running during 1998, with the assistance of staff from other institutions with experience in programme design and 'recurriculation'.

THE PURPOSE OF PROGRAMMES

Participants at both workshops were concerned as to how they should interpret Government policy on programmes. Were they to be the vehicle for restructuring the higher education system? Or were they mechanisms for funding? Or for reorganising curricula?

Prof. Naude, quoting from the (Draft) White Paper on Higher Education, said a careful reading of this document led one to the conclusion that programmes play a crucial role in the vision of a single, co-ordinated higher education system.

They were seen as instruments through which institutional restructuring was to be accomplished and as a means to restructure the fragmented higher education system into a more co-ordinated system.

The following quotations from the document (the Draft White Paper) highlighted this, he said:

> the single co-ordinated system will be predicated on a programme-based (as opposed to institution-based) definition of higher education…[4]
> the programme-based approach, through ensuring greater articulation between the different tiers of the higher education system, promoting flexibility and diversification in the range of programmes offered and fostering co-operation between institutions will result in structural changes and a reconfiguration of the institutional landscape in the medium to long term.[5]

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[1] In the final White Paper on Higher Education, called *A Programme for the Transformation of Higher Education* (Department of Education White Paper 3, July 1997), this quotation lost its reference to institutions and read:

> … the single co-ordinated system will be premised on a programme-based definition of higher education

[5] In the final White Paper on Higher Education, this quotation was replaced by the more diffuse:

> As each institution in the higher education system clarifies its institutional mission based on appropriate programme choices and combinations, as the body of learners diversifies, as the teaching, research and management profiles become more representative of our people, as quality promotion and quality assurance processes take hold, as the institutional landscape changes, as centres of excellence are recognised and promoted across the system, the distinction between historically advantaged and historically-disadvantaged will become less and less relevant.

However, the debate made it clear that not all institutions shared this understanding. Prof. Bunting said that originally the notion of programme was linked to funding considerations. 'If you are going to plan and function in a co-ordinated way then you must stop thinking of the institution as primary. When we spoke of programmes being funded we were thinking of broad categories. The programme notion was never intended to be anything other than a funding mechanism', he said.

The notion of programme no longer bore any relation to what was happening locally, Prof. Bunting said. Originally there had been a 'brave new world paradigm' at UCT which suggested that programmes would be the primary institutional building blocks and departments and courses would be secondary (part of a broader view that believed programmes would turn higher education on its head so that the system was no longer a collection of institutions but of programmes). This paradigm had gone. Instead there had been a re-emphasis of the primacy of disciplines and of individual courses, retention of control of resources by heads of departments while programme convenors were in effect subcommittee chairs, responsible to the Dean.

THE FUNDING OF PROGRAMMES

Concern about the way in which programmes would be funded was mentioned by a number of participants at the Grahamstown workshop, including the executive director of SAQA, Mr Samuel Isaacs. Only programmes registered on the NQF would be funded, he said, but not all programmes registered on the NQF would be funded. Which would be excluded? Three-year rolling plans also had to be developed for funding purposes. What was the relationship between these plans and the NQF processes of registration and accreditation? He said there was an urgent need for the state to clarify these issues.

Dr. David Woods, Vice-Chancellor of Rhodes University, objected to the fact that universities were being asked to support the travel costs of academics who served on SAQA's bureaucratic processes (NSBs and SGBs).

We are developing a huge bureaucracy and we don't know who is going to pay for it. We don't believe that it is our responsibility Government should pay travel grants for academics to attend proper conferences rather than paying [for them] to run the system.

At the end of the Grahamstown workshop, Dr. Nico Cloete announced that there would be another national workshop to which the National Department of Education, as well as SAQA, would be invited, in order to clarify issues such as this.

VOCATIONAL VERSUS GENERAL EDUCATION, COHERENCE VERSUS BREADTH

A major theme of the discussion at both workshops was the extent to which programmes should be vocational or general, whether they should emphasise coherence or breadth.

The irony of the debate, as Dr. Nico Cloete of CHET pointed out, was that it showed that a "lot of people are trying to vocationalise at the moment when globally there is a recognition of general education". Prof. John Butler-Adam of esATI, opening the Durban workshop, made a similar point:

> *The NQF appears to be exerting pressure on the general formative disciplines at a point when it is generic education that is being prized by employers.*

The attempts by the Faculty of Human Sciences at the University of Stellenbosch to make their degree BA (General) less general and more coherent were described in some detail by Prof. Rudy Botha of the Linguistics department, who had also produced a more general document on programmes[6]. He said one could solve the problems associated with the degree BA (General) by replacing the degree with a range of narrowly focused programmes but many would not be financially viable and few would offer the forms of academic breadth required by many students and regarded as desirable, by, for example, the Report of the National Committee of Inquiry into Higher Education in theUK (chaired by Sir Ron Dearing). The Dearing Committee found that in the UK employers had a need for generalists in addition to specialists and more than 40 percent of advertised vacancies were open to applicants from most if not all disciplines.

Prof. Botha said his faculty shared the view of the Dearing Committee and the Boyer Commission on Educating Undergraduates in the Research University that there were compelling reasons—professional, academic and personal ones – why there had to be undergraduate programmes that offered students certain forms of breadth, including 'constrained inherent breadth based in coherent diversity' and 'contextualizing breadth'.

Building the required measure of contextualizing breadth into inherently narrow programmes was not all that difficult, he said The true challenge was to develop a BA programme which was inherently broad but also sufficiently focused and coherent.

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[6] Botha R (June 1997) '*Instructional programmes: dimensions, types and criteria'*. University of Stellenbosch.

Dr. Linda Smith of Border Technikon said there was a danger of producing "highly skilled barbarians". There was a need to address ways to "creatively integrate the things that make us human and not merely highly skilled" and to do this within existing funding constraints.

Prof. Botha said this depended on how one defined "barbarian". If it meant someone who did not know any philosophy, then it was relevant that at several universities philosophy courses had either been phased out or the philosophy lecturers had to go cap in hand to other departments to see if they could participate in particular programmes. At Stellenbosch they had decided there was a natural slot for philosophy within programmes because philosophers understood the question of coherence of programmes. They could teach the kind of philosophy congruent with other modules in the particular programme.

Another participant said the problem with subjects like philosophy and theology was that their academics were not able to make the structural adjustment needed to market themselves.

However, Prof. Bunting said the philosophy department at UCT had been quite entrepreneurial within the process of 'horse trading' which surrounded the development of programmes at that institution and had managed to write themselves into several other programmes.

Prof. Naude said he believed it was possible to have stronger career, market-oriented focus without losing 'the generalistic fanatic'. There was a wide range of electives that could be included in a programme. UPE had developed entrance and exit modules designed to increase basic literacy, entrepreneurship and professional communication skills to make up for the lack of skills training in the past. This did not mean that the university was now concentrating only on training.

Debunking certain myths about programmes, Prof. Joe Muller of UCT said programme thinking was not dependent on the NQF or on a philosophy like OBE. At UCT programmes had been designed which were also not "qualification specific". They were "content-coherent specific".

THE FATE OF FACULTY AND FACULTY STRUCTURES IN PROGRAMME DEVELOPMENT

The development of programmes had varying effects on departmental structures while retrenchments were regarded as inevitable, participants reported. In some cases the programme development process was being driven by management, in others there had been an attempt to develop a "bottom up" approach or, at least,

to workshop ideas at all levels of the university. There was concern that academics were losing control of knowledge.

“Academics are frozen in the trenches”, said Dr. Nico Cloete in his concluding remarks at the Grahamstown workshop. Transformation had shifted, he said, from being “efficiency driven” to “transformation as bookkeeping”. An example was UDW’s three year plan, a sophisticated document which nonetheless did not “tell one anything about knowledge”.

Management had been driving the process, Dr Cloete said. Academics had to develop ways of holding onto knowledge and the importance of knowledge.

Prof. Bunting said UCT had encouraged “bottom-up” planning Older academics had been discouraged from getting involved but in the end there had been a mix of older and younger academics, with varying levels of enthusiasm. This had led to unevenness in programme development across sectors and imbalance between the planned faculty niche and final suite of programmes.

Prof. Bunting said academics had realised, as programme development got under way, that their future security at the university depended on them getting their courses into programmes. A great deal of “horse trading” had resulted. Initially it had been thought that programmes would be the primary institutional building blocks and programme leaders the power brokers. Instead there had been a re-emphasis of the primacy of disciplines and of individual courses at UCT, retention of control of resources by heads of departments while programme convenors were in effect subcommittee chairs, responsible to the Dean.

Dr. Cleaver Ota, director of the Education Policy Unit (EPU) at the University of Fort Hare, said one was dealing with systemic reform and instead of thinking about whether programme development should be “top down or bottom up”, one should talk about an integrated system and consider: what is the role of the top and what is the role of the bottom.

Prof. Bunting said management had two functions in the programme development process: to interpret the new politics from the university (“you can’t ask each staff member to read all the policy documents”) and to create an enabling environment. UCT’s Council had decided that six percent of the annual budget should go on programme leave, he said. Lecturers could pay people to teach on a contract basis for them while they worked on the development of programmes.

“If management doesn’t do these things they will kill the system and your academics will die”, Prof. Bunting warned.

At UPE, according to a document which Prof. Naude distributed in support of his presentation, a system of development leave and secondment, with a "once-off financial support" from the university's Council, was introduced from 1 January 1998 to support programme development.

The document also made it clear that UPE lost about 20 staff in two years – some voluntarily and some involuntarily.

Prof. Bunting also predicted retrenchments at UCT. He said there were certain powerful programme convenors who could do damage to certain degrees and there would have to be major staff retrenchments. Religious studies was one of the disciplines that would be affected. Only one stream would take its courses. As a result undergraduate enrolments would collapse in that department and they would be forced to confine themselves to postgraduate work.

PROGRAMMES ARE LEADING TO LESS ARTICULATION RATHER THAN MORE

One of the major aims of programmes, according to government policy, is the achievement of greater articulation between courses and institutions. Yet both workshops revealed an alarming tendency towards the opposite effect: programmes were leading to less articulation rather than more.

Dr. Nico Cloete said that in the National Commission on Higher Education there had been a deep division between those who supported the NQF and those who opposed it. The one thing they agreed on was the need for a more articulated system.

However, it seemed the system was moving in exactly the opposite direction. "We have seen an increasingly unarticulated, uncoordinated system", he said. "Where would you fit a student from one of [Prof] Bunting's programmes [at UCT] into one of yours?" he asked delegates from a range of Eastern Cape Institutions. "What we have here is a whole set of unconnected, incoherent programmes."

Earlier Prof. Bunting had admitted that articulation of UCT's programmes was going to be extremely difficult. "We have built walls around the Humanities Faculty at UCT which are going to be difficult for other universities to penetrate." It would also be difficult for UCT students to transfer between programmes' he said. An undergraduate who wanted to change programmes before graduating would probably have to start all over again.

Dr. Bill Blunt of UPE, predicted that it would be difficult for institutions to articulate the programmes they had each developed. There would be problems relating to the uniqueness and identity of the programmes, and to issues of

competitiveness. At the same time the success with which their courses were able to articulate with others would be measured in terms of accreditation “which of course means money”.

He said that in order to achieve articulation there would have to be a very uniform system, but often there were two different paradigms operating in a single debate. Dr. Blunt related these to the concepts of collection and integrative codes developed by educational sociologist Basil Bernstein. On the side of collection code, he ranked concepts such as framework, articulation, portability, accreditation, standards, programmes, homogeneity, uniformity (of curriculum) and system. On the side of integrative code, he ranked terms such as interdisciplinary, flexibility, contextualised, unique, process approach, diversity, integration, complexity, critical/creative, problem based.

Difference was built into the higher education system, he said. Academics were trained to be different, to give different angles on issues If they were not able to do so, they would not be able to publish. This was a reality which would make it very difficult to create easy articulation from one course to another. Every department, in creating a course, would try to make it as interesting (and different) as possible.

Universities also had a strong sense of ownership of their qualifications. This, combined with the fact that they were all different, would create complications in the system that needed to be sorted out.

At the Durban workshop, Dr. Ethney Genis, chairperson of the Curriculum Development Workgroup of SAQA and Director of the Unit for Quality Promotion at Technikon Pretoria, said the basis of articulation had become an important area of debate for technikons. She indicated that technikons were going to be able to offer less articulation rather than more in future. In the past, because of the way in which technikons developed qualifications on a consensus basis, which included agreement on the learning programme for the qualification, technikon learners enjoyed “considerable mobility between technikons”, Dr. Genis said, in a paper distributed in support of her presentation.

The new emphasis on outcomes, while allowing for greater flexibility in developing and changing learning programmes, would “affect the current high articulation potential”. Exit level qualifications were now seen as the best option for articulation. Mobility between providers before the completion of a qualification could be problematic in the absence of agreement on learning programmes.

Jonathan Gunthorp warned that programmes could “do everything for coherence while doing nothing for portability”.

NQF ISSUES

The workshop in Grahamstown was attended by the executive director of SAQA, Mr Samuel Isaacs, who gave a detailed exposition of the NQF and of OBE. He said there was a need to develop "towering competence on NQF matters" and said South Africa was reinventing outcomes-based education and training, producing a non-reductionist version. He said the NQF represented a "national qualifications framework discourse". This was an evolving discourse that was not complete and not shaped by a dominant ideology. It was best represented by a notion of "social construction".

Mr. Isaacs also aroused considerable controversy with a comment that the NQF was not mandatory. It rested on voluntary participation, he said, and one did not have to join the NQF. "You are never going to get a summons from SAQA". Although no one took up this comment at the time, it was referred to several times during the next day. Prof. Naude said he had never heard of a law being described in this way. Institutions had no option but to comply with the requirements of the NQF.

Earlier in his presentation, Mr. Isaacs had said the SAQA Act was not prescriptive, in that it did not tell one how to set standards. "It just says we want an NQF with these objectives and establishes the statutory bodies. It is their job to oversee the development and implementation of the NQF. And who is going to develop the NQF? Not SAQA. You are," Mr. Isaacs said.

Mr. Isaacs also made it clear that SAQA regarded certain issues as settled. For example the debate about whether institutions should register whole qualifications or unit standards was "old" and "over". It had been settled, he said, with SAQA's decision to allow the registration of whole qualifications based on unit standards or on outcomes and exit level criteria.

A delegate from Vista University asked Mr. Isaacs if he didn't think the representation of academics on SGBs was "a bit screwed up". "We need representation of our own league", he said. "We would like to take ownership of these bodies".

"We have also had that debate", Mr. Isaacs responded. He said Prof. Colin Bundy, representing SAUVCA, had also put forward the complaint that academics could be outvoted in these bodies.

The system would only become illegitimate, Mr. Isaacs said, if academics came with a well-prepared set of outcomes and were outvoted. It was not illegitimate if they came with proposals that lacked substance, and then found they couldn't "sell" these to the other members of the SGB.

At one stage NSBs and SGBs looked alike, Mr. Isaacs said. The critical change was that SGBs now consist of key education and training stakeholders, such as Deans of Education at universities.

"It could happen that in the power play someone tries to block something in an NSB", Mr. Isaacs said. "If an NSB doesn't do its work, SAQA can take over that function."

At the Durban workshop, Jonathan Gunthorp also of SAQA revived an old debate about the pros and cons of unit standards to focus on what unit standards were *not.* They were not behaviouristic, mechanistic, bite-sized bits of knowledge, he said.

At a time when the 3R's are being emphasised, they tended to codify at least four types of knowledge:

- Knowledge of good practice
- Knowledge of interconnectedness
- Knowledge of the practitioner
- Knowledge of the production of knowledge

They had been accused of leading to "internal interference" which was "the new bad word".

"Unit standards open up a causeway between the world of work and education. Is that internal interference?" Mr. Gunthorp asked.

Others questioned the parameters of the NQF debate.

Dr. Nico Cloete noted that the technikons were "pulling away [in implementing the NQF] in a technical way" while the universities were trying to start a debate about whether they should "go into this" at all.

"The technikons never asked the question they just went", he added. "Are the universities going to be able to pull them back and say let's redebate some of these things?"

Adam Habib of UDW noted that there was a tension in one of the panels between those who "accepted the broader parameters of the NQF and those who questioned the entire framework". How could one raise the kinds of questions, which the latter were raising without precluding discussion on the type of clarification, which the former was seeking?

Prof. Jonathon Jansen, Dean of Education at UDW, said the purpose of the Durban workshop was "to generate questions around the NQF, not with the goal

of dumping it – I would like that – but to get a much more enquiring approach and less mechanical".

Debates at both workshops were complicated by the varying levels of understanding of NQF matters. At the Durban workshop Prof. Dziwani Mjojo, of the University Of Durban Westville, while chairing a session, asked for a definition of unit standards.

One of the presenters, Ms Dimes Naidoo, volunteered: "They are a registered statement of a cluster of significant learning outcomes".

Much laughter followed.

"Can you put this in layman's language?" Prof. Mjojo persisted.

Ms. Naidoo's co-presenter, Ms Lesley-Ann Cooke, then described what a unit standard for analysing a chemical specimen might look like. Prof. Mjojo indicated that he understood by this that a unit standard was "clearly behavioural". After all, there were clearly defined steps for such procedures. But what would a unit standard look like in the case of a subject like history?

Ms. Cooke replied that unit standards were not meant to be "a set of behavioural steps". There was embedded knowledge to be considered, also values. In addition range statements would specify complexity and context. One might put it in the context of a laboratory, another in the context of industry. They ensured that learners would know how they did in tests because they know what is expected of them.

The debate raged on… all about the definition of a unit standard, which is now prescribed in law.

TECHNIKONS AND THE NQF

Dr. Ethney Genis, Chair of the Technikon Curriculum Development Workgroup of SAQA, and Director of the Unit for Quality Promotion at Technikon Pretoria, said, in a paper in support of her presentations at both the Grahamstown and Durban workshops, that "as a general statement it could be said that technikons have in principle accepted the NQF, its principles, concepts and approaches and are engaging with them".

One of the reasons for this, she said, was that many of the concepts and principles were not entirely new. "For instance, technikons develop qualifications on a consensus basis. This includes agreement on the learning programme for a qualification, its subjects and levels and the credits associated with subjects". An

outcome of this approach was that learners had considerable mobility between technikons. However, this articulation potential would be affected by the new emphasis on outcomes. (See previous section on “Programmes are leading to less articulation not more”.)

Dr. Genis predicted that the new definitions of certificates and diplomas which SAQA had promulgated in an effort to establish a norm and common understanding for these qualifications were likely to lead to confusion in industry and among the general public. The technikons’ higher certificates would not simply become diplomas, nor would the former diplomas become degrees. These qualifications would have to be reconsidered in the view of the level descriptors, which had not yet been defined.

At the Durban workshop, Dr. Genis emphasised the need for the development of level descriptors. She said technikons initially thought they would “fall into” the NQF quite easily but it was not proving to be so simple.

At first we thought it was just a simple equation. Our National Certificate would be Level 5, our National Higher Certificate at 5,5, the National Diploma at Level 6 and the BTech at Level 7.

Then we realised the whole of higher education would have to agree as to what makes the various levels. We also realised that level descriptors would have to relate to cognitive processes. We have to come up with a set of expectations as to what will emerge at a particular level.

She said the structures of technikon qualifications would also have to change. “A diploma will now mean something different. A BTech will no longer be RVQ13, it will be RVQ12”, she said.

The decision by technikons to register whole qualifications at this stage was a technical one, she said. In the long term there might be qualifications defined solely in terms of unit standards or a mix of exit level outcomes and unit standards. There was concern that qualifications defined solely in terms of unit standards would become too utilitarian.

You don’t want qualifications that are so utilitarian that they are only for now and not for the future.

Defining exit level outcomes was difficult in the absence of level descriptors, Dr. Genis said. How could one decide where to peg an outcome if one did not know what constituted a level?

In her paper Dr. Genis said technikons supported the wide consultation that would be effected through SGBs and NSBs but noted that the process of

consultation and submission of new qualification proposals could become so lengthy that it could be more controlling than the current process, particularly in the interim when NSBs are not fully functional.

“Currently it takes about 18 months from initiation to the implementation of a formal programme, and the concern is that if the new process increases this lead time, technikon qualifications may be outdated even as they are introduced. There is also concern that the constitution of NSB’s does not make them imminently qualified to judge qualifications and that, as a group, they currently lack the experience to do so”, Dr. Genis said.

The net effect of the NQF had been that “comfort zones have been severely disturbed”, Dr. Genis said. “The predictions of failure are clearly of no consequence and the hope that this will all go away quietly, unrealistic.” Technikons had now developed a plan of action which consisted of:

- A phase of building capacity in developing outcomes;
- A review of all technikon qualifications, together with the partners from industry;
- A review of the learning programmes for the different qualifications by every technikon;
- Submission of technikon qualifications for final recording on the NQF by June 2000.

A network had been established across the technikon sector to co-ordinate these actions and to use the available curriculum expertise to the benefit of all technikons. In this way the technikon sector aimed at developing a common understanding of the outcomes-based approach and its attendant concepts and contributing to the national process of outcomes development in a meaningful way.

CONCERNS ABOUT TEACHING AND LEARNING

One of the most powerful critiques of the NQF and OBE at either of the two workshops came from Prof. Jonathon Jansen, Dean of Education at UDW. He started his address at the Durban workshop by saying he felt like a “DRC [Dutch Reformed Church member] entering a Pentecostal gathering in full flight”.

> I don’t speak in tongues, I don’t understand people speaking in tongues and I don’t think swinging from the chandeliers is the way to get to God.

He said he had been stunned by South Africans’ faith in policy and also by the belief that policy was made simply by declaring it. Predicting that neither the NQF

nor OBE would work, Prof. Jansen said policies had to "resonate with the ideas of practitioners" thinking' in order to work. "People have to make sense of [them] in the daily grind of their work".

There were assumptions that learning and teaching would be improved by the NQF and OBE, he said. He could "buy" the argument that the NQF would lead to greater access.

But will learners in fact learn more and better as a result of the NQF? Will lecturers teach less and more clearly? Will we be able to improve the quality of teaching and learning in higher education institutions? There is an assumption that quality can be contained within an outcome statement. But quality could only be assessed by examining what happens in classrooms.

He predicted that universities and technikons would make "a weak or soft interpretation of the NQF' and go the whole qualifications route except in cases where a very literal interpretation had been taken, e.g. the Pharmacy Council.

There would also be very mechanical conformity to some of the requirements coming down from SAQA, he said. Every one of the 36 institutions had registered their outcomes. "But we will retain in higher education a set of serious problems which will remain unresolved despite the NQF…. because we have still not dealt with the essentials of what constitutes teaching and learning".

Responding to Prof. Jansen's comments, Prof. Parker said Prof. Jansen tended to divide the world into good and bad, yet the world was a "much messier place than [his] heaven and hell images lead us to believe". The NQF had some good and some bad aspects, Prof. Parker said. He denied that there was a serious gap between policy and implementation but conceded that "the biggest problem is getting teachers back into the class. We have a sophisticated policy and a disastrous daily reality."

Delegates to both workshops conceded that the new policies concerning the NQF and OBE had forced academics to engage with each other and also to re-examine the way they were teaching.

Jonathan Gunthorp said the NQF had led to "Habermasian-type conversations between parties that would never have spoken to each other before. The Deans of Education are talking to each other, nationally. Even the Deans of Arts are talking to each other. Things must be pretty dire to get them to do that", he quipped.

He said the NQF processes had also led to soul-searching, to confrontation with issues to do with elitism and racism and to "useful reflection".

Dr. Genis said some people felt there was no demonstrated benefit yet of moving to the competency based route, that it took a lot of time and effort to convert a qualification without being sure there would be meaningful benefit. “It is an act of faith”, she said.

However, the process had forced academics to be more reflexive as to why they were designing particular learning programmes and had provided an ideal opportunity to re-examine qualifications to see if they shouldn’t be rationalised or consolidated with others, she said.

Prof. Bunting said at the Grahamstown workshop that the important thing about programmes was that they had forced academics to stop and rethink how they had been teaching. But Prof. Joe Muller told the Durban workshop it was possible to do programme planning without being thoughtful about it. “One could do a technical rethink and some of the key questions are not asked at all”.

Kathy Luckett brought a constructivist perspective to the Durban workshop when she described the SAQA notion that “integration of education and training will result in social development” as a “grand narrative” and OBE as “just one educational discourse among many”, one that ‘throws light on some aspects of curriculum development and shadows on others, makes it possible to take about some aspects and silences others”.

She then considered various problems which were thrown up in the use of “OBE methodology”.

She warned participants, for example, that OBE could result in “curriculum as prescription” with learning outcomes standing in a deterministic relation to teaching and learning practice.

> OBE can be a useful planning tool if you avoid over-specification of learning outcomes and assessment criteria. Allow students to negotiate and re-interpret them for themselves and don’t impose a university interpretation. Curriculum planning should have a dialectical rather than a prescriptive relationship to implementation.

She said OBE assumed teaching to automatically result in learning, in other words the process of learning was unproblematic. “Put the learner and the learning process back into the equation!” was her advice. “Curriculum is accomplished interactively by teachers and learners. Curriculum is a contextualised social process”.

With regard to assessment, OBE could result in the atomisation and trivialisation of knowledge, Ms. Luckett said.

She advised educators to assess holistic complexes of learning outcomes via a range of assessment methods. Some assessment tasks should be situated in authentic contexts and learners should be allowed choice. “Let learners choose the means by which they provide evidence of achieving competence.”

She said an outcomes driven curriculum provided clear criteria against which to evaluate educational provision but there was a need to balance quality assurance with assessment improvement.

EXAMPLES OF CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

Various examples of NQF-style curriculum development were given at the two workshops.

At the Durban workshop, Dimes Naidoo and Lesley Cooke of ML Sultan Technikon focussed on the micro process of developing curriculum development within an NQF framework. Their concerns included:

- Should content be nationally or locally determined (they chose the freedom of providers to develop programmes in response to nationally determined outcomes);

- Whether unit standards should be “bite-sized” or “chunky” (they chose “chunky”);

- Where they should focus their energies on micro-level teaching and learning or on the learning outcomes. (They chose the former).

Ms. Cooke also appealed for a guideline from SAQA to help establish a “multi-dimensional relationship between notional credit and credit for competence”. She said the concept of credit as formulated by SAQA was based on notional time. There needed to be a strong link between notional credit and credit for competence. Also credits had to be attached to a particular level.

Responding to their presentation, Hanlie Griesel of esATI said she worried that there was such a flurry of activity around registration of current qualifications that access-related issues would be ignored. Naidoo and Cooke’s only reference to access-related issues was to the recognition of prior learning (RPL). “We must guard against it [RPL] being a catchbag for what used to be a serious concern of SAQA.” She also wondered how their work would articulate with that of others.

At the Grahamstown workshop, three staff members of the Eastern Cape Technikon described that institution’s efforts towards outcomes-based curriculum development and staff capacity development. As part of this programme, the

Faculty of Engineering introduced the concept of continuous evaluation of all S1 level subjects in January 1998. Mr. Ivan Sunjka, head of Mechanical Engineering at the technikon, said an evaluation of the new system showed a downward trend in results in certain subjects such as Mathematics and Mechanics while other subjects such as Engineering Drawing Manufacturing and Engineering had shown an upward trend.

Ms. Nontuthuzelo Zulu, lecturer in teacher education at the Eastern Cape Technikon, reported on the institution's attempts to "bring student teachers on board SAQA jargon". To achieve this teacher trainees had been given the necessary theoretical background on SAQA the NQF and OBE, she said. They had been supplied with copies of draft unit standards for most of the different areas of leaning. They had been given a specific outcomes chart for the eight levels of learning. They had been trained how to use the learning programme design sheet and had been trained how to plan their daily lessons using OBE terms.

During practice teaching, however, the technikon had encountered the following problems:

- Classrooms were not spacious enough to lend themselves well to OBE learning;
- It was difficult to work in groups because classroom furniture was either insufficient or could not be moved around;
- Libraries and laboratories were either insufficiently equipped or absent;
- Staff were not able to carry generators to schools without electricity;
- There was a shortage of purified water in most rural schools;
- The pupil-teacher ratio 'created a problem in most schools'.
- OBE needed a lot of planning research and sometimes excursions;
- The attitude of teachers was a problem.

Advantages were that there was learning across the curriculum (coherence and co-ordination ensured lack of duplication and teachers worked together), teaching was always subordinate to learning (learner-centred), there was parent involvement and continuous assessment was built into the programme.

Prof. Ben Parker of the University of Natal who chaired the Technical Committee on Norms and Standards for Educators said the report of this committee was a good example of how qualifications might be registered on the NQF. The report set out requirements which people had to meet if they wished to be employed by the National Department of Education as educators. It also produced a qualification framework for the education sub-field that would be put to the NSB.

Prof. Parker did admit, however, that it had been a costly business. The process took “one year and R1 million and consultations with over 1000 people produced a set of qualifications to be registered on the framework”. However, the work is still not done, it seems. “We couldn’t produce a definitive set of roles and competencies”, Prof. Parker said. “It is now up to providers to do research into real life situations to produce qualifications that produce a specific purpose, grounded in empirical research”.

THE CHANGING NATURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Delegates to both workshops were reminded that higher education now consists, not only of universities and technikons, but also of 29 colleges which will be incorporated from next year (1999).

There were numerous comments about the changing nature of academic work as a result of the NQF and programmes policy initiatives.

“Bureaucrats are beginning to behave like academics and academics like bureaucrats”, said Dr. Cleaver Ota, of Fort Hare.

Prof. Mapule Ramashala, vice-chancellor of UDW, opening the Durban workshop, said that traditionally universities had been elitist institutions. The move to maxify university education had created a need for some form of quality assurance. The standardisation of academic business was a daunting task for people who had been brought up in an elitist tradition. It was regarded as another intrusion of modern business practices in the academic domain.

While some delegates argued for more academic autonomy, others wanted greater direction from above -- in the form of a clear definition of programmes, for example, or management assistance.

Prof. T N V Maqashala, deputy vice chancellor (academic) at the University of Fort Hare, said academics did not have a record of managing themselves well and it was foolhardy to leave the transformation process to academics alone. He suggested the establishment of a national management framework.

THE POSITION OF THE HDIs IN THE NQF AND PROGRAMMES DEBATES

Several delegates commented on the differences between historically advantaged and historically disadvantaged institutions and the relative disadvantage of the HDIs in debates about the NQF and programmes.

Prof. S E Minnie from Fort Hare noted that most of the debates occurred in Pretoria and not "where things should be happening". Mr. Nquobizitha Ndaba, a lecturer in Comparative Education at the University of Zululand, told the Durban workshop he was concerned about the silence of academics from processes of change. The HDIs, in particular, were not participating. In Kwazulu Natal, for example, only the University of Natal and the EPU at UDW were participating in the NQF debate.

Prof. Archie Mrara from UNITRA said transformation was difficult at institutions like his because there was a vast difference between their students and those who went to institutions such as UCT. Institutions like UCT took in the best students and those that were rejected came to institutions like his.

> We are like a wastepaper basket. If they have matric they think they are entitled to be here.

He said it was difficult to get students at UNITRA to select appropriate combinations of subjects so they could eventually be employed. They just wanted to obtain a degree. They didn't mind if it was in African languages and Religious studies.

To transform such institutions one first had to give these students "new values and new perceptions" and this could not be done overnight, he said.

Marion Jacobs from the University of Zululand said, at the Durban workshop, that the NQF would alleviate only part of the problems being experienced at HDIs. What was being done about the inequalities between "strong universities and weak universities"? She said staff at the HDIs did not teach well because they were not so well trained, there was no teamwork, they were demotivated and there was a lot of corruption.

Dr. Cloete commented that responsiveness to national signals depended on advantage. "Some institutions see the signals but do not have the capacity to respond." The HDIs were "in a worse shape than ever before in competitive terms", while the Afrikaans institutions, which had been able to respond to Government initiatives, were becoming the "darlings" of the government, "in an ironic new twist of fate".

Dr. Cloete encouraged representatives of the HDIs attending the workshops to try to access USAID funding to develop capacity to participate.

LIST OF ACRONYMS

BA	Bachelor of Arts
CHET	Centre for Higher Education Transformation
ECHEA	Eastern Cape Higher Education Association
ESATI	Eastern Seaboard Association of Tertiary Institutions
HDI	Historically disadvantaged institution
NQF	National Qualifications Framework
NSB	National Standards Body
OBE	Outcomes-based education
SAQA	South African Qualifications Authority
SAUVCA	South African Universities' Vice-Chancellors' Association
SGB	Standards Generating Body
UCT	University of Cape Town
UDW	University of Durban-Westville
UPE	University of Port Elizabeth
UNITRA	University of the Transkei
UNIZUL	University of Zululand

AXES OF CHOICE IN CURRICULUM PLANNING: A COMMENTARY ON THE GRAHAMSTOWN SEMINAR

Presented By: Paula Ensor
School of Education, University of Cape Town

INTRODUCTION: DEFINING ACADEMIC PROGRAMMES

What is an academic programme? This was the central question to surface, in different ways, during the proceedings of the Grahamstown seminar. Contributions from participants turned on two important aspects of this key issue: firstly, the characteristic features of academic programmes and how they should be constructed, and secondly, how these should be, and for some are, implemented in institutional settings. By the end of the seminar we had not necessarily achieved consensus on how these issues might be resolved but had certainly brought them into sharper focus. The seminar marked the contours of an ongoing discussion about academic programmes and their underlying imperatives of equivalence, relevance, coherence and efficiency.

The organisation of higher education curricula into programmes of study has been established as a central principle for the reconstruction of higher education in South Africa. The National Commission on Higher Education (NCHE) went so far as to propose the need for a funding formula for higher education based on programmes rather than institutions. In so doing, it did not specify the necessary features of programmes except to set out that they should be coherent, allow for portability and equivalence between institutions, demonstrate relevance to socio-economic needs and support a striving for efficiency and cost saving. These recommendations have subsequently been inscribed in legislation but to date, neither in law nor in policy, has the Department of Education set out in any further detail the specifications for academic programmes. Rather, institutions have been charged with the responsibility to conceptualise, plan and implement programmes themselves.

Although the Department has not legislated on the shape of academic programmes, in the public mind these have come to be associated with a dominant discourse around programme planning, perhaps best enunciated by Professor Wieland Gevers from UCT who has argued that:

> The sequential learning activities leading to the award of particular qualifications can be called programmes. These are almost invariably trans-, inter- or multidisciplinary, and can be transinstitutional as well, they should be planned, coherent and integrated. (CHET, 1998, pg. 4)

It is not clear whether Professor Gevers was at this time giving voice to SAQA's or to UCT's particular view of what constitutes an academic programme. Nevertheless, the guidelines he sets out here, most particularly that a programme *necessarily* involves interdisciplinarity, have become dominant in higher education discourse as the discussions at the Grahamstown seminar clearly demonstrated.

Professor Gever's comments, taken together with the guidelines established by the NCHE, thus define programmes as *interdisciplinary*, *equivalent* and *portable* within a National Qualifications Framework dedicated to lifelong learning, and *relevant*. These imperatives are embedded in a wider discussion about *efficiency* and cost saving within institutions and across the higher education system as a whole. Associated with the efficiency argument are calls for the establishment of niche academic provision on the basis of institutional strengths.

"Equivalence and portability" as programme attributes have already drawn fire in South Africa (as they have, for example, in New Zealand) from protagonists who argue that these programme properties presuppose generic knowledge and skills which are impossible to isolate and teach. "Relevance" has been challenged by those who oppose what appears to be a creeping vocationalism and "dumbing down" of higher education curricula. These matters did not surface at the Grahamstown seminar but had done so, in part at least, at the previous seminar in Durban.

Less controversial thus far, but an issue to emerge sharply at the Grahamstown seminar, was the prescription of interdisciplinarity as a necessary (and unquestioned) feature of programme planning. The contribution of Professor Botha of the University of Stellenbosch provides an interesting example of this.

INTERDISCIPLINARITY AND COHERENCE

Professor Botha began his seminar presentation by describing the general BA which until recently was selected by the majority of students in the Faculty of Humanities at the University of Stellenbosch. In 1997 half of the Faculty's graduates left the university in possession of this degree, delivery of which

involved over 20 academic departments. This seemingly highly successful academic offering is no longer tenable, according to Professor Botha, because it allows students "excessive freedom" to select courses which can be "cobbled together" without due regard to two important criteria; *focus* and *coherence*. These two concepts are for Professor Botha interlinked; "a programme should have a definite **focus** defined clearly in thematic, disciplinary or functional terms" and "a programme should be highly **coherent** in regard to content: the units making up its content have to be integrated in an overt way in terms of such relations as complementarity, supplementarity, (strong) compatibility, (functional) contrast and so on" (extract from seminar presentation).

Botha clearly invests programmes with a meaning similar to that of Professor Gevers. "Coherence" for him is associated with interdisciplinary curriculum construction and as the seminar progressed, it became clear that most participants used interdisciplinarity and coherence as interchangeable descriptors for programmes. Yet I want to suggest that "coherence" can be invested with a very different meaning to this in order to motivate for much the same curriculum which Professor Botha feels ought to change. In the same seminar that Professor Botha heralded the end of the general BA at Stellenbosch in the name of coherence, representatives of the Arts and Humanities Departments at Rhodes University espoused an equally determined commitment to retain their general BA, likewise in the name of coherence.

In this brief commentary on the Grahamstown seminar I want to prise open possible meanings of the term "coherence" when applied to different forms of curriculum construction. I want to suggest that this term, like that of relevance, can take on different meanings according to one's curriculum planning perspective, most specifically whether one advances an interdisciplinary or discipline-based approach to curriculum construction. Having done this I want to explore further the programme aims of interdisciplinarity, relevance, portability and efficiency which are usually taken to be confluent, pointing in a mutually supportive, common direction. I want to suggest, with reference to the seminar discussions, that in important respects these programme attributes seem to be working orthogonally with respect to each other. To open this discussion, I want to sidetrack slightly by drawing on the work of Basil Bernstein, a sociologist of education who provides a conceptual frame for discussing curriculum.

INTEGRATED AND COLLECTION-TYPE CURRICULA

Bernstein describes the organisation of curriculum and the shaping of academic identities by means of two categories, *classification* and *framing*. Of these, classification is of prime interest here and refers to the relationship between the "contents" or academic discourses comprising the curriculum as a whole:

> Classification refers to the nature of the differentiation between contents. Where classification is strong, contents are well insulated from each other by strong boundaries. Where classification is weak, there is reduced insulation between contents, for the boundaries between contents are weak or blurred. *Classification thus refers to the degree of boundary maintenance between contents.*(Bernstein 1977, pg. 88, emphasis in the original)

Classification is thus concerned with the division of labour of educational knowledge and its related division of academic labour. Classification does not refer to what is contained within a curriculum, but the strength of insulation between its components. It enables us to contrast two ideal-typical modes of curriculum construction; a *collection type* where 'the contents stand in a closed relation to each other, that is if the contents are clearly bounded and insulated from each other' (pg. 87) and an *integrated type* where classificatory boundaries are weak and 'where the contents stand in an open relation to each other' (pg. 88).

These two types can be used to describe a curriculum structure as a whole as well as components within it. The traditional degree structure is an example of a collection-type curriculum. In terms of this, a student could constitute a degree with English, History, French and Mathematics as first year subjects, for example, where the subjects were strongly insulated with respect to each other. A collection-type curriculum can be thought of as a series of vertical "pillars" with little if any necessary connection between them.

An integrated-type curriculum, on the other hand, seeks to draw existing disciplines into the production of a single discourse. At its best, an integrated curriculum can be thought of as pyramidal in structure. On the basis of a number of organising ideas, selections are made from existing academic disciplines to constitute a new interdisciplinary offering which in successful cases can begin the process of forging a new discipline. As I have said, at its best, an integrated curriculum is pyramidal. At its worst, however, it consists of a number of loosely defined themes which have little relation to each other, where the organising principles are not made explicit, if indeed they exist at all.

UCT and other institutions both here and abroad have in the past, and indeed the present, been characterised by strong classificatory boundaries between disciplines. The arrangement of disciplines within the traditional degree structure took the form of a collection; subjects were selected to constitute a degree but there has been little permeability across boundaries. Stellenbosch's general BA is an example of this

The call for interdisciplinarity requires academics to organise subjects into programmatic streams so that while students may have some choice between

subjects within a programme, this is now limited. The basic choice they will make is between programmes. While the collection-type curriculum of the past has not been abandoned, there is pressure towards greater integration between subject areas.

I want to suggest that the distinction between collection and integrated-type curricula is crucial, and that notions of coherence, relevance, portability and efficiency take on different meanings according to whether one privileges one or the other approach to curriculum construction.

COHERENCE, COGNACY AND RELEVANCE

I have suggested that the distinction between a collection or integrated-type curriculum provides a starting point for discussing programme attributes. "Coherence" for example can take on two different meanings (at least) in the present discourse, depending on the position from which one advocates it. In the first instance, in the context of an integrated curriculum, with the loosening of classificatory boundaries between subject areas and the forging of new areas of interdisciplinary study, coherence refers to the horizontal linkages between the academic disciplines which form the new interdisciplinary offering. Such *horizontal coherence* is concerned with how, for example, to weave economics, political science and sociology together to constitute a programme of developmental studies. The emphasis on coherence here foregrounds linkages *between subjects* which are brought together around a core theme, in the example just cited, that of developmental studies. In present higher education curriculum discourse, "coherence" appears to be equated for the most part with interdisciplinarity and when Professors Gevers, Botha (Stellebosch) and Naude (UPE) argue for coherence, it is such horizontal coherence they seem to be referring to.

However, and in the second instance, coherence can also mean the *vertical coherence* of a collection-type curriculum, foregrounding the weaving of links between *different levels* of a degree programme (how first, second, third year English articulate, for example. So when the delegates from Rhodes argue for the retention of a successful BA on the basis of coherence, it is such vertical linkages that are being indexed.

This ideal-typical distinction between vertical and horizontal coherence is useful in that it highlights how different curriculum developers can invest the same term with very different meanings. In practice, curriculum construction deploys coherence in both senses, but in the present circumstances, the word is used to highlight either horizontal or vertical linkages. We can take this further. Within the discourse of horizontal coherence, a further distinction needs to be made which highlights the grounds upon which interdisciplinarity is to be built, between what I will term *academic and applied cognacy.* By this I mean the following: the call for

interdisciplinarity is a call to reduce the classificatory boundaries between disciplines (or degree subjects). But how are the new boundaries to be drawn? What are the rules of selection of the combined disciplines? What is the focus of the new area of study?

It seems to me that there are at least two possible axes of choice. The first is to combine disciplines or subjects on the basis of academic cognacy, bringing together disciplines with similar objects of study, such as for example, sociology and anthropology, or mathematics and physics. Academic cognacy can in turn advance its own appeal for relevance, such as a classical humanist argument for the relevance of academic provision to the "educated person".

An applied cognacy tends to be rather different. In this case, interdisciplinarity is motivated for on the grounds of the future use of the degree, most particularly in the world of work. So while academic cognacy might not easily combine sociology, business economics and zoology within a joint programme, a programme to train graduates for wildlife management and tourism might well do so. Applied cognacy advances an argument for relevance, this time for the world of work, social and economic reconstruction and development and so forth.

However curriculum constructors define coherence, cognacy and relevance for their academic programmes, increasingly they defend their offerings on the basis of increased efficiency. For the defenders of the collection-type curriculum, efficiency arguments, if they are advanced at all, tend to point to the market and the desire of potential graduates to combine subjects according to their own personal strengths and interests. There was evidence of this in Professor Botha's description of the Stellenbosch BA. For the protagonists of the integrated-type curriculum which emphasises academic cognacy, efficiency arguments tend to be similar to those of the collection-type. Protagonists defending integrated curricula on the basis of applied cognacy justify their provision in terms of meeting the needs of the market, as in the wildlife and tourism example above.

All efficiency arguments, whether stemming from a collection- or integrated-type curriculum, also make a case for building academic offerings on niche strengths. This can take different forms. Niche strengths at Rhodes appear to convince academics that the present academic offering in the BA should continue. Niche strengths at UPE convinced planners to build interdisciplinary programmes on strong departments and eliminate departments which were considered less productive. These have very different implications for portability within the system, which I will discuss further below.

CONFLICTS OF AIMS?

I have suggested that academic programmes have come to be defined as exhibiting interdisciplinarity, coherence (which for most means horizontal

coherence and applied cognacy), portability and equivalence, relevance and efficiency. The assumption is that these prescriptions are compatible and work broadly towards the same end. The discussions at the Grahamstown seminar suggest that in practice they may tend to work orthogonally with respect to each other.

For example, at UCT, in the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, a highly complex suite of interdisciplinary academic programmes was described to the seminar by Professor Ian Bunting. From four starting points or “bins” students are to select a route of study. The imperative for efficiency has been met in that the new programmes build on departmental strengths. The imperative for interdisciplinarity appears to have been met in the construction of the programmes. Yet, according to Professor Bunting, while the thrust of programme planning was to lead to greater integration between subject areas, subject departments have by and large emerged stronger from this process than previously. The collection code has reasserted itself.

While the UCT programmes meet the criteria of interdisplinarity (in part at least) and efficiency, it seems that they have rendered portability more difficult than before. By building on niche strengths and placing emphasis on the uniqueness of UCT’s offering, the Faculty of Humanities has now made it less easy than previously for social science students to shift from other institutions to UCT. Portability has been inhibited rather than advanced.

Similar issues are playing themselves out at UPE. There, as at UCT, programmes have been interpreted as integrated, interdisciplinary offerings. The Faculty of Humanities decided to establish a number of strong academic nodes and build programmes around these, closing departments which were deemed to lack strength. As a result, anthropology and history for example will not be available to UPE students from 1999. Programme planning went hand in hand with institutional downsizing and provided the rationale for this to happen.

The UPE case is set forth as a model of efficient programme planning. Interdisciplinary offerings have been built on niche strengths. It remains an open question whether these offerings will allow for portability and equivalence, but on the face of it, it appears not, for the same reasons that hold at UCT. What does seem to be the clear is that UPE has engaged in an exercise of division and specialisation of academic (and pedagogic) labour which has attenuated its academic offering to the Eastern Cape region. Students who wish to study history and anthropology will simply have to go to another institution. The downsizing and reshaping of UPE’s humanities provision raises the question whether such niche provisioning is an option for all universities. Is such a model feasible for the higher education system as a whole?

CONCLUSION

The following diagram summarises the brief discussion above. While it does not attempt to provide a basis for choosing one form of curriculum construction over another, it hopefully removes some of the ambiguity associated with key terms of the discussion, highlights some of the dilemmas at work and explains why different protagonists appear to be making the same arguments to justify very different kinds of curricula.

Collection-type	**Integrated-type (interdisciplinary)**
• *coherence,* largely *vertical* with emphasis on linkages *within* rather than between degree components)	• *coherence* largely *horizontal* with emphasis on linkages *between* rather than within degree components
• subject combination is in large measure *personal*, selection from an array by the individual student • *relevance* to the "educated person"	• subject combination in terms of *academic cognacy* or *applied cognacy* • academic cognacy establishes *relevance* to the "educated person" • applied cognacy establishes *relevance* to world of work
• protagonists, insofar as they use *efficiency* arguments, do so on the basis of the market; what prospective graduates want. Can also be related to niche strengths (in English, Sociology etc.). Detractors deem this inefficient because subject combination lacks horizontal linkages and applied cognacy	• protagonists deem this *efficient* because of horizontal coherence and applied cognacy, linked to niche strengths
• *portability* within the system relatively easy to achieve	• *portability* within the system threatened by building interdisplinarity on niche strengths

The Grahamstown seminar foregounded a range of dilemmas in programme planning in higher education, namely: What is a programme? Does a programme necessarily imply interdisciplinarity? If so, why should this be the case? If interdisciplinarity is to be the chosen route, will subjects be combined on the basis of academic cognacy (relevant to the "educated person") or applied cognacy (relevant to the world of work)? What are the implications for portability and equivalence of building interdisciplinary programmes? How do institutions balance the pursuit of portability and coherence with building programmes on local strengths and expertise (and thereby in part addressing the needs of

efficiency?) Why should the seemingly successful, vertically coherent general B.A. at Stellenbosch (and at Rhodes) not be considered a programme?

These are some of the dilemmas emerging from the programme planning process discussed at the seminar. Other questions emerge at a more systemic level. Why are some institutions moving towards the implementation of programmes at almost breakneck speed while others are holding back and taking a more cautious approach? Why is there such widescale systemic lack of information about the needs and requirements for programme planning? Why do the historically disadvantaged universities seem to be lagging far behind the historically advantaged universities, and the technikons generally, in getting an agenda for curriculum reconstruction off the ground? What will be the long-term implications of this? These are issues which future seminars can hopefully begin to address.

References:

Bernstein, B. (1977) *Class, Codes and Control Vol. 3* London: Routledge
CHET (1998) The New Qualifications Framework for Higher Education: a first reader Pretoria. CHET web site: http://chet.hsrc.ac.za

APPENDIXES

Centre for Higher Education Transformation (CHET) **AND** **eastern seaboard Association of Tertiary Institutions (esATI)**

INVITE YOU TO A SEMINAR ON

The National Qualifications Framework & Programme Structures

hosted at University of Durban-Westville 14 September 1998

Two major new policy changes in South African higher education are the introduction of a National Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the related move by many institutions to a programme based curriculum structure. Both these changes have enormous implications for higher education in terms of how curricula are accredited, structured, funded and ultimately, how knowledge and institutions are organised.

We thought it timely that institutions in the region get together to share ideas and debate issues, and hope that this seminar will be the first in an on-going series of seminars around these issues.

Each institution is invited to send 10 participants. RSVP by 31 August 1998 (contact details below) with names and exact numbers.

Please note:
The seminar is not intended as "information for beginners". Therefore, as background reading, the esATI office will make available a document developed from a similar workshop held in the western Cape (June 1998), and further occasional papers as the need may arise.

Attached please find a copy of the programme, and contact Andrea Gommans for further information at -
Tel: 031- 260 3262
Cell: 082 333 1204
Fax: 031- 260 1249
E-mail: gommansa@admin.und.ac.za

PROGRAMME

DATE: Monday 14 September 1998

TIME: 9H00 TO 16H00

VENUE: Senate Chamber, UDW

Welcome:	Mapule F Ramashala (UDW)	09h00 to 10h30
Introduction	John Butler-Adam (esATI)	

Focus 1 -
Whole Qualifications vs Unit Standards: Implications for Comparability & Transferability

Chair:	Dziwani Mojojo (UDW)
Speakers:	Dimes Naidoo & Lesley-Ann Cooke (ML Sultan)
Discussants:	Hanlie Griesel (esATI) & Jonathan Gunthorp (SAQA)

Focus 2 - 11h00 to 12h45
What are the Main Debates around the NQF and SAQA

Chair:	Martin Mandew (ML Sultan)
In the Universities:	Ben Parker (UNP)
In the Technikons:	Ethne Genis (National Convenor of CTP Committee on
Discussant:	SAQA)
	Jonathan Jansen (UDW)

Focus 3- 13h30 to 15h55
Moving to Programmes: issues and implications

Chair:	Nico Cloete (CHET)
UniZulu:	John Boughey
University of Natal:	Kathy Luckett
UDW:	Angina Parekh & Adam
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Closure 16h00

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NQF Seminar 14 September 1998

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THE EASTERN CAPE HIGHER EDUCATION ASSOCIATION (ECHEA)
IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE
CENTRE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION TRANSFORMATION (CHET)

Invites you to a seminar on

QUALIFICATIONS AND PROGRAMMES
DEBATES AND CHALLENGES

RHODES UNIVERSITY, GRAHAMSTOWN,
OCTOBER 21 AND 22

Two major new policy changes in South African Higher Education are the introduction of a national Qualifications Framework (NQF) and the related move by many institutions to a programme based curriculum structure. Both these changes have enormous implications for higher education in terms of how curricula are accredited, structured, funded and ultimately, how knowledge and institutions are organised and managed.

We thought it timely that institutions in the region get together to share ideas and debate issues, and hope that this seminar will be the first in an on-going series of seminars around these issues.

Each institution is invited to send a maximum of 15 participants. Overnight accommodation is available at the:

Graham Protea Hotel. Tel (046) 622 -2324

When booking are made please indicate that it is an ECHEA conference booking. The rates negotiated are:
Single: R 199 per person bed and breakfast.
Twin: R 139.50 per person sharing bed and breakfast.

Please note: The ECHEA office will, as background information, make available a document developed from a similar workshop held in the Western Cape (June 1998), and further occasional papers as the need may arise.

PROGRAMME

QUALIFICATIONS AND PROGRAMMES
DEBATES AND CHALLENGES

RHODES UNIVERSITY, GRAHAMSTOWN,
OCTOBER 21 AND 22

DAY ONE - 21 OCTOBER

12:00 **Registration and Lunch**

14:00 **Welcome:** **Nico Jooste - Executive Director ECHEA**

14:05 **Opening:** **Dr. D Woods - Vice Chancellor Rhodes University**

14:15 **SAQA UPDATE:**
Dr B Blunt - UPE
Sam Isaacs - SAQA
Dr Ethney Genis - Pretoria Technikon
Chair: Prof TNV Maqashala - DVC Academic University of Fort Hare

15:15 **Tea/Coffee**

15:30 **NQF CHALLENGES: Panel Discussion**
FORT HARE
UPE
PE TECHNIKON
Chair: Prof L Brunyee - VC Border Technikon

17:00 **Summing Up:**
Dr. B Blunt UPE

17:30 **Closure**

17:45 **Reception for delegates**

DAY TWO - 22 OCTOBER

07:00 **Breakfast**

08:45 **Welcome: Prof. Len Brunyee - Chairperson ECHEA**

09:00 **PROGRAMME CASE STUDIES:**

STELLENBOSCH UNIVERSITY - Prof. R.P. Botha
EASTERN CAPE TECHNIKON - Ms N Zulu
UCT (Humanities) - Prof. I Bunting
UPE - Prof. Piet Naude
VISTA - Prof. G. Levin

The case studies will raise programme issues regarding Definitions, Reasons, Planning, Efficiency and the Reorganising of Institutions and Knowledge

Chair: Dr S Fourie – Registrar: **Rhodes University**

11:00 **Tea**

11:15 **Discussion of Case Studies:**

Discussants: **Border Technikon**
UNITRA
Port Elizabeth Technikon
Fort Hare University

Chair: Mr. B. T. Maharaj - Vice Principal: Academic, Eastern Cape Technikon.

12:15 **Lunch**

13:30 **Discussion of Case Studies:**
Continuation of previous discussion.

Chair: Dr Nico Cloete - CHET

15:00 **Summing up: Prof Josua Fullard - UPE**

15:50 **Closure**

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