



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

AUDIT REPORT OF THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

REPORT OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION QUALITY COMMITTEE TO THE UNIVERSITY OF THE FREE STATE

March 2008

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Executive Summary

Institutional Mission

1. The University of the Free State institution is a medium-sized residential university which operates across three campuses. The University's main campus and one of its satellite campuses are located in the city of Bloemfontein, the capital of the Free State Province in the centre of South Africa. The second satellite campus is located in Qwaqwa in the Eastern Free State. Established originally as an English-medium college in 1904, the institution changed its medium of instruction to Afrikaans in the late 1940s. The college became the University of the Orange Free State in the 1950s and under apartheid legislation it catered exclusively for white students. The most significant development in the 1990s was the growth in student numbers and the adoption of a new university statute in 1999. In February 2001 the institution was renamed the University of the Free State. In the context of the general restructuring of the South African higher education system, the Qwaqwa Campus of the then University of the North was incorporated into the University of the Free State on 1 January 2003 and the Vista (Bloemfontein) campus was incorporated in January 2004, which further increased the student headcount.
2. In the last 15 years the institution has undergone a dramatic expansion with its enrolment growing from 9 372 students concentrated in a single campus in 1990 to 24 653 students distributed across three campuses in 2005. UFS houses more than 3 500 students in 20 residences on the Bloemfontein main campus and more than 800 students on the Qwaqwa campus. Ninety percent of UFS enrolments are contact students, of whom the majority attend classes at the main campus, 2 percent at the Vista campus and almost 8 percent at the Qwaqwa campus. The 10 percent of distance student enrolments is distributed across the Faculties of Law, Economic and Management Sciences and Natural and Agricultural Sciences.
3. In 2005, there were 381 undergraduate programmes, covering basic, applied and professional disciplines, offered to 13 842 students, while 9 454 students were registered for the 240 postgraduate programmes. The distribution of student enrolments across the six Faculties: Humanities, Economic and Management Sciences, Natural and Agricultural Sciences, Law, Health Sciences and Theology show the institution's orientation towards the humanities and social sciences.
4. In the space of 15 years UFS changed from an Afrikaans-medium historically white institution to a parallel-medium university with a majority of African student enrolments. While this change took place in the context of a systemic expansion in South African Higher Education (HE), UFS aided the transition by adopting a language policy in 1993 which opened the University to black students. There is no doubt that UFS has made progress in changing the profile of its student enrolment to one that is much more representative of the demography of the Free State Province and that of the country. However, UFS has not been able to match the change in the demography of the student body with a similar change in the profile of its staff.

5. The Panel heard that the University's language policy might be having an unforeseen negative effect on both the recruitment of new staff and the integration of new recruits into the institution. Although proficiency in Afrikaans is no longer a requirement when recruiting academic staff, the fact that the University also offers tuition in both Afrikaans and English inhibits recruitment among African academics who are not proficient in Afrikaans and can offer only English-medium modules. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to investigate the impact of the language policy on staff equity and to develop the necessary measures to counteract those aspects which undermine UFS's efforts in other areas such as employment equity. The Panel urges UFS to analyse both the nature and extent of the internal obstacles to speedier change in the institution's staff profile as well as its capacity to retain black staff.

Recommendation 1

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State consider conducting an investigation into the nature and extent of the internal obstacles which might be preventing speedier change in the University's staff profile and its capacity to recruit and retain black staff. The findings of such an investigation should be used to develop and implement the necessary strategies to ensure that equity targets are met.

6. The Panel was particularly concerned about the gaps between the institution's goals and its current practices in the areas of multilingualism and multiculturalism. While the Panel was pleased to learn that the language policy was adopted in order to enable UFS to become multilingual and racially integrated, the Panel was concerned that an unintended consequence of the policy might be that it is dividing the student population along racial lines, as white students predominantly attend programmes that are offered in Afrikaans, while black students predominantly attend programmes offered in English. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to investigate this matter so as to address both the reality and the perception of an issue which has the potential to undermine seriously the institution's ability to achieve its goal of becoming a 'true South African university'.
7. The Panel was encouraged to hear during its interview with the Language Committee that this body is aware of the need to conduct an investigation into the implementation of the language policy to determine the extent of these problems and their associated risks. The Transformation Task Team is responsible for identifying solutions to implementation problems. The Panel suggests that that the Team consider developing and implementing the necessary support mechanisms for Afrikaans mother tongue lecturers to be able to lecture in English competently and for English-speaking lecturers to acquire a level of acceptable proficiency in Afrikaans. Furthermore, the Panel is of the view that, while the Draft Transformation Plan addresses the language policy as an academic matter, the planned strategies should reflect an understanding of the language policy as also affecting the social aspects of student life.

Recommendation 2

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State consider the need to investigate the extent to which the transformation strategy and the language policy chosen by the institution support each other, and explore the most adequate means to overcome practices which undermine the University's goal of becoming a non-racial, non-sexist, multilingual and multicultural higher education institution, especially in the area of employment equity.

8. In terms of the multicultural dimension of UFS's understanding of transformation, the University considers itself as having played a leadership and pioneering role in addressing past divisions, prejudices and stereotypes through the steps that it took in the late 1980s to open up the institution to all races. The Panel acknowledges that the University has put initiatives in place to support its goal of becoming a non-racial, non-sexist, multilingual and multicultural university, but is concerned that the objectives of these policies might be undermined by some attitudes and practices among staff and students. The Panel encourages the institution to monitor carefully the impact of these initiatives to ensure that they fully support the achievement of their stated goals.
9. An investigation commissioned by the Executive Committee in 2005 to determine the status of a number of aspects of student life, revealed that residences seem to be where racial integration is most resisted and that this resistance is particularly strong among white male students. An investigation commissioned by the institution found that both campus and day-residences are divided along racial lines. The report identifies the residence placement policy as playing a key role in creating mono-racial residences. The Panel is concerned about a number of aspects of the process and structures that regulate placement and conditions in UFS residences, but of special concern is the lack of transparency about the criteria used to decide the placement of students in residences and the way this system seems to be perpetuating racial segregation, racism and sexism at the institution. Senior management is aware that integration in residences has not been effective and that the placement policy and practice has not supported transformation. The Panel concurs with Executive Management regarding the urgency of taking a far more decisive and proactive stand in relation to this issue, which constitutes a fundamental risk for the achievement of transformation.

Recommendation 3

The HEQC recommends that, as a matter of urgency, the University of the Free State review all policies related to student residences. Such a review should include an examination of the current placement policy in order to make it more transparent, the publication of University approved criteria for selection into residences, a review of decision-making structures, more intensive diversity training in the department of student accommodation, new types of training for wardens, and a more systematic monitoring of student satisfaction issues in the residences.

10. As for the aspects of multiculturalism which involve student life outside the residences, senior management indicated that in their view integration is taking

place and that different groups had opportunities to interact through academic life and community service, even if the language of choice separated their interaction in the teaching and learning process. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to think of the concrete forms that a process of re-socialisation could take; how these could be more effective and bolder than other initiatives already in place; how these activities would involve the SRC; and how they would relate conceptually and practically to the existing social contract project.

11. Social life is a crucial aspect of the total student experience at a university and it defines the quality of education as much as curricular experiences do. The Panel is concerned that some of the academic staff who were interviewed did not see a connection between the curricular and non-curricular aspects of education, such as institutional culture, and therefore did not consider the current state of affairs a serious risk to the University's core activities. However, the Panel is satisfied that Executive Management understands the complexity of the educational experience and is aware that attitudes towards race and gender and issues of safety and health all form part of students' learning environment and need to be managed to ensure successful learning.

Recommendation 4

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State develop appropriate mechanisms to monitor the impact that tensions among, and between, staff and students about various aspects of its institutional culture are having on the core functions of the University and the extent to which the interventions already put in place by management are effective in the face of resistance to change on the part of some students, staff and parents.

Institutional Planning, Resource Allocation and Quality Management

12. The Panel is of the view that, since the institution has to give effect to its commitment to its mission and understanding of transformation in an environment of growing competition for scarce funding and human resources, the spaces in which to negotiate with, and between, various institutional stakeholders and interest groups could become critical to the development of consensus about policy implementation in the three core functions and the operationalisation of the institution's strategic goals. The Panel would like to suggest that, taking the achievements of the integrated management system as a point of departure, the institution review the way this system creates spaces for accountability and debate about the institution's identity as an 'engaged, research intensive, multicultural and multilingual university'.

Recommendation 5

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State consider the need to assess critically the achievements and weaknesses of its integrated management system particularly in relation to the management's ability to deal with the quality and academic risks posed by the potential failure of its transformation agenda, and develop a strategy to sharpen the

functions and responsibilities of, and between, Council, Management and Senate.

13. Resource allocation is guided by the strategic goals of the institution and income is disbursed according to a model in which expenditure on human resources and activities that support the academic project are balanced. The resourcing of initiatives to support student academic development and improve the Qwaqwa campus, supernumerary funding for the appointment of staff from designated groups, indicated that UFS has integrated and aligned strategic objectives, financial planning and quality management. The HEQC acknowledges the development and implementation of an integrated system for planning, resource allocation and quality management at UFS. The Panel is concerned, however, that there are instances in which planning and quality management do not seem to be working in a coordinated manner. In terms of the financial and non-financial costs of academic decisions, the Panel also explored UFS's degree of awareness of the long-term financial viability of providing an extensive range of modules in two languages, and the unexpected consequences of this for academic culture.
14. UFS's awareness that the Qwaqwa campus is not financially viable in terms of its current HE programmes and a recognition that the socio-economic needs of the region and its sub-regions extend beyond the typical higher education offerings of the University have led UFS to rethink how best the Qwaqwa and Vista campuses could be used to address the needs of the regions in which they are located. These considerations formed part of deliberations by the Free State Higher Education Consortium (FSHEC), which comprises UFS, the Central University of Technology (CUT), the Free State School of Nursing (FSSON), and the University of South Africa (UNISA). The FSHEC has developed a proposal for using the Bloemfontein Vista campus (UFS), the Qwaqwa campus (UFS) and the Welkom campus of Vista (CUT) on the basis of needs analyses conducted at these campuses in 2005 and consultation with Further Education and Training (FET) colleges, stakeholders from the sub-regions in which the campuses are located, and the Free State Provincial Government. This proposal, known as the Tri-Campus Project, focuses on a revised programme and qualifications mix (PQM) for the Qwaqwa and Vista campuses that is aimed at drawing new students from lower levels than previously possible, by widening and opening up access pathways at both FET and HE levels. The PQM will be aligned to provincial government clusters and strategic initiatives, within the context of the Free State Growth and Development strategy (FSGDS).

Commendation 1

The HEQC commends the University of the Free State on the innovative approach it has taken to optimise the use and viability of its campuses through a partnership model with other regional and national institutions which takes into account regional and national needs while simultaneously responding to the restructuring imperatives of public higher education and which can therefore be regarded as good practice for the national level.

15. The Panel notes the University's recognition that managing the different campuses to ensure consistency of standards in the core functions is a challenge. The Panel

is aware of the investment the institution is making in developing physical infrastructure and was informed that the physical resources at Qwaqwa have been significantly improved since its incorporation. The institution is conscious of the limitations of this investment and of the pressure that large numbers of students are putting on the physical infrastructure and technical facilities. The Panel understands that investment in the Vista campus will not occur while the University awaits the outcome of its Tri-Campus proposal. The Panel would like to suggest that in Exco's interactions with the Vista SRC a joint way is found to respond to the students' concerns about these issues.

16. UFS regards quality management as a key element for realising its vision, mission and strategic goals and strategic planning as an integral part of quality management. The Portfolio, additional documentation and the interviews provided the Panel with evidence that the Planning Unit is making a valuable contribution to developing UFS's quality management system. The Panel also noted the considerable input by the Programme Planning and Quality Assurance Offices of the Planning Unit in coordinating and evaluating the programme self-evaluation process. The HEQC acknowledges the Planning Unit's input in promoting and supporting quality management and assurance at UFS. The Panel also saw evidence that faculties are aligning their plans with the institution's strategic plan, but noted that reporting on progress with strategic goals varied greatly across faculties.
17. The Panel found that UFS staff are aware of the issues that represent quality risks for the institution, such as the impact of parallel-medium language instruction on racial integration and multiculturalism, the impact of the extensive range of modules offered in two languages on resources, and the general lack of monitoring of processes and policy implementation. The Panel urges the institution to translate this awareness into the development of the necessary systems to monitor the extent and the impact of policy implementation
18. UFS has also participated in the ACU University Management Benchmarking Programme over the past five years. This has enabled the University to develop a sense of how it compares with other participating universities in terms of good practice in processes generic to universities. The value of this benchmarking process is that it becomes part of annual institutional review and improvement and that the University has to identify both its strengths and weaknesses in the relevant processes. Where UFS underperforms, the manager of the relevant area conducts a self-evaluation, to identify improvement activities. UFS monitors progress with these improvements.

Commendation 2

The HEQC commends the University of the Free State for using the Association of Commonwealth Universities (ACU) University Management Benchmarking Programme in a systematic and regular way to improve the quality of management and academic processes at the institution.

General Arrangements for Teaching and Learning Quality

19. UFS aspires to be an excellent, equitable and innovative institution. Its mission reflects this aspiration in its focus on promoting an academic culture, critical scientific reflection and scientific education. More specifically in the area of teaching and learning this is realised in the development of the ‘total student’ as part of its academic culture. The notions and practice of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘multilingualism’ constitute one way in which the University attempts to give expression to its vision. Successive strategic plans have tried to put this into practice through the integration of planning, implementation and monitoring. The Panel is concerned that the introduction of parallel-medium education in English, without providing for Afrikaans mother tongue lecturers to improve their language skills, in a context where English is at best a second language for the majority of the students, jeopardises the quality of teaching and learning and of the overall student academic experience.
20. The impact of student expansion on the quality of teaching and learning has been considerable and the institution urgently needs to put in place the necessary mechanisms to counter the weakening of the quality of provision. In this regard, the Panel would like to caution UFS that despite its emphasis on a three percent improvement in the undergraduate success rates, a more critical and proactive approach to the need to improve the quality of the teaching.

Recommendation 6

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State continues to make the improvement of teaching and learning a fundamental and urgent priority at the institution. This should include the development of mechanisms to monitor the influence that language competence, class size and prior high school experience have on students’ learning and how these issues affect the quality of teaching.

21. A number of planning and support structures are responsible for the quality assurance and support of teaching and learning at UFS, but the operationalisation of teaching and learning at the institution depends on a number of other committees and structures. The Panel suggests that the institution revisit its programme development practices and if need be put mechanisms in place to strengthen the role of the Programme Committee so that it fills both its quality assurance responsibilities and its role as custodian of the standard of programmes offered at the institution.
22. While the Panel understands the need for autonomy and the need to adjust policy where required by a specific context, the Panel encourages faculty management structures to be more consistent in the implementation of policy at the institution. The Panel is of the view that the delay in the approval of the institution’s Education Policy may be partly responsible for the lack of consistency in the teaching and learning practices observed by the Panel across faculties. The Panel is aware that some faculties have introduced what can be considered good practices, but these are too recent to make any substantive comment on their effectiveness.

Recommendation 7

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State consider undertaking a review of the role and effectiveness of the structures responsible for the organisation and quality of teaching and learning, and in the light of the review develop structures that support the consistent application of institutional policies, the dissemination of good practices and the development of a quality management system that integrates accountability and academic integrity.

23. In the area of access, the Centre for Higher Education Studies and Development (CHESD), in consultation with other higher education institutions in the region and the FET sector, developed and established a Career Preparation Programme (CPP) almost 15 years ago, as an access/bridging programme, which is now offered at seven sites across the country. This programme is instrumental in improving access for historically disadvantaged students with potential to enter university. The Panel noted that UFS has been monitoring the number of students who gain access *via* this mechanism, and currently there are more than 800 students enrolled at UFS who began their studies in the CPP.

Commendation 3

The HEQC commends the University of the Free State for its sustained commitment to providing support programmes for underprepared students as a way of guaranteeing access with success to disadvantaged students.

24. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to explore the necessary mechanisms to generalise the good practices developed in the context of this initiative to a larger number of students. In terms of developing the culture of learning which, according to UFS's mission, constitutes the basis of scholarship, the institution considers it imperative to ensure that such a culture is strengthened in the student residences. For this purpose, a system of peer helpers/tutors was established in the residences; in which senior students help first-year students adjust to the learning environment at the University. In 2005, 90 such tutors were appointed on the main campus, 20 on the Qwaqwa Campus, and ten on the Vista Campus. The Panel is not clear as to how this initiative works in a residence environment which is often difficult to negotiate owing to racial tensions in hostels. The Panel found that the available evidence was not sufficient to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of the tutor system and would like to encourage the institution to monitor the impact the system is having not only on student performance but also on changing the residence culture.
25. The development of a framework for student academic development is one of the elements included in the University's Strategic Plan. The Panel understood that the newly established Department for Student Development and Success, which aims at extending the tutor system to undergraduate non-residence students, is an important part of such development. The Panel learned that a pilot tutoring project will be launched in four faculties in 2007. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to look at the issue of student academic development in context and

include in the future framework the curricular as well as non-curricular aspects of student life which may support or hinder students' progress in their programmes.

26. The introduction of extended learning programmes is aimed at addressing the declining success rates of undergraduates, and particularly the low success rates of historically disadvantaged students. The DoE funding for foundation programmes has enabled UFS to introduce extended learning programmes in Natural and Agricultural Sciences, Economic and Management Sciences, the Humanities and Law. The Panel noted that CHESD will be monitoring and tracking the success of these students, and when the first cohort graduate in 2008 it should be possible to draw some conclusions about the effectiveness of extended programmes.
27. Student academic support also includes other types of courses, such as those offered at Kovsie Counselling. Up to 2006, Kovsie Counselling services offered a range of short courses to address study-, reading-, academic writing-, learning-, and time management skills. The Panel noted that students' progress is monitored and assessed according to defined criteria. Students are expected to achieve a mark of at least 65 percent in order to obtain a certificate for a course. The Panel acknowledges the importance of this unit's work and congratulates the institution on the work the unit does with disabled students.
28. The Panel observed that the appointment of a Director (Student Development and Success – SDS), teaching and learning managers and community service and research coordinators in some faculties, forms part of strategic expansion of support to enable the University to fulfil its mission. During interviews, the Panel was informed that CHESD and SDS work closely together to align academic staff and student development initiatives. The fact that the SDS was established very recently prevents the Panel from commenting on the effectiveness of its programmes and the impact it is having on improving the quality of teaching and learning. However, the Panel noted the comprehensive approach that informs the conceptualisation of SDS's work, which includes an early warning system, an online diagnostic support system, and the piloting of a tutorial system to improve student success. The HEQC acknowledges the broader research based approach to student development systems that UFS is adopting.
29. In terms of providing conditions conducive to learning, students' health is a critical factor. The UFS has committed itself to playing an active role in combating HIV and AIDS and the Voluntary Confidential Counselling and Testing (VCCT) programme offered by the Kovsie HIV and AIDS Centre established in 2000 provides free HIV/AIDS testing to students and staff. During the audit visit the Panel established that the VCCT programme is available and used by 10 to 20 students and staff each week, although the real need is probably much higher; the stigma associated with the condition probably prevents greater numbers coming forward. The Panel was concerned that despite the activities of the Kovsie HIV and AIDS Centre there is no visible campaign on HIV/AIDS awareness and prevention on the main campus. The Panel strongly encourages the institution to sustain and expand its efforts in relation to voluntary counselling and testing and to increase the visibility of the HIV/AIDS awareness campaign.
30. In terms of quality management, the library has a system of user surveys to monitor its services regularly. Participation in the ACU Benchmarking

Programme revealed that the institution followed a systematic approach to managing learning resources and that there were no major gaps in the way LIS applied quality assurance measures, but that some areas were underdeveloped. These were subsequently improved.

Commendation 4

The HEQC commends the University of the Free State on the valuable contribution that the Library and Information Services (LIS) are making to the development of both undergraduate and postgraduate students and to the support of research at the institution.

31. In terms of ICT supported teaching and learning, the Panel concluded that computer support at UFS is managed sufficiently well to support the core functions. The Panel is also satisfied that there is sufficient awareness of potential risks, and that UFS is attending to them. Overall, the Panel is of the impression that the incorporation of IT into teaching and learning is in its infancy and, while acknowledging some instances of good practice, the Panel believes the institution will have to keep monitoring the quality of programme and materials design, the quality of outcomes and assessment, the provision of adequate IT infrastructure, and staff and student preparedness to use this technology productively.
32. UFS distinguishes between credit-bearing short learning courses, in which the learner is assessed and the course carries automatic credits for a UFS formal programme. The Panel noted that some of the credit-bearing modules in formal academic programmes have been developed into short courses for the purpose of staff development. The Panel also noted that credit-bearing and potential credit-bearing short courses are subject to scrutiny at various levels before being approved, and that Faculty Boards play a central role in assuring the quality of short courses. However, the Panel observed some inaccuracies in the descriptors at the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) level of short courses, and observed that the review process for these courses sometimes focuses on the continuance of the short course rather than on its quality. The Panel noted that where a short course was offered in terms of a partnership in a professional discipline the review process was more rigorous.
33. The Panel is concerned that records of course participation and certification based on performance or attendance is not managed centrally and that there does not appear to be a process in place to ensure the integrity of records and certification. The faculty representatives interviewed claimed to have independent databases for tracking the certification of these courses. The Panel noted that in some cases duplicate certificates are retained as proof of certification, while other faculties used appropriate numbering systems to differentiate and identify certificates. Since short courses are one of the areas of delegation, the Panel suggests that UFS should ensure that there is rigorous oversight of certification of all the types of short courses it offers.

Recommendation 8

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State ensure that tighter controls are applied to the quality assurance and certification of

all types of short courses and that mechanisms be developed and implemented to ensure integrity of these awards.

34. The University applies an ‘engagement model’ in the design of its academic programmes, which is characterised by the inclusion in the programme design of inputs from stakeholders such as students, lecturers, academic support staff and professional bodies. According to the institution, this approach reinforces the principles of the Education Policy and the Programme Self-evaluation framework. From interviews with the responsible committee the Panel found that there was little understanding of the processes involved in programme design. The institution does not seem to have a clear policy for programme management that can be applied consistently across faculties.

Recommendation 9

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State review the effectiveness of the existing guidelines for programme design and consider developing more substantive policies to assist staff in designing new programmes.

35. The Panel noted that the Planning Unit and the Programmes Committee performed a crucial role in the approval and review of programmes. However, the Panel is of the view that the processes run by both structures need to include a far greater interrogation of the programme curriculum in terms of content, alignment between the curriculum and the purpose of the programme, exit level outcomes and assessment criteria, and the inclusion of generic skills as specified outcomes of the programme.

Recommendation 10

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State ensure that the structures responsible for programme review and approval focus their attention more clearly on the interrogation of curriculum in terms of content, the alignment between the curriculum and the purpose of the programme, the correspondence between exit level outcomes and assessment criteria, and the inclusion of generic skills as specified outcomes of the programme.

36. UFS developed its strategic plan in a context marked by the mixed effects of student expansion and the introduction of the dual medium of instruction. The strategic plan identifies two main strategies for achieving its goal of providing student-centred education. In the Panel’s view, this strategy requires those responsible for programme design and approval at UFS to consider the financial, infrastructural, socio-cultural and academic implications of the delivery of a programme. The links between a programme’s design, the best blend of teaching methods to ensure student success and integration, and the planning implications for its delivery should be taken into consideration when approving new programmes. Since most of the academic staff were still using traditional lectures as the preferred approach to teaching, existing programmes will have to be reviewed to determine how blended learning could best be rolled out to the benefit of both the students and the University.

Recommendation 11

The HEQC recommends that, in developing and implementing various types of blended learning, the University of the Free State ensure that it monitors the effect it has on the effectiveness of teaching and learning and, particularly, on the development of the multicultural campus that it aspires to be.

37. The Panel was surprised that programme evaluation did not raise concerns about the fact that parallel medium of instruction typically means that students are *de facto* segregated along racial lines in their courses and that this has negative implications for both the student learning experience as well as meeting the institution's strategic objectives. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to include in the framework for programme evaluation an analysis of the impact that teaching and learning policies have on students and lecturers' attitudes and behaviours in the classroom and outside the classroom, and how these match the goals of institution level policies.
38. UFS acknowledges that talented, creative and productive staff are its principal resource, and staff recruitment and development is therefore focused on attracting and retaining staff of a high calibre. The Panel noted that UFS is making a concerted and systematic effort to give effect to its commitment to equity among academic and non-academic staff.
39. UFS recognises CHESD as having played an important role as an agent of change at the University through the professional support it offers to management, faculties and support services, and in particular its contribution to quality service in the professional development of staff. The Panel acknowledges the range of services offered by CHESD and their impact on academic staff development at the institution. The Panel believes, also, that the newly introduced teaching and learning managers at the faculty level should be encouraged to play a greater role in staff development for teaching and learning.
40. The Panel found evidence of the need to improve staff proficiency in English in order for students to receive equivalent provision in Afrikaans-medium and English-medium courses. Neither the documented nor verbal evidence from interviews with academic and support staff provided any indication that the University is acting on this issue. Besides the language competence of the teaching staff, the Panel is concerned about the way the language policy creates a much greater workload for permanent staff. The Panel would like to encourage the institution to monitor its permanent staff's workload so as to ensure the quality of teaching and learning in all programmes.

Recommendation 12

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State consider the most appropriate strategy to enhance its academic staff language competence, both in Afrikaans and English, but especially in English, in order to improve the quality of staff–student interactions in the classroom and the effectiveness of teaching and learning in the relevant modules.

41. Overall there are four areas of concern for the Panel in relation to the conceptualisation and implementation of assessment at UFS. The first is the inconsistent implementation of the assessment policy and the lack of appropriately trained assessors. The second is the need to establish assessment practices which are consistent with the new teaching methodologies introduced by the institution to deal with some of the problems resulting from oversubscription of modules, without these being perceived as less rigorous than more traditional practices. The third is the internal moderation of exit level assessment that has dominated recent practice. The Panel strongly supports the introduction of external moderation, but is concerned that this external moderation still needs to be strengthened in policy and practice. The fourth, an issue of greater concern pointed out by external examiners, is the deficient translation of examination papers that makes the meaning of papers of the same module different in English and Afrikaans. The Panel wishes to point out that such discrepancies could have far-reaching consequences in an environment where black students already perceive Afrikaans students as being favoured by class schedules. The Panel urges the institution to take the necessary steps to rectify this matter.

Recommendation 13

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State should take the necessary steps to ensure that the policy and practice of assessment are strengthened across all faculties. This should take a variety of forms. First, the institution would need to align assessment practices so they are consistent with the new teaching methodologies introduced at the institution. Second, UFS would need to consider the introduction of external moderation for all exit level courses. Third, UFS should ensure that adequate mechanisms of quality control are in place to implement the institution's language policy in the area of assessment in order to ensure consistency, fairness and comparability of the assessments set in English and Afrikaans for the same module.

42. UFS sees RPL as a mechanism for facilitating access and promoting mobility and progression along education, training and career paths. No evidence was forthcoming regarding the monitoring and evaluation of RPL. The Panel encourages the institution to develop and implement appropriate monitoring and review systems with respect to its various forms of RPL.

Management of Research Quality.

43. The UFS aspires to be a research intensive institution. The Panel is of the view that the University's core of NRF rated scientists, a growing number of postgraduate students, the existence of specific areas of strength in plant biology and clinical medicine, and a general enthusiasm and determination to intensify research activity across faculties are good points of departure in this regard. However, the Panel noted that the position of research in the management structure of the institution as a report to two Vice Rectors, neither of whom has research in their portfolio, does not support the vision of a research intensive institution. This is compounded by the existence of a decentralised system of research management that introduces some serious inconsistencies in practices across faculties.

44. The Panel is of the view that a slow process of strategic decision-making and the lack of an efficient and operational management information system that could produce the necessary data to underpin planning in the research core function are undermining the implementation of UFS strategic goals in the area of research.

Recommendation 14

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State revise its strategy for the development of research, focusing particularly on the prioritisation of goals and objectives, the position of research in the management structure of the institution, and the time frames for decision making. This will ensure that the intention to become a research intensive university is appropriately supported at the operational level.

45. The Panel noted that the UFS has adopted a strategic approach to the development of research and selected five strategic clusters that provide the full scope of research and innovation activities and include appropriate academic training at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

Commendation 5

The HEQC commends the University of the Free State for the development of five strategic clusters which respond to the national, regional and community priorities and which are conceptualised to include the development of undergraduate and postgraduate students.

46. With regard to increasing research capacity development among black and women staff, the Panel observed that in recent years the University has significantly increased the number of grant holders in the NRF Thuthuka Programme, which focuses on previously disadvantaged young researchers, and that 55 applications had been submitted for 2007.

Commendation 6

The HEQC commends the University of the Free State on the systematic way it is focusing on the development of research capacity and its promotion of the development of black and female staff in particular.

47. Overall, the Panel saw evidence that UFS is progressing with respect to its stated research objectives, accompanied by considerable financial and human investment in developing research capacity. The HEQC acknowledges the enthusiasm and commitment with which UFS staff members are working towards the aim of being a research-intensive university.

48. The Panel noted that in 2005 the direct research allocation from internal funds constituted about 24 percent of the total allocated research funds from all sources, which represented an increase of 112 percent over the internal allocation in 2002. The total expenditure on research includes many indirect ways of funding research, and in 2004 the total expenditure was R117 million.

Commendation 7

The HEQC commends the University of the Free State on the continued financial, material and human investment it is making in order to promote and develop research at the institution.

49. Management of the quality of research is a decentralised function at UFS, with faculties taking responsibility for the quality arrangements for research. The Panel observed that the initial evaluations of research proposals according to departmental and disciplinary criteria are not guided by institutional policy, so that this process varies considerably across faculties. The Panel is of the view that UFS should consider measures to ensure greater consistency across faculties in the implementation of the research policy and closer alignment of faculty strategic plans to the institutional research strategies.
50. The Panel learned that the functioning of the Portfolio Committee for Education and Research (PCER), which has a sizable agenda, results in long delays before strategic education and research decisions are finally ratified by Senate, partly because research issues have to be tabled at the University Research Committee (URC) as well. The Panel noted that the timing of the URC meetings seemed erratic, and found that a number of matters did not seem to have been considered by the URC, among them large research contracts and the research outputs of faculties and departments.

Recommendation 15

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State review the relationship between the University Research Committee (URC) and the PCER (Portfolio Committee for Education and Research) with a view to facilitating speedier and more focused consideration of strategic research matters.

51. Of greater concern to the Panel is that the Ethics Committee, which is situated in the Faculty of Health Sciences, and which reports annually to the Dean, has no direct reporting route to Council. The Panel found neither documented evidence of the autonomy, jurisdiction and responsibilities of this Committee, nor any reference to the potential risks for this Committee. The Panel could not establish whether the Ethics Committee confined its function to research ethics or dealt with wider academic ethics issues, such as academic fraud and contestation of authorship. The Panel is of the opinion that a clearer and better formalised approach to ethics clearance is urgently needed to avoid reputation and financial risks in relation to specific research projects.

Recommendation 16

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State establish an Ethics Committee at institutional level with comprehensive supervision of research ethics and all aspects of academic ethics, including fraud, in all disciplines.

52. The Panel observed that in 2005, to manage the commercialisation of research, UFS had developed a Policy for the Management of Intellectual Property. In the interviews the Panel learned of UFS plans to appoint a Director

(Commercialisation), who will report to the Director of the DRD. The HEQC acknowledges the steps that the UFS is taking to ensure that it has a system in place for managing the commercialisation of research.

53. The Panel noted that the Policy on Plagiarism focuses on teaching and learning, but does not seem to cover research fraud. In view of several instances of research fraud at higher education institutions highlighted in the media over the past few years, and the potential risk to the University's reputation, the Panel is of the view that the UFS should pay attention to this issue. The HEQC urges the UFS to review its policy on plagiarism in order to address plagiarism in research.
54. In terms of monitoring as an aspect of quality management, the Panel saw no evidence of how the institution is systematically monitoring the requirement that staff allocate at least ten percent of their time to research. The Panel noted that faculties are expected to benchmark their research activities and output against comparable faculties. The Panel, however, saw no evidence of any extra-faculty mechanism for monitoring progress and performance against agreed benchmarks. The Panel is of the view that delegated responsibility for research implies that faculties should take a more active role in monitoring and measuring their research performance against benchmarks which they have identified and agreed upon.
55. With the exception of the Faculty of Law, the output of publication units has increased, with the most significant increases occurring in the Faculties of Humanities and Natural and Agricultural Sciences. The Faculties of Natural and Agricultural Sciences and Health Sciences publish mostly in ISI accredited journals. The largest faculty, Humanities, is the second most productive faculty, but almost all of its publications are non-ISI indexed. The second largest faculty, Economic and Management Sciences, is the least productive, with the majority of publications in non-ISI indexed journals. Most authors at UFS publish not only in local journals but also in institutional ones.

Recommendation 17

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State take the necessary steps, with due regard to discipline specific issues, to reverse the predominance of staff publishing in institutional and local journals, and develop the necessary mechanisms of support and incentive for UFS researchers to publish in international journals. This should be part of a deliberate and proactive strategy to give greater content to the institution's stated aim of becoming a research intensive university.

56. The Panel found that, apart from the requirement that ten percent of academics' time be allocated to research, no other research output criteria or benchmarks are evident, which does not enable the institution to monitor or evaluate the success of its research strategies. In view of UFS's intention to become a research-intensive university, the Panel is concerned that no requirements regarding peer reviewed publication, or measurement of progress relevant to research goals, form part of either individual performance evaluation or faculty reviews.

57. The Panel noted that UFS has acquired a software system which enables individual departments to enter research data, thus enabling UFS to capture, monitor and manage research data. The Panel recognises the positive steps UFS has taken to establish a comprehensive research information system, but urges the University to use this system fully so as to enable the monitoring and analysis of research activities and output as the basis for reviewing its research strategies.
58. The implementation of postgraduate policy, procedures and guidelines rests with Heads of Departments, which means that practices can vary greatly both within and across faculties. The Panel took note of a draft Policy on Master's and Doctoral Studies which is aimed at establishing greater coherence in and consistency of approach to postgraduate studies, but is concerned that many FRC members interviewed by the Panel were not aware of this policy. The Panel urges UFS to ensure that the implementation of this policy is carefully managed and monitored.
59. The Panel observed that although the General Regulations provide guidelines on postgraduate assessment, departments generally have their own arrangements, which are communicated to students on enrolment and seem to be working well. Faculties were generally not able to provide documented assessment criteria during the site visit, even though it is a requirement that these be provided to examiners. The documentation of the role and responsibility of supervisors also varies across departments, with some departments providing excellent guidelines and others very poor ones. The University does not have a general policy on the examination of postgraduate work.

Recommendation 18

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State review its current policy for the examination of postgraduate degrees to ensure that the same quality standards are applied across faculties and departments in order to protect the quality of the postgraduate degrees conferred by the institution.

60. In the Panel's view, the lack of an overarching policy framework for postgraduate studies presents some risk to the University. For instance, the Panel found no evidence of institutional policies or regulations for postgraduate publications, which means that the ethical dimension of publications may not be appropriately monitored. The Panel is also concerned that the lack of consistency across departments and faculties in the approval of postgraduate proposals at the master's and doctoral levels will ultimately compromise the quality of postgraduate studies.

Recommendation 19

The HEQC recommends that the University of the Free State urgently review the way it balances institutional monitoring and faculty autonomy in the interest of greater consistency across faculties in implementing key policies relevant to the research core function. This should include reviewing policies regulating the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students, and regulations and guidelines for the assessment and examination of postgraduate work.

61. In relation to graduation rates, postgraduate graduation rates at the UFS are below the national benchmarks in all categories. The Panel is of the view that UFS should explore the factors that affect postgraduate success, with the aim of improving its postgraduate graduation rates, particularly at master's and doctoral levels.
62. The implementation and impact of the language policy on postgraduate education varies across faculties. The Panel was concerned that as the Medical School was operating on a dual-medium basis the quality of the student learning experience may be compromised. The Panel found significant differences in the way departments reported on student progress and concluded that overall consistency in the way research policies are implemented was a major need at UFS. The Panel would also like to encourage the institution to assess the extent to which the language policy supports UFS's dual objective of expansion of the postgraduate student enrolment and internationalisation.

Management of the Quality of Community Engagement

63. The Panel noted that there are different conceptualisations of community engagement (CE) at the institution and that their ability to give expression to a variety of curricular and non-curricular activities is unevenly distributed across faculties and departments. The Panel also noted that not all senior academic staff members are convinced of the value of community engagement.
64. The Panel noted that there is no dedicated department at institutional level which takes responsibility for the coordination and administrative support of CE. There is no portfolio committee for CE at institutional level, but there is a Community Services Management Committee, which operates outside the formal portfolio committee structure. While this arrangement may have been sufficient in the initial stages of CS, the Panel is of the view that the envisaged transformation from CS to community service-learning (CSL) across programmes will require more dedicated monitoring of policy implementation and staff and student performance as part of the quality management of CE, with appropriate monitoring at institutional level. This is particularly important in view of the UFS view of CE as a form of scholarship.
65. The Panel observed that CS engagement and the implementation of CSL is highly varied across faculties and programmes. The Panel urges UFS to develop a quality management system for community engagement which could help the institution give more effective expression to its conceptualisation of CSL as integrated into the core functions of teaching and learning and research.
66. 'Partnerships' is the framework within which CE is conceived and the Panel noted that the institution has been very successful in developing external partnerships. The long-standing Mangaung–University of the Free State Community Partnership Programme (MUCPP) has been a key CS site where the University, community and government departments interact.

Commendation 8

The HEQC commends the University of the Free State on its continued commitment and initiatives to establish community engagement as a credible core function and the significant contribution that it makes to social development through viable partnerships, such as the Mangaung–University of the Free State Community Partnership Programme (MUCPP) and the Free State Rural Development Partnership Programme (FSRDPP).

