

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE TOWN
ACADEMIC DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMME

IMPROVEMENT PLAN

26 August 2011

1. Introduction

The review of the Academic Development Programme (ADP) took place during November 2010. The panel was chaired by Professor PJ Schwikkard, Dean of Law. The report was finalised and made available to ADP staff at the end of March 2011. The review report has been discussed within ADP and CHED in the following fora: (1) CHED Heads of Department meeting; (2) CHED DAC and DAC long-term strategic planning workshop; (3) CHED Faculty Board; (4) two meetings of ADP unit heads; (5) three meetings of the ADP forum to which all ADP staff are invited; and (6) meetings of the individual ADP units. Three ADP unit-heads also sent written comments on behalf of their units.

Staff responded positively to the review panel's endorsement of ADP work and its recommendations, and the report has generated constructive discussion about the vision and structure of ADP. The commendations and recommendations are repeated below for ease of reference.

2. Commendations

- The ADP is to be commended for the proactive leadership role it has taken both at UCT and at a national level in the field of academic development.
- The Faculty of Commerce's Academic Development Unit (EDU) is to be commended for its proactive approach to academic development and its ability to raise the status of the academic development programme in that faculty.
- The University is to be commended for facilitating a structural arrangement for the work of ADP that both supports the work that ADP does and recognises the importance of the academic status of the personnel in its organisation. ADP is commended for its vision in implementing best practice in its organisational structures.
- The ADP is to be commended for the credibility that its highly qualified and experienced staff enjoy within faculties/departments. Furthermore, they are to be commended for the high level of staff morale within these faculty-based units.
- The ADP is to be commended for successfully securing funding and managing to convert much of their requirements to the general operating budget (GOB), helping to ensure the sustainability of their operation.

3. Recommendations

The committee made a number of recommendations, which we have grouped into categories in order to structure our discussion and response.

3.1 Improvement of graduation rates in ADP programmes

It is recommended that:

- the ADP further investigates means of increasing the graduation rates in ADP programmes in order to improve equity of outcomes.

3.2 Improvement of ADP's impact on the mainstream

It is recommended that:

- the ADP increases its assistance to faculties to identify and address gaps and weaknesses in the extended programmes (including uneven throughput and graduation rates across different faculties) and to strengthen the interaction with mainstream programmes.

3.3 Organisational structuring of ADP work

It is recommended that:

- the University supports the development of a comprehensive and unified approach to teaching and learning via the proposed new Senate Teaching and Learning Committee which it is anticipated will be responsible for coordinating all University activities in this area.
- the role of the ADP in Faculties is clarified so that there is a better understanding within the University of the respective roles and responsibilities of the ADP and faculties for academic development.
- a new Advisory Committee be established to amongst others, inform new developments within ADP and to promote its work.
- the ADP pay particular attention to the issue of staff succession planning and recruitment.
- the ADP considers mechanisms to enable the participation of key stakeholders in its budgeting process.
- faculties indicate, an AD income and expenditure line in their annual budget.
- in the areas of educational development where the ADP units are involved in work outside of UCT, there is a need for them to find a good balance between their national commitments and the need to support teaching and learning at UCT.

4. ADP's Improvement Plan: Overview

4.1 ADP-faculty interaction: towards 'mainstream educational development'

The ADP's work is integrally linked with teaching-and-learning in the faculties. While the foundational elements of extended programmes are designed and taught predominantly by ADP staff, most of these staff are on secondment to faculties or departments, and are responsible to these mainstream academic entities for the disciplinary integrity of their work. Moreover, foundational teaching and other ADP-related activities are increasingly being undertaken by staff whose posts are funded by the faculty and managed by the faculty-based ADP units. In two faculties, viz. Commerce and Health Sciences, there are Education Development Units (EDUs) that are joint faculty-ADP ventures.

These structures and developments indicate two key points that underlie the proposals in this improvement plan. First, while foundational provision can and must continue to improve, the performance and graduation rates of extended programme students depend greatly on the effectiveness of articulation between foundational and mainstream provision, which is in turn dependent on the capacity of the mainstream teaching-and-learning process to successfully accommodate educational diversity in the student body.

Second, improving overall throughput across the university depends primarily on improving the success rates of underperforming student groups, which largely comprise educationally disadvantaged students admitted to the mainstream as well as to extended programmes. Thus AD-related work is increasingly a joint faculty-ADP responsibility. It has also been recognised that the Department of Student Affairs has a crucial role to play in the provision of support services such as mentoring, counselling, financial aid and housing. The means of maximising the effectiveness of this co-operation are of increasing strategic importance to UCT's preferred approach to growth, viz. improving the success and graduation rates of the existing student intake rather than substantially increasing enrolment.

UCT's evolving admissions and placement policies are also central to faculty-ADP co-operation. There is a recognition in several faculties that, particularly in view of developments in the school sector and the NSC, improving throughput is likely to require larger numbers of students being directed into foundational courses or full extended programmes, and that various post- as well as pre-registration placement mechanisms need to be put in place. This will require co-operation in some new areas.

What is referred to in the ADP as 'mainstream educational development' has thus become a strategic priority for the ADP. It is also at the heart of most of the review panel's recommendations and thus the ADP's improvement plan. The structures and conditions – internal and external to the ADP – that we believe would best give effect to this co-operative effort form the basis of the improvement plan's proposals.

4.2 Proposed structures for facilitating mainstream educational development

- The ADP strongly supports the establishment of a **Senate Teaching and Learning Committee** with an overall brief to propose broad teaching-and-learning policy and target outcomes, work with the faculties on effective implementation, and monitor and evaluate output and outcomes. The ADP believes that the Senate committee should as a matter of priority develop and propose a comprehensive Teaching and Learning Strategy for UCT, incorporating Admissions and Placement policies, that can provide clear guidance for the development of UCT's undergraduate

and postgraduate teaching-and-learning process in all its facets, including relevant aspects of staffing policy, resource allocation and physical planning.

A long-term strategic planning initiative recently undertaken is considering, inter alia, how CHED might best support the work of the Senate committee as a 'professional arm', proposing policy and assisting with implementation.

- The ADP believes, on the basis of organisational analysis and previous experience, that the proposed Senate committee will not be able to work to optimal effect without similar structures at faculty level. There are a range of faculty-level bodies that are concerned with facets of teaching and learning, but in our view their composition and terms of reference are not comprehensive enough to guide the more in-depth educational development – including tracking of student performance and monitoring of success and graduation rates – that is necessary to meet UCT's goals.

The ADP therefore proposes that the faculties consider the establishment of **faculty-level teaching-and-learning bodies** with terms of reference that mirror those of the Senate committee and with constitutions that allow for representation from CHED and from relevant sections of Student Affairs, particularly those concerned with student advising and counselling. A key aim would be to facilitate a holistic approach to academic and student development at faculty level.

- Whether or not such faculty bodies are established, the ADP believes that strengthening its faculty-based units will be necessary to provide for more comprehensive mainstream educational development. The experience gained in Commerce and Health Sciences suggests that the best means currently available for ensuring that such strengthening will maximise co-operation with the faculties is the establishment of **Education Development Units (EDUs) in all faculties**, adapted from the models in Commerce and Health Sciences. The four faculties that do not have EDUs are consequently requested to consider the establishment of such units as joint ventures with the ADP and CHED.

Particularly if faculty-level teaching and learning bodies are established as proposed above, the faculty-based ADP units or EDUs could play a key role in proposing policy and assisting with planning and implementation by working in partnership with these bodies, again as a 'professional arm'.

- In order to strengthen the ADP's strategic role and promote transparency in resource allocation, the ADP welcomes the review panel's recommendation that an **ADP advisory board** be established. The ADP proposes that the primary membership of the board be the Deputy Deans responsible for teaching and learning. The board's role would be to interact with the ADP on approaches and strategic priorities, and to provide direct faculty participation in the development of ADP budget proposals and related matters of resource allocation.
- The role of other CHED departments is relevant to faculty-ADP co-operation. It was not within the review panel's brief to examine the ADP's role in relation to other units in CHED, but it is important to note that ADP works alongside units such as CET (Centre for Educational Technology), HAESDU (Higher and Adult Education Studies and Development Unit) and the Career Services, which all provide specialised professional services to mainstream curricula, as well as student and staff support. The CHED DAC has recently embarked on a series of longer-term strategic planning workshops to consider how CHED as a collective might best respond to the need to intensify its impact on UCT's mainstream, as called for by the Vice-Chancellor's

throughput-focussed budgeting and planning process. At the first meeting, in May 2011, it was recognised that within CHED as a whole, more work needs to be done to establish clear roles, positions and potential synergy. CHED itself needs to be clearer in articulating what academic and professional services it can provide to faculties. Strengthening CHED's role is likely to involve some **re-structuring of the work and resources within CHED**. This discussion will be followed up at the next workshop, scheduled for September 2011. The work of CHED as a whole is likely to be strengthened by the establishment of faculty teaching and learning structures, of the kind suggested above, where the needs of the faculty will be articulated in a coherent manner rather than on the basis of individual departmental requests.

4.3 Strengthening ADP work internally to meet emerging challenges

- The majority of faculty-based ADP staff are employed primarily in designing and teaching foundational courses within extended programmes. Given the increasing significance and expected growth of foundational provision, it is essential to maintain and strengthen the quality and effectiveness of this work. Since these staff are satisfactorily qualified in their home disciplines, the emphasis in staff development here is on the following:
 - providing encouragement and enabling conditions for undertaking higher degrees where appropriate, particularly PhDs, in the home discipline or in education related to that discipline;
 - providing informal and non-formal programmes for staff to develop as professional educators (such as internal and external short courses, seminar series, learning communities such as the Commerce Education Group (CEG), and reading groups such as that run by the Centre for Research in Engineering Education (CREE);
 - developing cross-ADP or cross-CHED research projects, such as the ADP research project on post-2009 matriculants (ADPrP) and the Postgraduate Literacies Project.

These activities are in place, and will be continued and where possible strengthened in future, with a view to raising the level of expertise of ADP staff in specialised teaching roles.

- Faculty-based ADP staff are generally specialists in their disciplines who are embedded in their faculties and departments and identify strongly with them. This is highly beneficial for gaining authentic experience, credibility with mainstream colleagues, and contextual effectiveness. Its disadvantage is insufficient interaction among AD staff across faculties and with the centralised units (Language Development Group, Numeracy Centre and AARP). It was envisaged that the ADP Deputy Director would play a central role in facilitating inter-unit links, but his secondment to AARP and the very limited resources in the central unit have blocked this. Ideas of establishing structured groupings of ADP staff who work in cognate areas across faculties (such as Mathematics and Statistics, or Physical Sciences) have not progressed, for the same reasons.

However, as outlined below, the ADP has decided to establish a small number of portfolios that will enable experienced staff to take responsibility for developing particular areas of ADP work. It is envisaged that one of these can be devoted to internal staff development and promoting inter-unit links.

- In comparison with the number of ADP staff in specialised teaching positions, there are at present relatively few staff who spend substantial time on mainstream educational development. Senior staff in the units and the directorate do a considerable amount of work in this area in a range of ways, from informal consultation and advocacy to active service on

committees and task teams, in some cases carrying a faculty portfolio. Also, by the nature of their work, staff in the centralised academic units (Language Development and the Numeracy Centre) collaborate closely with various mainstream departments and individual academics.

However, if the challenge of mainstream educational development is to be met, ADP capacity in this area must continue to be built. This will entail measures such as: increasing the experience and expertise of senior ADP staff in mainstream development; enabling ADP teaching staff to work more closely with the mainstream in specified roles (without jeopardising foundational provision); drawing interested mainstream staff into ADP-related roles; and in some cases establishing new senior ADP positions, in partnership with the faculties where possible and where there is a demonstrable case for the allocation of strategic funding. A specific mechanism for increasing the professionalisation of AD work is to expect new and inexperienced ADP staff to take modules in the Higher Education Studies Masters programme run by CHED staff.

- ADP staff members have acknowledged the need for succession planning given that the director will be retiring in 2013. Staff members have agreed to the development of portfolios within ADP that will enable experienced staff to take responsibility for specific areas of work, e.g. admissions, the first-year experience project, affective student development (in co-operation with Student Affairs), postgraduate student development, and internal staff development. This will facilitate the development of expertise beyond the directorate as ADP becomes more involved in mainstream work, and will facilitate discussion and exchange of ideas across conventional boundaries within ADP. It will also be important for career development and facilitate transformation within ADP/CHED. In addition, during the periods that the director and deputy-director take sabbatical leave over the next year, different staff members will be asked to take on areas of responsibility under the mentorship of the ADP directorate. It is envisaged that the appointment process for the new director will begin in late 2012 in order to ensure a reasonable period of hand-over and induction in the course of 2013.
- It is acknowledged that, especially during this period of change within ADP, work at a national level will have to be balanced with the need to support teaching and learning at UCT. The justification for the effort that senior ADP staff have put into national work includes that the establishment of an enabling environment through national higher education policy development is fundamentally important to AD work at UCT. Examples are the establishment of the foundation grant scheme, which has enabled most of UCT's extended programmes to be run on at least a break-even basis, the curriculum reform ('four-year degree') initiative, and the National Benchmark Tests project, which is playing a growing role in admissions and placement. However, if senior ADP staff are to be drawn more into mainstream educational development at UCT, attention will have to be given to rationalising roles, increasing delegation of routine administration, and improving the efficiency of administration systems (particularly through online mechanisms). The development of a portfolio system, as outlined above, is intended to be a central initiative in this area.

5. Summary of responses and proposals in relation to the specific recommendations

5.1 *... the ADP further investigates means of increasing the graduation rates in ADP programmes in order to improve equity of outcomes.*

- internal ADP staff development, including expecting new and inexperienced staff to take Higher Education Studies modules;
- promoting development in the theory and practice of foundational and other specialised forms of teaching and course design through facilitating inter-unit collaboration by means of a dedicated ADP portfolio and, in due course, the work of the Deputy Director;
- improving the articulation between foundational and mainstream provision through working with the faculties via the faculty-level structures – EDUs and faculty teaching-and-learning committees – proposed in section 4.2;
- continuing to refine admissions and placement mechanisms through working with relevant university and faculty committees.

5.2 *the ADP increases its assistance to faculties to identify and address gaps and weaknesses in the extended programmes (including uneven throughput and graduation rates across different faculties) and to strengthen the interaction with mainstream programmes.*

- working with the faculties via the faculty-level structures – EDUs and faculty teaching-and-learning committees – proposed in section 4.2;
- working with CHED to clarify and focus CHED's overall contribution to mainstream educational development
- building the capacity of ADP staff to contribute to mainstream education development in the ways outlined in section 4.3.

5.3 *the University supports the development of a comprehensive and unified approach to teaching and learning via the proposed new Senate Teaching and Learning Committee which it is anticipated will be responsible for coordinating all University activities in this area.*

- ADP and CHED to support the proposed Senate Teaching and Learning Committee through providing a 'professional arm' in assisting with policy development and implementation.

5.4 *the role of the ADP in Faculties is clarified so that there is a better understanding within the University of the respective roles and responsibilities of the ADP and faculties for academic development.*

- roles clarified and strengthened through a Teaching and Learning Strategy developed by the Senate Teaching and Learning Committee and through ADP co-operation with the individual structures proposed in section 4.2, recognising that the roles will differ from faculty to faculty.

5.5 *a new Advisory Committee be established to amongst others, inform new developments within ADP and to promote its work.*

- ADP to establish an Advisory Committee, comprising representatives from the faculties, the DSA, the IPD and other relevant stakeholders, to interact with the ADP on policy and resource allocation.

5.6 *the ADP pay particular attention to the issue of staff succession planning and recruitment.*

- ADP to focus on extending cross-unit expertise beyond the directorate by introducing portfolios on key cross-cutting areas of work, and to propose that the recruitment of a new director begin in 2012.

5.7 *the ADP considers mechanisms to enable the participation of key stakeholders in its budgeting process.*

- ADP to consult with the forthcoming Advisory Committee on resource allocation.

5.8 *faculties indicate an AD income and expenditure line in their annual budget.*

- ADP to assist with this through its faculty co-ordinators or EDU directors, noting the importance of avoiding duplication of budget items in the faculty and ADP budgets.

5.9 *in the areas of educational development where the ADP units are involved in work outside of UCT, there is a need for them to find a good balance between their national commitments and the need to support teaching and learning at UCT.*

- aiming to increase involvement in educational development at UCT without compromising national work by establishing conditions and structures, such as those outlined in 4.2, that enable senior unit staff to widen their role, and by greater delegation.

6. In conclusion

The ADP self-review and review report documents both speak to the wider issues of UCT teaching and learning strategy and its organisation at UCT. While our proposals focus particularly on the structural aspects of this work, we know from experience that the engagement of mainstream academic staff is essential to this work. We believe that an essential condition for improving educational development is that the Senate Teaching and learning Committee should give thought to the incentives that can be established at departmental, faculty and institutional level in order to recognise and reward staff members who commit time and energy to student development and to improving throughput rates. We welcome further discussion and feedback from colleagues in the wider university.

The ADP expresses its appreciation to the review panel for its key contribution to this work.

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