



**University of Fort Hare**  
*Together in Excellence*

**UNIVERSITY OF FORT HARE**  
**INSTITUTIONAL IMPROVEMENT PLAN**

**September 2009**

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## Acronyms

CE	Community Engagement
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CFO	Chief Financial Officer
CIO	Chief Information Officer
DoHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
DMC	Division of Marketing and Communication
DVC	Deputy Vice-Chancellor
ED	Executive Director
EL	East London
EMT	Executive Management Team
ExL	Experiential Learning
GMO	General Manager: Operations
GMRDC	Govan Mbeki Research Development Centre
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
HEQF	Higher Education Qualification Framework
HESA	Higher Education South Africa
HoD	Head of Department
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IF	Institutional Forum
IIP	Institutional Improvement Plan
IO	Internationalization Office
IOP	Institutional Operating Plan
IQAC	Institutional Quality Assurance Committee
ITS	Integrated Tertiary System
LAU	Learning Advancement Unit
LKA	Life Knowledge Action
M&C	Marketing and Communication
MIS	Management Information System
NRF	National Research Foundation
PG	Postgraduate
PQM	Programme and Qualification Mix
QA	Quality Assurance
QMA	Quality Management and Assurance
SD	Strategic Development
SLA	Service Level Agreement
SP 2009-2016	Strategic Plan 2009-2016
SPAC	Staff Planning and Appointments Committee
SRC	Students' Representative Council
STLC	Senate Teaching and Learning Committee
TLC	Teaching and Learning Centre
UFH	University of Fort Hare
UG	Undergraduate
VC	Vice-Chancellor

## SECTION ONE

### Background

Following the audit of the University of Fort Hare (UFH) conducted by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) in May 2008, the Final Audit Report containing the findings of the Audit Committee was released to the University in April 2009. The Report contained six commendations (in the text) and twenty-two recommendations that the UFH is required to address (see Appendix 1).

The UFH is required to provide to the HEQC by September 2009 an Institutional Improvement Plan (IIP), approved by the University Council. The required format, replicated below in Section Two of the IIP, must contain details of action plans, resource requirements, performance indicators, accountability and time frames for addressing the shortcomings and areas for improvement contained in each of the recommendations.

Prior to the Institutional Audit, and in order to comply with the requirements of the HEQC audit procedure, the UFH had conducted, during the course of 2007 and early 2008, a comprehensive self-evaluation of all academic departments as well as support service units and other non-academic entities. This exercise had revealed most of the issues subsequently included in the CHE Audit Report recommendations, and in many of the problematic areas plans had already been put in place to deal with deficiencies and inadequacies.

#### *Synergies between the UFH Strategic Plan 2009-2016 and the Institutional Improvement Plan*

Subsequent to the Institutional Audit, during the course of 2008 and before the release of the CHE Draft Audit Report in November, much of the information generated by the self-evaluation had been incorporated in the draft UFH Strategic Plan 2008 – 2016, revised this year to become the UFH Strategic Plan 2009-2016 (see Appendix 2).

The first phase of the development of the draft Strategic Plan entailed the establishment of project teams tasked with identifying objectives and formulating corresponding action plans in eight thematic areas<sup>1</sup> that had been recognized as constituting fundamental components of overall strategy. Widespread consultation with the University community through a 'brown paper'

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<sup>1</sup> The themes were: Financial Sustainability; Multi-Campus Model; Excellence in Teaching, Research and Community Engagement; Service Culture; Human Resources; Information Technology; Student Life; and a Quality Improvement Plan. These themes have been incorporated as 'objectives' and 'enablers' in the University Strategic Plan 2009 – 2016, submitted to the UFH Council in April 2009.

process elicited numerous ideas and suggestions that were incorporated as proposed action plans into the various thematic areas of the draft Strategic Plan. It subsequently became clear that many of the components of the draft action plans related directly to issues that had been included in the recommendations of the Institutional Audit Report. In order to avoid duplication of effort, and to consolidate activities and direct resources towards shared goals, components of the proposed action plans were incorporated in the first draft of the Institutional Improvement Plan wherever possible.

An Operations Plan consolidating the action plans was developed to give substance to the Strategic Plan 2009-2016, and the Operations Plan was presented to the UFH Council together with the first draft of the Institutional Improvement Plan in June 2009. Formal endorsement of both the Operations Plan and the draft Institutional Improvement Plan (IIP) by the University Council enabled the proposals for the IIP to be carried forward to the next stage, that of wider consultation with the UFH community, which took place in the form of Open Days held on the East London and Alice campuses in July 2009.

Subsequent to the incorporation of further details emanating from this consultation, a planning session held on 19 August 2009, aimed at integrating activities contained in the Operations Plan and the Institutional Improvement Plan, led to the finalization of both.

During the final week of August the Final Draft of the IIP was presented to the Senate Executive Committee, which recommended minor changes, and thereafter to Council on 03 September, where approval was obtained, and Senate on 09 September, for presentation prior submission to the HEQC.

## Introduction

The format of the IIP is aligned to that proposed by the HEQC<sup>2</sup>, but in the opposite sequence, with the first section containing the narrative, and the second details of the action plans aimed at addressing the Audit Report recommendations.

The narrative provides an explanation of the layout of the IIP and outlines progress made during 2008 and the first half of 2009 in achieving specific goals set by various parties with academic as well as operational responsibilities. These are clustered in the same six categories into which action plans relating to improvement have been divided in the second section of the IIP, viz.

- strategic objectives;
- transformation and institutional culture;
- excellence in teaching and learning;
- community development;
- research; and
- non-academic operational and corporate support services.

The first section also contains comments on the ongoing constraints and challenges with which the UFH is faced in achieving its goals, which remain largely financial. The Audit Report commended the UFH for its progress in recovering from the crisis of the late 1990s and “its efforts in working systematically on the various strategic and operational aspects that constituted that particular crisis”<sup>3</sup>. The Audit Report likewise acknowledged the resource constraints that have threatened, and continue to threaten, the financial stability of the UFH and cautioned against expansion of the East London campus at the expense of the Alice campus (CHE Final Report on the University of Fort Hare, p16).

Notwithstanding the financial difficulties of which the CHE is aware, several recommendations contained in the Audit Report urged the UFH to make available the necessary resources for addressing particular issues. However, the current critical financial situation of the UFH, which prompted a visit from a Department of Higher Education and Training (DoHET) Task Team in May 2009, has prevented the UFH from effecting plans requiring an outlay of expenditure exceeding standard operational costs. The net effect of the DoHET Task Team’s findings is that the UFH should achieve financial break-even through cost-cutting and revenue maximization. An

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<sup>2</sup> HEQC Directorate: Accreditation Guidelines on writing Improvement Plans.

<sup>3</sup> CHE Final Audit Report on the University of Fort Hare, p 9.

inevitable consequence of implementing some of the CHE recommendations would be the incurring of further debt through additional expenditure, thus bringing some aspects of the two sets of recommendations into conflict. The efficiency imperative has thus prevented the UFH from allocating resources to certain critical issues that impact on the quality of information technology and other student support services, and restricts significantly the activities of certain units such as the Internationalization Office. Whilst action plans in these areas have been developed and will remain as part of the IIP, forming part of the annual progress report, the actual date of implementation will depend entirely on the financial position of the UFH over the forthcoming five-year period.

## **Progress in 2008/2009**

Apart from operational planning that took place in 2008, several initiatives have been established in areas that had previously been targeted by the University as requiring attention, and had subsequently been identified in recommendations of the CHE Audit Report.

### *Strategic objectives*

Recommendation 1, relating to the strategic role of campuses and the need for equitable resourcing, was included among the strategic goals of optimizing the multi-campus model, which assumed a prominent place in the UFH Strategic Plan 2009-2016, and which has been carried forward from preceding Strategic Plans. Guided to some extent by directives regarding DoHET infrastructural grants, expenditure will be directed primarily towards improving infrastructure on the Alice campus, such as upgrading student accommodation and improving and expanding academic facilities (lecture venues, research laboratories, etc) for the Faculties of Education, and Science and Agriculture (see Appendix 3).

A comprehensive academic review process was initiated in April 2009, and one of the expected outcomes will be the development of an academic plan for all campuses, as specified in Recommendation 9. The process comprises a self-review report, to be completed by academic departments and also research and community engagement entities, complemented by input from two external peer reviewers per department or entity. The self-review reports and external reports will be considered by a committee towards the middle of 2010, with a view to developing an academic plan for the various campuses, which is expected to be presented to Senate by the end of 2010. It is envisaged that this will optimise the allocation and use of academic and infrastructural resources, whilst rationalizing offerings through developing focus areas and orienting programmes towards satisfying the needs of students and the general public in the areas serviced by the EL, Alice and Bhisho campuses.

### *Transformation and institutional culture*

Recommendations 4, 6 and 7 of the Audit Report targeted issues that have been covered within the broad spectrum of transformation, dealing with issues around race, gender, age, nationality, diversity and inclusivity.

Recommendation 4, relating to human resource planning and focusing on the issue of succession planning, had not been addressed in 2008 or 2009, due to the vacant portfolio of the

Executive Director for Human Resources, a post that was filled on 01 July 2009. The new incumbent has submitted a plan which is currently being considered, and as a result details cannot be included in the IIP at this stage. Broad brush strokes are thus provided, and the precise details relating equity targets, as well as the development and retention of young, black academic staff will be included in future reports.

Recommendation 6, focusing on the need to address xenophobia and foster a culture of diversity, has been incorporated in the goals of the Transformation Working Group that was established in response to the release of the 'Report of the Ministerial Committee on Transformation and Social Cohesion and the Elimination of Discrimination in Public Higher Education Institutions', commissioned by the former Minister of Education, Ms Naledi Pandor. The issue of xenophobia is also incorporated in the 'Life, Knowledge, Action/Grounding Programme' that will form part of the first-year curriculum for all first-year students. The issue of xenophobia will also be included in the staff development plans of the new Director of Human Resources.

Recommendation 7, which urged the UFH to revitalize the Institutional Forum (IF), has recently been tackled with a strategy aimed at rejuvenating the composition and functionality of the statutory body, as part of a national initiative. Part of the IF rejuvenation is the revision of the University of Fort Hare Statute itself. Amendments to the University Statute have been submitted to Parliament for promulgation. An overview of the plans is reflected in the action plan in Section Two.

### *Teaching and learning*

Much progress was made in developing and finalizing policies relating to teaching and learning, programme and curriculum development and review, and assessment, as recommended by the Audit Report (recommendations 10, 11, 12, 16, 17, 19).

The review of the policy on assessment and moderation was completed in early 2009 and the revised draft received Senate approval on 10 June 2009. Faculties must investigate and report to QA committees where modules have failure rates that exceed the UFH norm, with a view to establishing whether assessment is a contributing cause.

The Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) offers training on an assessment module, which is part of the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education. This module has been made a necessary

requirement for promotion of academic staff as part of the ongoing strategy to promote the quality of teaching and learning. Already this has significantly improved the number of staff enrolled for the module, which is offered twice a year and has full enrolments of 30 each semester.

Related to assessment is the policy on the evaluation of teaching and courses, which accommodates student evaluation of staff teaching as well as the evaluation of courses / modules. The revised draft of this policy had been presented to Faculty committees and Boards during the first quarter of 2009, and was approved by Senate in June 2009.

When the IIP was being drafted, the policy relating to curriculum development and review was developed and presented to Faculty committees and Faculty Boards for input. Feedback and comments have been collated and workshopped, and the final draft has been compiled by the Teaching and Learning Centre for submission to Senate in the last quarter of 2009.

#### *The Life, Knowledge Action/Grounding Programme*

A significant achievement was the launching of the pilot of the Grounding Programme (recommendation 3) on the Alice campus in July 2009. It will be expanded to the East London campus in 2010. The action plans relating to the Audit Report recommendation are presented in comprehensive detail in Section Two, and further progress in meeting the objectives of the LKA/Grounding Programme will be reported in future progress reports submitted to the HEQC.

#### *Community development*

Recommendation 22 referred to the absence of a conceptual and policy framework to accommodate the range of activities within the area of community engagement, and, whilst a policy had been developed in 2008, no mechanism was in place for its implementation or for the recording and monitoring of activities. An acting Director of Community Engagement has now been appointed and the incumbent will be responsible for establishing an overarching structure for coordinating and monitoring of community engagement activities, including experiential learning (which was included as part of recommendation 11, relating to accommodation of teaching and learning goals in curriculum development). Experiential learning forms part of the Community Engagement Policy and thus far only broad objectives have been defined. Further and finer details of action plans and achievement will be provided by the incumbent and reported on in the years subsequent to the initial IIP.

### *Research*

The development of an institutional strategy to firmly establish a research culture was contained in recommendation 20, and this aspect has been comprehensively addressed by the draft Strategic Research Plan (see Appendix 5), which provides a detailed account of activities underway and those planned for the remainder of 2009 and 2010 under the auspices of the Dean of Research and the staff of the Govan Mbeki Research Development Centre (GMRDC).

The establishment of the GMRDC and the appointment of a Dean of Research in 2008 provided a base for the consolidation and growth of research and postgraduate activities in general, focusing on, *inter alia*, the creation of an enabling policy framework (the Research Policy and Plagiarism Policy were approved by Senate in June 2009, with the latter directly addressing recommendation 21), the development of a Postgraduate Guide for use by staff and students, capacity development through the provision of support in research-related activities (seminars, workshops, information sessions) for staff and postgraduate students, the establishment of a centralized research data base to record all research outputs, and facilitation of research funding.

Recommendation 5, regarding the attraction and retention of postgraduate South African students, was workshopped by Faculties during the first semester of 2009, and the numerous suggestions replicated in Appendix 4 were distilled into the action plans. These relate mainly to identifying potential postgraduate students during their undergraduate studies and encouraging them to proceed to postgraduate level, as well as providing more attractive facilities and making funding available. Some of the suggestions are to be investigated prior to implementation in order to establish their feasibility, but have been flagged as such in the action plans.

### *Non-academic operational and corporate support services*

As previously indicated, the development and implementation of several recommendations relating to non-academic support services have been influenced by the non-availability of resources, which has affected the ability of the UFH to fully address these. The area of ICT is affected by the high costs of imported technology and it will not be possible to implement plans to address some issues noted in recommendation 14 in the immediate future. However, whereas, for example, a complete disaster recovery system cannot be put in place at this stage, back-up procedures are applied with due diligence to ensure that no institutional data will be lost. Opportunities for collaboration with WSU on their DRP platform are being investigated but these

are also hampered by connectivity and bandwidth issues. Virtualization is also providing for an element of disaster recovery once the virtual environment transformation is completed. This is dependent on further funding.

However, in other areas, support service departments and divisions had during 2008 engaged in developing improvement plans in response to previous audits and self-reviews that were conducted. In the Student Affairs Division, where the portfolio of Dean of Student Affairs was vacated in March and filled in May 2009 by the current incumbent, several plans have been launched to address long-standing issues such as the quality of residences (recommendation 13).

In the area of academic administration, standard reviews subsequent to stages of the academic cycle (registration, examinations, graduation) and the signing of Service Level Agreements between Faculties and the Registrar's Office resulted in defining of processes in several areas, covering the issue of certification highlighted in recommendation 15.

### *Gaps*

The process of mapping existing action plans against the recommendations of the Audit Report revealed several gaps, where either the required resources were not available, structures and processes were not yet in place, or the relevant portfolio responsible for implementation was vacant. The identified deficiencies fell into two broad areas: the absence of the party who would be responsible for developing and implementing action plans to fruition; or the non-availability of funding to acquire the resources needed.

The only area in which a responsible party was lacking by September 2009 was in the division of Marketing and Communication, where the post of Director was vacant. The post is about to be filled, however. A comprehensive plan will be developed to address the issues identified by the Audit Report in recommendation 2, once the new Director has assumed office.

As indicated previously, an area requiring major expenditure that cannot be made available at present is the division of Information Technology. Another unit that is unable to perform according to expectations due to budgetary constraints is the Internationalization Office. Recommendation 6 suggested that it should be resourced to provide better services and that it should contribute to combating xenophobic behaviour, but further staffing is required to enable this.

### *Conclusion*

Whilst presenting project plans aimed at addressing and resolving the issues contained in the Audit Report recommendations, the final draft of the Institutional Improvement Plan thus also represents a set of high level *statements of intent* in certain areas such as Marketing and Communication, and Human Resources, where comprehensive action plans covering all the issues contained in the recommendations of the Audit Report have yet to be developed in finer detail.

## **SECTION TWO**

### **Action Plans relating to Audit Report Recommendations**

In conceptualizing the implementation of the action plans, it was evident that both the issues themselves and the planning and coordinating of steps to address these could be clustered. However, these could not be dovetailed entirely with the Strategic Plan, which, by foregrounding strategy, de-emphasised individual core academic activities, which it is believed are important to retain as separate entities. Similarly, an emphasis on service culture, which it is acknowledged is of importance, should not be subsumed to the principles inherent in a quality assurance system that combine the quest for academic excellence with effectiveness and efficiency, transformation and value for money.

Recommendations and action plans have therefore been assigned to categories that separate the three core activities of a higher education institution, whilst attempting to create synergies within other categories, as follows:

- strategic objectives;
- transformation and institutional culture;
- excellence in teaching and learning;
- community development;
- research; and
- non-academic operational and corporate support services.

The recommendations and action plans developed to address the issues raised have been assigned to the above categories and the Improvement Plan has been arranged accordingly. In instances where vacant posts have created gaps, or where resources are not available, this is stated in the narrative or alongside the action plan itself.