

UNIVERSITY OF THE
FREE STATE
UNIVERSITEIT VAN DIE
VRYSTAAT
YUNIVESITHI YA
FREISTATA



External Reviews Guidelines

**Directorate for Institutional Research
and
Academic Planning
(DIRAP)**

November 2021

Approved

Academic Committee of Senate 28 September 2021

Outcome

7.7 External Review Guidelines (see item 9.9 of the previous minutes)

See appendix, pp 122-162 of the agenda.

Elucidation: Dr S Brüssow

Supported the External Review Guidelines, subject to the following two changes:

It was requested that the wording be changed to "research-led university".

See paragraph 1.1, p 130: The heading of the paragraph should read as follows: "The Vision and Strategic Plan of the UFS."
The date ("2018 to 2022") should be deleted.

It was requested that the amended version be made available to the members: Dr S Brüssow.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. PREFACE	3
2. INTRODUCTION TO QUALITY.....	3
3. QUALITY ASSURANCE THROUGH EXTERNAL REVIEWS.....	4
4. EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW PROCESS.....	8
5. EXTERNAL REVIEW STRUCTURE	9
I. Terms of Reference for the Departmental External Review.....	9
II. Terms of Reference for the External Review Panel.....	10
A. ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS	13
6. SELF-EVALUATION REPORT GUIDELINES ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS.....	13
7. EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS REVIEWERS	21
B. SUPPORT UNITS	28
8. SELF-EVALUATION REPORT GUIDELINES SUPPORT UNITS.....	28
9. EXTERNAL REVIEW GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORT UNIT REVIEWERS.....	33
ANNEXURE A: PORTFOLIO OF EVIDENCE - ACADEMIC AND SUPPORT	37
ANNEXURE B: DEPARTMENTAL REVIEWS: A CRITICAL APPROACH (PREVIOUS APPROACH)	38

1. PREFACE

The External Reviews Guidelines document represents the way external reviews were conducted up until now and recommend ways that the process can be improved in the future. It should however be seen as a living document where continuous inputs and feedback will be included to ensure that the guidelines remain relevant, address sentiments and preferences of all stakeholders, and the impact on quality processes continue to lead to high quality outcomes. It is thus envisaged that this document is revisited in 2022 to accommodate the reflections on the process so far and spell out the way forward.

2. INTRODUCTION TO QUALITY

For more than a decade now South African higher education has experienced a national quality assurance regime. The audits, national reviews and accreditation systems of the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) of the Council on Higher Education (CHE) have largely shaped universities' internal systems of quality assurance as well as their overall notions of quality. Since the HEQC was launched in 2001 a variety of changes have taken place in the South African higher education system as well as in the policy frameworks and orientation of other national higher education systems. Research by a variety of national and supranational bodies has provided greater and more complex knowledge of both higher education and the impact and limits of quality assurance. This research needs to be taken into account as institutions consider the future of their approaches to quality and quality assurance.

The HEQC quality assurance system has had an important impact at a variety of levels, providing common practices, guiding institutions in designing explicit systems and procedures, and giving institutions an opportunity to reflect on how understandings of quality can respond to specific institutional missions and national challenges.

Nonetheless, the existence of a quality assurance system is not a sufficient condition for the development of quality in the core functions of a university. This task might be monitored and encouraged by national structures and processes, but generating quality teaching and learning, research, and community engagement resides in the domain of the university.

The University of the Free State (UFS) went through an HEQC audit in 2006 that pointed out a wide range of areas for review and improvement not only in the core functions but also in terms of governance, management and institutional culture. The recommendations of the HEQC were translated into an improvement plan. At a national level the HEQC has launched after wide consultation a quality enhancement project that replaces the institutional audits of the first cycle and that focuses on student success at undergraduate level. These new institutional reviews, which will be dealing especially with development of the teaching and learning core function, constitute another important element that needs to be factored in when rethinking the UFS approach to quality and how we monitor it.

The gains made by the UFS in the previous quality assurance cycle, the changes in the regulatory and policy environment as well as international trends in quality assurance (now

usually renamed quality enhancement) need to be seen and reinterpreted in the light of the UFS' current reality and aspirations as have been formalised in the new vision of the institution captured by the current Strategic Plan. In the last few years a number of important internal documents have been produced at the UFS that give expression to different aspects of the university's Strategic Plan; of particular relevance for this Quality Enhancement Framework is the Teaching and Learning Strategy that links in no uncertain terms quality teaching and learning and quality research at research intensive universities. Every effort has been made in preparing this framework to align its approach to the Teaching and Learning Strategy and the UFS's renewed focus on expanding research capability and capacity.

This document's main purpose is to articulate a common understanding of quality and quality assurance processes at the UFS that can serve the new strategic direction of the institution, and the enhancement of the quality of its core functions. This framework focuses specifically on those higher education functions that are funded by the Department of Higher Education and Training: teaching and learning and research and looks at service learning as part of the curriculum.

The document is organised in three subsequent sections. Section two describes the ways in which quality assurance has been managed at the UFS so far and provides a basis for the approach going forward. Section three outlines the key principles that underpin quality at the UFS. The final section offers some concluding considerations that connect the proposed framework to practice.

3. QUALITY ASSURANCE THROUGH EXTERNAL REVIEWS

Internal quality assurance at the UFS has taken the primary form of departmental reviews. The most recent version of the UFS Guidelines for Departmental Evaluation (and a similar document for programme evaluation) proposes a broad scope of analysis that includes not only the three core functions of higher education, but also the administrative and support functions provided by and to the department under review. The review process includes an internal self-evaluation and external evaluation that constitute the basis for a quality improvement plan.

These guidelines were presented to faculties as a way of organising periodic reflective practice across the full range of departmental activities, but each faculty was responsible for determining how best to implement its review. Each department enjoyed flexibility and variance provided that the review process included internal and external evaluations that produced an improvement plan. In most cases, those departments affiliated with an active professional board that conducted regular reviews experienced a streamlined internal process that primarily included an internal evaluation in preparation for the professional board site visit and an improvement report one year following the visit.

The regularity with which the internal quality assurance processes were implemented across the university and alignment to the national quality agenda created a fairly disciplined approach to quality assurance at the university, which became integral to identifying good practices and areas for improvement. Undoubtedly all of this assisted the UFS in establishing a culture of

quality assurance during the first cycle of implementation of the frameworks. Now the HEQC has changed some fundamental aspects of its approach. The Quality Enhancement Project, due to commence during 2014, with its focus on the effectiveness of teaching and learning, is guiding HEIs in adopting greater levels of reflexivity on their practices.

Following international developments in quality assurance, the HEQC's stated new approach to quality, and the UFS' s commitment to offer high-quality undergraduate and postgraduate education, as well as to position itself as a research institution, the focus of UFS internal quality assurance must change. It is necessary to place a much more pointed focus on the reflection on current practices with the specific purpose of achieving institutional strategic goals. In other words, quality assurance and enhancement must be regarded as a tool for change.

In response to a number of internal imperatives as well as changes in the external regulatory framework in relation to programmes and qualifications, the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP) embarked upon an institutional curriculum review in 2012 that ran together with the national Higher Education Qualifications Sub Framework alignment process. The purpose of this review was to assess the quality of UFS academic offerings relative to benchmarked national and international standards and the curriculum's alignment with the mission and strategic aspirations of the UFS. Due to the scope of this endeavour all internal departmental and programme reviews were suspended for the duration of the curriculum review. The unfolding of the curriculum review has also provided the space to rethink the quality assurance processes and to design a meaningful way forward for quality assurance/enhancement at the UFS beyond the curriculum review.

Analysis of the most recent version of institutional quality assurance processes (i.e. departmental and programme reviews) suggests that in order to emphasise academic quality enhancement, the methodology must narrow its scope to focus more pointedly on the effectiveness of teaching and learning and the intensity of research at different departments as well as on the relationship between teaching and research at undergraduate level. Equally important, if we have the view of using quality assurance processes as a tool for change, is that the criteria as well as the evidence base for reviews need to be consistent across all departments. This will allow the UFS to analyse information originated within the quality assurance process and to use it to establish benchmarks and trends that can become directly useful for academics.

In as many ways as possible assuring academic quality at the UFS must be a useful endeavour that supports academics' work and is part of the development of institutional knowledge that is used to steer the university toward its strategic objectives. The next section outlines the principles that should govern the practice of quality assurance at the UFS.

2.1 Conceptual and Practical Principles of Quality Assurance at the University of the Free State

It is critical that quality assurance at the UFS seeks to overcome the limitations of a compliance focus and connects quality to the pursuit of a better understanding of the educational enterprise and academics' role in it.¹ Both institutionally and nationally, the focus of quality assurance has

¹ Singh, M.; Quality assurance in higher education: Which pasts to build on, what futures to contemplate; *Quality in Higher Education*; vol. 16; no. 2; pp. 189-194; 2010.

been on establishing a functional system, and the associated processes have largely been based on outcomes. This has meant that there is much less emphasis on the constituent elements that yield the identified results. Certainly, for example, a university must graduate its students and even prepare them for an occupation, but, arguably, a university education should do more than that. With the persistent legacy of inequality in educational access and outcomes along racial and socio-economic lines in South Africa, quality education must consider “not only what is taught but also who teaches, how it is taught and to whom”² and with what results. If a more holistic, contextual approach to academic quality is required and endorsed, quality assurance methods must reflect this aim.

Following some of the most substantive conceptual critiques levelled at quality assurance, the UFS is adopting a new framework and practices for quality assurance at the university. The main purpose of a new framework for quality assurance is for departments to examine their implicit or explicit understandings of teaching and learning and research in order to identify what works and what does not work and why.

In the area of teaching and learning, this knowledge should help the institution to improve its curriculum and teaching practices, and therefore the student experience of our academic programmes. The new focus looks at quantitative evidence (e.g. student marks) and policies (e.g. faculty rules) as entry points to interrogate teaching and learning practices. In practical terms, the new framework focuses on what enables good teaching in different departments at the university, and on the obstacles that hinder good practice. Such an approach moves from a compliance orientation to an enhancement focus by creating opportunities to think and re-think *why* a particular practice or approach produces certain results.

Similarly, in the area of research, the approach is aimed at unpacking the extent to which research and scholarship are part of a department’s culture; how this culture expresses itself in activities and practices; and what outcomes it produces in terms of both quantity and quality (productivity). To what extent is a department producing research that is in line with national development goals and/or has local and international relevance within specific fields? This perspective will help the institution to move from an authority-driven, compliance approach to quality assurance toward an improvement-driven approach in which the academic staff is the agent of change.

A precondition for the success of this approach is for staff to be able to understand and interpret performance data in order to examine what lies underneath information such as success rates, graduation indicators and research outputs. Introducing this new way of thinking to open up the possibility for an enhancement-led quality process will require time and commitment from faculties and university management. Academic staff must be central to establishing *how* and *why* the students’ academic experience is taking place in a particular way and how the academic identity of staff unfolds and is nourished.

Together with this conceptualisation of change and the educational processes, the approach to quality assurance adopted in this framework relies on six principles: (i) academic freedom; (ii) faculty leadership; (iii) accountability; (iv) student engagement; (v) evidence; and (vi) impact.

² Gerwel, J.; Transformation and the universities: The experience of the University of the Western Cape in *Education in a Future South Africa*; Unterhalter, E., Wolpe, H., & Botho, T. (eds.); Africa World Press; 1992.

Academic freedom: Academic freedom is a right enshrined in the “freedom of speech” clause of the South African Constitution and designated as a core principle in the 1997 *White Paper on the Transformation of Higher Education*. It endorses academics’ freedom to decide what is worth teaching and researching. A system of quality enhancement relies on peer judgement to decide on the quality, relevance and importance of both teaching and learning and research in different fields. This said, a lecturer’s personal position or view should not be an obstacle to the introduction of students to contrasting knowledge and different voices.

Faculty leadership: Faculties are directly responsible for the quality of their academic offerings and nobody else can assume responsibility on behalf of the faculty for the quality of teaching and learning and research. This responsibility includes keeping pace with the development of the relevant knowledge fields and with teaching and learning as a specific area of knowledge. In this sense, deans, heads of departments, programme coordinators and individual academics are expected to take ownership of academic quality assurance processes to ensure that the engagement and outcomes are meaningfully and appropriately generated, understood, articulated, and implemented.

Accountability: Accompanying the endorsement of faculty leadership is accountability. Taking responsibility for academic quality implies an acceptance of performance expectations in the form of targets and benchmarks, including but not limited to reporting obligations and policy adherence in light of university strategy.

Student engagement: Empowering students to actively engage with the quality of their academic experience in a systematic and sustained manner is fundamental to enhancing the quality of tuition, learning and teaching, and citizenship preparation. Thus, it is critical to take seriously the ways in which students currently provide commentary on academic quality issues (e.g. student engagement data, course / module evaluations, student interviews and focus groups during accreditation site visits) as well as to be open to and affirming of new and/or creative possibilities for students’ influence on the UFS academic experience. The engagement with students should provide students themselves with an opportunity to evaluate institutional data so as to make them aware of the importance of evidence-based change.

Evidence: While data is at the core of any meaningful conversation about academic quality, data alone is insufficient. Academic quality reviews will encourage units under review to engage data to provide a reasoned account of successes and weaknesses in the educational process.

Impact: The aim of quality assurance efforts is to provide lean, evidence-based processes that produce institutional knowledge that can be used in strategic decision-making at all levels of the institution. In essence, the quality assurance process going forward should be a tool for meaningful change.

2.2 Considerations

This approach to quality assurance will enable the institution to create a method of academic review that takes seriously the university’s desire to be known for its commitment to academic excellence and human reconciliation. It is hoped that the systematic engagement with the

evidence of academic processes will create a critical frame of mind at the university that will help to improve the quality of teaching and learning and research.

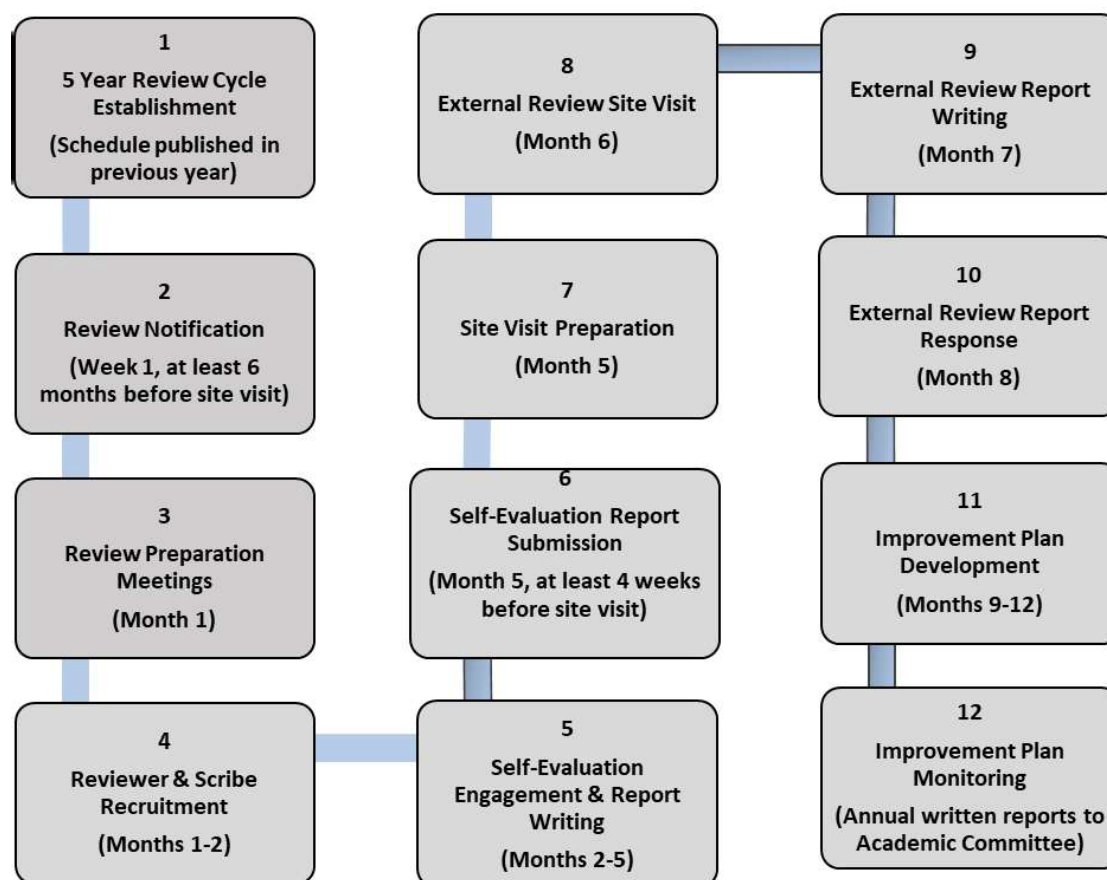
The successful implementation of the UFS Quality Enhancement Framework does not rest solely on the shoulders of DIRAP's Office for Quality Enhancement. On the contrary it depends on the active involvement and agency of academics and students.

The quality enhancement reviews have two main focuses, teaching and learning and research, and one unit of analysis: the academic departments. Thus, departmental reviews will focus on teaching and learning and research as well as on the explicit connection between the two in the undergraduate curriculum.

4. EXTERNAL QUALITY REVIEW PROCESS

The external review process consists of three main phases: 1) the internal self-evaluation by the department, 2) the external peer evaluation of the department, and 3) the quality improvement plan, which addresses the issues that would have been identified as needing attention. As detailed in the table below, the entire external review process may take a period of about 9 months from preparation to improvement plan development and submission.

Recommended Timelines for the External Review Process



5. EXTERNAL REVIEW STRUCTURE

I. Terms of Reference for the Departmental External Review

The terms of reference are stated in relation to the strategic goals and objectives of the Institution and the unit as well as the operational efficiency.

1. Institutional Terms of Reference

1.1. Vision (Strategic Plan)

The UFS is a research-led, student-centred and regionally-engaged university that contributes to development and social justice through the production of globally competitive graduates and knowledge

1.2.UFS' Strategic Goals

Goal 1: Improve student success and well-being

Goal 2: Renew and transform the curriculum

Goal 3: Increase UFS contribution to local, regional and global knowledge

Goal 4: Support Development and Social Justice through Engaged Scholarship

Goal 5: Increase the efficiency and effectiveness of governance and support systems

Goal 6: Achieve financial sustainability

Goal 7: Advance an Institutional Culture that demonstrates the Values of the UFS

- Social justice as the key outcome of transformation
- 'Decolonising the syllabus' and 'Democratising' knowledge
- An increased knowledge contribution locally, on the continent, and globally
- Strongly incorporating scholarship from Africa and the global South
- Student engagement as preferred approach to successful learning

1.4. UFS Quality Enhancement Framework (6 Principles)

- **Academic freedom** self-reflection and peer judgement
- **Faculty leadership's** academic quality role and responsibility
- **Accountability:** Performance expectations, policy adherence, etc.
- **Student engagement:** Commentary, data, course/module evaluations, etc.
- **Evidence:** Data and documentation (including learning material) to gauge successes and weaknesses

- **Impact:** Informing strategic decision-making & improvement/change at relevant levels of the institution

2. Specific Terms of Reference as established by the unit/Dean/DVC/Registrar

II. Terms of Reference for the External Review Panel

1. Composition of the Panel

The Panel consists of four to seven members. The number of members comprising the Panel is determined by DIRAP. Panel members will come from a diversity of backgrounds so that they gain maximum advantage from the range of thought from different expertise, perspectives, and experiences. Ideally, the combined expertise of the Panel members will cover the field of specialisation and expertise of department under review. The Panel Chair is a member of the Panel nominated by the External Review Panel members. The Panel Chair presides at the Panel meetings as well as during the review interview process, the compilation of the report, and the feedback to stakeholders.

2. Responsibilities of the Panel

The External Review Panel will assist the UFS in improving the department with reference to recommendations listed in the feedback report.

3. Role of the Panel

The Panel is established as an external review panel only to review the department/unit/school/centre of the UFS and, as such, has no decision-making authority. Panel members, for the time of the external review process, serve not as a representative of an organisation but in their personal capacity as a subject field expert.

4. Panel Member Responsibilities

The external review panel will study the department/unit/school/centre SER and hold interviews/discussions with different stakeholders to review the department/unit/school/centre according to the different areas addressed in the SER.

Conflicts of Interest

Panel members must disclose any conflicts of interest, real or potential, they may have in relation to the matters included in the SER and the schedule of the meeting.

Confidentiality

Members must keep information and materials provided by the UFS as confidential.

4.1 Operations

DIRAP facilitates the review process. The review takes the form of an online interactive meeting via the virtual meeting platform, *Microsoft Teams* over five days. The schedule for the meetings is propose by Academic Planning.

The external reviews take five days according Table 1 that follows:

Table 1: External Review Programme

Day Number	Review Focus
Day 1	External review introduction and document review
Day 2	Bloemfontein and South Campuses interviews
Day 3	Bloemfontein and South Campuses interviews continuation
Day 4	QwaQwa Campus interviews
Day 5	External review consolidation and preliminary reporting

The department/unit/school/centre SER together with documentary evidence will be provided to panel members one month prior to the online sessions. During the first day of the online meetings and interviews the panel will be provided with a brief outline of expectations and will be given additional relevant material on request where needed provided by the Academic Planning unit of the DIRAP. The second day will focus on interviews and discussions with relevant stakeholders on the Bloemfontein and South Campuses. Day three is a continuation of these interviews. Day four will focus on interviews and discussions with relevant stakeholders on the QwaQwa Campus. Day five provides the panel the opportunity to deliberate and to have follow-up discussions with stakeholders, if needed. This day will also be dedicated to the review consolidation and preliminary reporting and development of the panel's draft report which needs to be submitted to UFS four weeks after the finalisation of the online meetings.

Draft Schedule

Day 1

Focus

Introduction: Discussion of the Agenda
Document Review
Document Review

Group

DVC: Academic/DIRAP
Panel
Panel

Day 2 Bloemfontein Campus

Discussion Session: Dean & T&L Manager
Discussion Session: Head of Department
Discussion Session: Academic Staff
Discussion Session: Support Staff
Discussion Session: Undergraduate Students
Discussion Session: Postgraduate Students

Day 3 QwaQwa Campus

Discussion Session: Campus Principal
Discussion Session: Head of Department
Discussion Session: QwaQwa Campus Academic Staff
Discussion Session: QwaQwa Campus Support Staff
Discussion Session: QwaQwa Campus Students

Day 4

Additional Sessions

Day 5

Panel Synthesise Findings/ Report Compilation
Report Compilation
Preview and Initial Feedback DVC: Academic
Report Preparation for initial feedback to all stakeholders
Initial Feedback
Departure

Panel
Panel
DVC: Academic/DIRAP
Panel
All Stakeholders

A. ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS

6. SELF-EVALUATION REPORT GUIDELINES ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS

The self-evaluation report (SER) template is divided into 12 sections meant to assist the academic departments to evaluate the quality and effectiveness of their academic practice with regard to learning and teaching, research, community involvement and resource allocation. Through engagement in the self-study, the departments get an opportunity to carefully assess the efficiency and effectiveness of their systems, processes, structures, policies, resources, etc. with regard to the different areas of the academic practice, assisting them to rethink and reconceptualise their practice for purposes of improvement of quality and effectiveness.

Section 1. General Information of the Department

1.1. Departmental Profile

The opening section of the self-evaluation report presents the profile of the department within the context of the faculty and/or the institution in terms of staff, students and academic offerings over the period of five years. The section presents the data of both the undergraduate and postgraduate modules and programmes/subject specialisation packages offered by the department as well as the associated enrolment and success numbers/rates. The data provides an overview of the programme relationships with the faculty and majors/fields of specialisation the department is associated with. Some of the key data of this section includes the following:

- Staff associated data, which represents the profile of the department in terms of demographics, numbers and terms of appointment, qualifications, student-staff ratios and research outputs
- Students associated data, which represents the student profile in terms of demographics, programme/plan, module enrolment and success rate
- Module profile, which is presented in terms of the credit load, NQF levels and first order classification of educational subject matter (CESM) code. Where relevant, the professional/statutory body associations and accreditation standards are indicated.

To ensure consistency in data reporting across all departments/divisions, the section of DIRAP creates dashboards to provide data support to the departments/divisions.

Section 2. Strategic Intent

This section is meant for the department to review the purpose for its existence with regard to its academic direction, disciplinary focus, and strategic positioning, plans and priorities. The department evaluates its progress towards its strategic plan and attainment of its intended mission, goals and performance objectives in line with the strategic positioning and priorities

of the faculty and/or the institution. It reflects also on its purpose and strategic positioning as a provider of the higher education and the contribution its makes to its specific subject discipline area.

Section 3. Management and Organisational Structure

In this section of the self-evaluation report, the department reviews the appropriateness and effectiveness of its organisational structure (organogram), leadership and deployment of staff in terms of the following:

- Presentation of the organogram of the department and accountability at all levels of the organisational structure
- Sufficiency of general support, specialised and/or academic leadership within the department
- Communication strategy, which entails the communication channels within the department and the overall strategy used to enhance or ensure optimal communication within the department. This includes coordination of departmental meetings and intervals thereof, various timeframes for the submission of papers, etc.
- Evident proactive leadership and succession planning in terms of departmental management and senior staff

Section 4. Resources

In this section, the department evaluates its human, physical, and financial resources deployment. Where necessary, the department may need to make use of supplemental information by the faculty.

4.1. Human Resources

The department reviews its human resource strategy in terms of its staff deployment and profile, including mechanisms for setting and monitoring equity targets for its staffing profile. It evaluates staff sufficiency according to its academic offering scope and the student-staff ratios. It examines the expertise within the department in consideration of aspects such as the appropriateness of staff qualifications and experience with reference to academic specialisation areas and levels, administrative role expectations and professional/statutory body membership/registration status (where applicable). It discusses what its equity targets are in line with the Integrated Transformation Plan, and to what extent it is achieving the targets. Other aspects that deserve strategic consideration are succession planning, staff morale and relationships, and staff development.

4.2. Physical Resources

The department reviews the availability, provision, efficiency, appropriateness, condition/functionality, safety and utilisation of facilities and equipment for execution of the mandate of the department in terms of learning and teaching, research, administration and community engagement.

4.3. Financial Resources

The departmental evaluates its financial resources status in terms of aspects such as budget allocation; financial sources, control and generation; and alignment thereof to departmental plans and priorities.

Section 5. Quality Management and Enhancement

In this section, the department evaluates the effectiveness of its quality assurance, planning and management systems and mechanisms in internally quality guaranteeing its academic offerings. The discussion could include consideration of the following factors:

- Staff accountability in ensuring provisioning of quality learning and teaching practice essential for students' success
- Evaluation of the learning and teaching practice through feedback from module/student and peer evaluations
- The department's role and processes in monitoring improvement with regard to the findings/outcomes of the evaluations
- Stakeholder satisfaction: How the department obtains feedback to gauge satisfaction of all stakeholders such as staff, students, alumni, labour market representatives, the local community and professional bodies to inform planning and improvement of its activities
- Internal quality maintenance and improvement strategies used to guarantee quality assurance and standards compliance in accordance with the requirements of the professional bodies/statutory councils (if the department is associated with a professional body/council).

Section 6. Learning and teaching

This section addresses the department's practice with regard to curriculum development and renewal, teaching, learning and assessment, and student support and development.

6.1. Curriculum Development and Renewal

The department examines the relevance and currency of its curriculum in consideration of factors such as the following:

- Reviewing the outcomes and content of the modules for effective alignment with the purpose and outcomes of the programme(s) that the modules are linked to
- Investigating module curriculum overlaps, gaps and the need to strengthen curriculum with regard to the outcomes of the programme(s)
- Ensuring constructive alignment of the module outcomes, content, learning and teaching activities and assessment
- Evaluating the expectations of the modules with regard to the admission requirements of the associated programme(s) to ensure suitability of the rules of access and progression
- Evaluating the appropriateness of the cognitive/exit level outcomes of the modules in view of the NQF level descriptors

- Renewal of curriculum in consideration of the changing profile and needs of the students in order to improve students' learning experiences, engagement and success
- Assessing the module curriculum for purposeful attainment of specified graduate outcomes and attributes such as effective communication, critical thinking and employability/alignment to market demand
- Renewal of the curriculum in consideration of the changing national higher education and institutional agenda and priorities
- Studying and discussing student enrolment trends; success and retention rates; and feedback from students, alumni and internal or external reviews. The department evaluates the feedback and reasons for extremely low numbers in modules/programmes, low success rates and drop-out/withdrawal from modules/programmes to explore the need for the renewal of the curriculum.

6.2. Learning and teaching

The department evaluates the quality and effectiveness of its learning and teaching associated strategies, processes and tools in terms of the following considerations:

- Reflecting on strategies in place for improvement of learning and teaching in order to increase student success
- Identifying ways in which student profile associated knowledge is used to improve the process of learning and teaching
- Evaluating the alignment of the learning and teaching practice to student-engagement as the preferred instructional approach of the Institution
- Discussing specific graduate attributes that inform the learning and teaching practice
- Discussing strategies in place to support academic staff to become better teachers
- Examining the roles and effectiveness of the different structures of the department/faculty (such as the Learning and Teaching Committee) in improving learning and teaching
- Discussing the main challenges to improvement of learning and teaching, and how the challenges are addressed
- Examining how research capacity is developed in the undergraduate curriculum and how senior students are sufficiently prepared for articulation into postgraduate studies
- Assessing the integration of learning and teaching with research and community involvement

6.3. Assessment

The department evaluates the alignment of its subject specific assessment strategy, methods and tools to the institutional assessment policy. It evaluates the staff members' awareness of the latest developments regarding assessment in higher education and at UFS. It examines the quality, credibility and academic standard (including NQF exit level) compliance of the assessment processes/tools such as moderation practices, examination and test papers, assignments, online tests, open book assessments and oral assessments protocols.

6.4. Student Support and Development

The department identifies the needs and challenges facing the students and discusses the student development strategy and associated measures in place for supporting the students in terms of the following considerations:

- Detailing and assessing the effectiveness of institutional/faculty/departmental policies, guidelines, structures and curriculum innovation strategies in place for conceptualising and promoting student support and academic development in an integrated manner
- Assessment of the quality of services such as student guidance and counselling services, tutoring, induction/orientation programmes, etc. for optimal support and development of the students
- Evaluation of the effectiveness of the strategies in place for purposes of learning remediation, including strategies for early identification and support of at-risk students
- Review of library support in consideration of factors such as provision and currency of sources in the specific area of study; provision of subject related journals/periodicals; availability of knowledgeable staff to provide subject specific assistance; opening hours and availability of services; and collaboration/ relationship with the department
- Examination of the extent to which the culture of the department is diversity cognisance and student-centred by orientation, allowing all members of the diverse student body to equally access learning and teaching and develop optimally
- Evaluation of strategies for supporting students with regard to the implementation of the institutional language policy, ensuring that students have adequate opportunities to develop their competence in the language of instruction.

Section 7. Research, Internationalisation and Innovation

In this section, the department reviews its research practice and performance in terms of the research output, postgraduate research management, integration of research with learning and teaching, and the management of the quality of research. Suggestion on how the different components of the research practice and performance may be reviewed are provided in the subsections that follow.

7.1. Research Output and Innovation

The department evaluates the aspects of research in terms of the following:

- **Involvement:** Statistics, tables and graphs are used to reflect the research output of the department and the range and scope of research activities in which the department is involved
- **Involvement in collaborative research** regionally, nationally and/or internationally
- **Joint venture opportunities** where senior and junior staff conduct research in teams needs to be highlighted to gauge the extent to which opportunities are provided for novice researchers to be supported for involvement in research projects
- **Research focus area(s):** The research focus areas of the department are identified, and the rationale thereof is explained in linkage with the institutional and national focus areas

- **Ethical considerations:** The department assesses the effectiveness of the central ethical committee (could be at faculty level) in overseeing ethical issues of the research undertaken within the department
- **Environment:** The departmental evaluates the supportiveness of the departmental environment and availability of resources in encouraging research engagement. It examines and address constraints that staff regard as obstacles to their capacity to conduct research
- **Innovation and generation of research income** through contracts, patents, commercialisation, etc.

7.2. Performance of Postgraduate Students

The department examines the strategies it uses to regularly monitor and review its postgraduate progress, completion rates and outputs. It uses statistics, tables or graphs to indicate the number of postgraduate students, fields of study, completion rates, feedback and number and nature of appeals and complaints received from postgraduate students. Throughput rate review includes determining the percentage of postgraduate students who complete their studies within the predetermined minimum time; investigating the dropout rate with reasons thereof; and identifying strategies for addressing the dropout matter.

7.3. Postgraduate Research Management

The department evaluates all processes associated with postgraduate research, including selection, admission, enrolment and induction of postgraduate students; developing and evaluating proposals; monitoring of research progress; management of supervision; and review of postgraduate research policies, procedures and regulations, and the implementation thereof. Suggestion on how the different components of postgraduate research management may be reviewed include:

- Appointment and responsibilities of supervisors and external examiners
- The subject matter and research methodology expertise (including knowledge currency) of supervisors
- Training and development opportunities for supervisors
- Guidelines on rights and responsibilities of supervisors and students with respect to research supervision
- Student complaints and appeal channels and procedures
- Communication strategy and the frequency of supervisor-student contact sessions
- Support mechanisms for postgraduate students with regard to their research, including appropriate induction to research and proposal writing support
- Criteria for evaluating postgraduate research, as provided to the students and external examiners
- Conduciveness of the infrastructure and environment for research
- Exploring grant and funding opportunities for postgraduate research studies.

7.4. Disseminating postgraduate research results

The department reviews its strategy in place for assisting postgraduate students in disseminating research results. The strategy should include rules and regulations associated with copyright, intellectual property and publication (e.g. co-authorship with supervisors, etc.).

7.5. Quality Assurance of Research

The department evaluates the quality assurance strategies of its research practice in accordance with the following considerations:

- **Policies and procedures:** Review of the appropriateness and functionality of research policies, regulations and action plans
- **Structures:** Review of research support and management structures (committees, panels, etc.) in place to serve as mechanisms to quality assure research
- **Information systems:** Exploration of the extent to which the department develops, administers and ensures access to research information systems and mechanisms
- **Support and development:** Review of the quality of activities aimed at building research capacity, such as training new staff in research methodology, as well as incentives and support offered to new researchers and opportunities created for collaborative research projects.

7.6. Internationalisation

This section focuses on the internationalisation goals, strategy and priorities of the department. The department stipulates its internationalisation goals, strategy, plans, priorities and practice and evaluates the alignment thereof to the internationalisation goals, objectives and priorities of the Institution and the Higher Education landscape nationally. It assesses the extent to which the goals and plans are being met as intended.

Section 8. Community Engaged Scholarship

The department reviews its community involvement and academic citizenship associated activities with respect to the following considerations:

- **Alignment to institutional priorities**
 - Assessing the alignment of the department's community involvement and service-learning activities to the related institutional policy, objectives and priorities
- **Community involvement and academic citizenship**
 - Reviewing the list of community involvement projects and academic citizenship associated activities, discussing the extent to which the projects and activities are effectively focused on the specific needs of the targeted community groups
 - Identifying staff members involved and those not involved in community associated projects/activities, and exploring reasons and/or factors that hinder involvement

- **Community service learning**
 - The department lists its community service-learning modules/activities and evaluates the management and effectiveness thereof, as well as how beneficial the activities are to the community, department and students
- **Integration with teaching and research**
 - The department evaluates how effectively integrated community involvement is with research and teaching, assessing to what extent community involvement contributes to the quality and richness of learning and teaching.

Section 9. Curriculum Transformation and Decolonisation

The department reflects on the implementation of the Integrated Transformation Plan in terms of the following considerations:

- Developing a statement that establishes how the department views the decolonisation of curriculum
- Assessing the global, regional and local relevancy of the curriculum by looking at how well it reflects global thinking, a variety of ways of knowing, and sufficient consideration for local understanding, experiences, and problems
- Analysing the achievement gap between the 'white' and 'black' students and explore and implement ways to reduce the gap.

Section 10. Benchmarking and Use of Feedback

The department identifies higher education and general academic and professional practices and institutions it benchmarks its practice against for comparability in order to inform its academic practice and improve the curriculum and quality of its academic offerings. It establishes its use of user surveys, reviews and impact studies in informing the academic practice and improvement.

Section 11. Short Learning Programmes Management

The department provides a list of its short learning programmes (SLPs) and reviews the relevance and currency thereof. It examines also the effectiveness of the systems and processes in place for the quality management of its SLPs in consideration also of the alignment of its quality management systems and practice to the relevant institutional policy.

Section 12. Concluding Perspectives

The department concludes the self-evaluation by consolidating the main findings in terms of achievements and areas identified as needing improvement. This analysis is then used by the department to review and improve of its academic practice according to the different key areas addressed in the SER.

7. EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT ACADEMIC DEPARTMENTS REVIEWERS

The departmental external review report is structured according to the headings and subheadings that are directly linked to the Terms of Reference of the review, as presented to the reviewers by the Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP). Paragraph numbering is used to chronologically order the different sections/subsections of the report. The following are the key areas of focus that may be used for section heading purposes:

- Strategic Intent and Organisational Structure
- Learning and Teaching
 - Assessment and Moderation
 - Programme Design and Management
 - Student Access and Success
- Staffing
- Research Internationalisation and Innovation
 - Research, Innovation and Postgraduate Education
 - Internationalisation
- Community Engaged Scholarship
- Curriculum Transformation and Decolonisation
- Academic Planning and Quality Management
- Infrastructure and Academic Support Services
- Benchmarking, User Surveys and Impact Studies
- Short Learning Programmes Management

A. Structure

The following structure is recommended for the report:

Title Page

The contents that are suggested for consideration in designing the title page of the external review report include indication of the name of the department under review, the faculty and the Institution; the dates of the review site visit; authors of the review report and their institutional affiliation; and the date of submission of the report. An example in this regard is provided below.

External Review Report of the Department of
Faculty of
University of the Free State
Dates of the Review Site Visit
Authors and Institutional Affiliation
Date of Report Submission

Executive Summary and Introduction

Key findings

The key findings section is divided into subsections according to the different areas of focus/practice. The section provides an evaluation of the state of the department in terms of both the strengths/commendations and challenges, and the findings are presented in a manner that directly paves way to the establishment to the recommendations. Recommendations needs to be clear, actionable and positively expressed to inform quality improvement. Recommendations may be written in bold and italics for ease of reference. The different key findings sub-sections are provided below with examples of how the recommendations may be numbered.

1. Strategic Intent and Organisational Structure

This section of the report assesses the extent to which the department's vision and strategic goals, objectives and priorities are clearly stated and are effectively aligned to the strategic goals and priorities of the Institution. The focus is also on how well the goals and priorities meaningfully respond to the local, national and international context, and how they are aligned to the transformational agenda of Higher Education in South Africa. The review evaluates the effectiveness of the strategies in place for the realisation and monitoring of the strategic goals and priorities. It examines also the extent to which the management and organisational structure and the human, financial and infrastructural resources at the department's disposal fairly support the realisation the strategic goals and priorities.

1.1. Key Findings

1.2. Commendations

1.3. Recommendations

2. Learning and Teaching

This section of the report focuses on the aspects of learning and teaching to assess how clear the learning and teaching strategy that is. It examines also how purposefully the learning and teaching strategy is focused on promotion of student learning and is aligned to the learning and teaching strategy of the Institution. The section assesses the extent to which the learning and teaching strategy ensures that effective learning and teaching methods, suitable learning materials and appropriate learning opportunities are used to facilitate learning and attainment of intended learning outcomes (including artistic outputs where relevant); and that progress is effectively monitored. It examines the extent to which the learning and teaching strategy takes cognisance of the institutional goals and objectives, mode of delivery, student profile, student engagement as a preferred instruction strategy of the Institution and intended graduate attributes.

2.1. Key Findings (according the above sub-areas)

2.2. Commendations

2.3. Recommendations

3. Assessment and Moderation

This section assesses the assessment policy, procedures and evidence of the department, evaluating the extent to which the assessment practice guarantees the quality of assessment and moderation in order to ensure reliability and integrity of the academic offerings and of the qualifications of the UFS. The section determines how clear the principles and implementation procedures are to effectively guide assessment and internal and external moderation, ensuring that assessment practices are explicit, fair and consistently applied throughout the department. The assessment practice is also evaluated for appropriate alignment to the relevant academic/professional standards and to the institutional assessment policy. Other related considerations include rigour and security of the assessment system, recording of assessment results, monitoring of student progress; settling of grievances, effective policy and procedures for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL).

3.1. Key Findings (according the above sub-areas)

3.2. Commendations

3.3. Recommendations

4. Programme Design and Management

This section of the report evaluates the extent to which the department has clear, efficient and credible systems, processes and procedures in place for the design, approval, coordination and management of its academic offerings. Considerations include coherent design and effective articulation of modules and programmes; module/programmes coordination, including work-based learning; effectiveness of the management information systems; alignment of the modules/programmes to institutional goals, academic standards, national requirements; and needs of students and other stakeholders. The section evaluates also effectiveness of the systems, processes and procedures in place to quality assure and regularly evaluate and improve the academic practice and offerings. It examines the extent to which review findings and recommendations are effectively explored to inform and facilitate staff development and curriculum improvement, and to improve student access and success.

4.1. Key Findings

4.2. Commendations

4.3. Recommendations

5. Student Access and Success

This section of the review report focuses on the student access and success. With regard to access, it examines the extent to which the departmental documentation used for student recruitment accurately and adequately describes the academic offerings, and also the extent to which the stipulated admission and selection requirements are fair, cater for widened access and equity and adhere to the relevant legislative expectations. The section evaluates the extent to which module/programme enrolment numbers take consideration of intended educational outcomes, departmental capacity and

employability. With regard to success, the section reviews the enrolment numbers and retention and throughput rates in consideration also of the performance gap between the racial and gender groups. It evaluates the effectiveness of the remediation and monitoring strategies in place in relation to improvement of access and success. It considers also academic development and other support initiatives in place for development of students and curriculum development for promotion of student success.

- 5.1. Key Findings**
- 5.2. Commendations**
- 5.3. Recommendations**

6. Staffing

This section of the review report addresses issues of academic and support staff capacity, adequacy and development. The section evaluates the extent to which the academic and support staff are suitably qualified and sufficiently/appropriately experienced for the department to effectively deliver its teaching, assessment, research, community engagement, quality and student support and administration mission. The review focuses on aspects such as policies, procedures and strategies in place for facilitation of staff recruitment, selection, appointment, support and capacity development. It considers also elements of staffing such as redress and equity, full-time to part-time staff ratio and academic seniority.

- 6.1. Key Findings**
- 6.2. Commendations**
- 6.3. Recommendations**

7. Research and Postgraduate Education

This section focuses on the efficiency of the arrangements in place for the quality assurance, development and monitoring of research (or research equivalent activities) engagement and production as well as postgraduate education. Research engagement and production associated review focuses on the degree of research participation and productivity and the extent to which research is supported for developed and quality enhancement. Postgraduate education review assesses the appropriateness of the strategies, policies, procedures and regulations for admission and selection of students; selection and appointment of supervisors; the roles and responsibilities of supervisors and students; and postgraduate education support initiatives. Considerations include increased number of registered honours, masters, and doctoral students; creating effective supplementary supervision models; improved research and research equivalent outputs (articles, conference proceedings, artistic outputs and books); increase in the number of NRF-rated researchers; commercialisation of research and research equivalent activities; and particular focus on development of black researchers.

8. Internationalisation

This section focuses on the internationalisation strategy and priorities of the department. It evaluates the extent to which the internationalisation strategy and practice of the department is aligned to the internationalisation goals, objectives and priorities of the Institution and the Higher Education landscape nationally; how clearly stated the goals, objectives, plans and priorities are; the visibility of the associated activities; and the extent to which the goals and plans are being met. Considerations include benchmarks such as cross-border mobility of students and staff; regional and global research collaborations; offering of joint supervision and degrees by universities in different countries; and offering higher education outside the borders of the home countries.

4.1.1 Key Findings (according the above sub-areas)

4.1.2 Commendations

4.1.3 Recommendations

9. Community Engaged Scholarship

This section focuses on the formalisation, effectiveness and quality of arrangements in place for facilitation and monitoring of community engagement. It assesses also the effectiveness of the integration between community engagement, research and learning and teaching. The assessment deals with the extent to which the department has/is strategically positioned/positioning itself with regard to maintaining the relevance of its curricula by linking its knowledge to the real local needs of the society. The section focuses on the interaction of the department with the diverse community for purposes of application of staff and students' knowledge and skills to address the specific needs of the community. In this regard, community includes the general local community, civil society, private sector, government, and non-governmental organisations. Modules that have a community engagement component need to be evaluated for purposes of strengthening the engaged scholarship strategy of the department.

9.1. Key Findings

9.2. Commendations

9.3. Recommendations

10. Curriculum Transformation and Decolonisation

This section focuses on the extent to which the curriculum in reflecting a variety of ways of knowing; 'decolonising the syllabus', 'democratising' knowledge and making it relevant. Important considerations are inclusion of voices, identities, philosophies of knowledge (local & others) that have previously been marginalised/excluded; student engagement as preferred instructional approach; education that produces excellent graduates who can contribute to a sustainable, just society, locally and globally; and engagement in global conversations/scholarship and locally relevant research; strongly incorporating scholarship from Africa and the global South.

10.1. Key Findings

10.2. Commendations

10.3. Recommendations

11. Academic Planning and Quality Management

This section focuses on the practice of the department with regard to the academic planning and quality assurance measures that exist for purposes of ensuring delivery of high-quality programmes. The section addresses the extent to which the quality management mechanisms, both external and internal, are integrated into academic planning. It reviews the effectiveness of the department's quality assurance and management arrangements in relation to support, continuous monitoring and enhancement of the quality of the core activities of the department, namely, learning and teaching, research and community engagement.

11.1. Key Findings

11.2. Commendations

11.3. Recommendations

12. Infrastructure and Academic Support Services

This section examines the effectiveness and adequacy of academic support services in meeting the needs of the departments. It assesses availability, sufficiency and suitability of venues, IT infrastructure and library and other resources, as well as policies and strategies in place for facilitation of support and access for students and staff. It looks at aspects such as the degree of exploration and uptake, the effectiveness of support, and ease of access by/for staff and students in support of research, curriculum development, learning and teaching and community engagement. Services of consideration in this regard may include services provided by the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), including, tutoring services; Directorate for Institutional Research and Academic Planning (DIRAP); Directorate for Research and Development (DRD); Student Counselling Services; Library and Information Services; and Information and Computer Technology (ICT) support.

12.1. Key Findings

12.2. Commendations

12.3. Recommendations

13. Benchmarking, User Surveys and Impact Studies

This section assesses the extent to which the department identifies and establishes valid and legitimate higher education and general academic and professional benchmarks for comparability of the academic practice in order to inform improvement of the curriculum and quality of its academic offerings. The section assesses the uptake and use of user surveys, reviews and impact studies in informing academic, student support and quality planning, delivery and enhancement. In the case where the department has had previous review(s) or has been part of some other review process such as programme or faculty review, assessment is made regarding the extent to which the department has responded to the recommendation of the previous review(s).

- 13.1. Key Findings**
- 13.2. Commendations**
- 13.3. Recommendations**

14. Short Learning Programmes Management (where applicable)

This section focuses on the effectiveness of the systems and processes in place for the quality management of the short learning programmes. The section assesses the department's short learning programme policy and systems for alignment to the relevant institutional policy. It assesses the extent to which the department guarantees programmes that are offered in partnership with other providers and stakeholders and programmes that are offered at off-campus tuition centres and satellite campuses. The section examines also the arrangements, quality assurance mechanisms and monitoring roles and responsibilities in place for ensuring the integrity of participant records that lead to certification.

- 14.1. Key Findings**
- 14.2. Commendations**
- 14.3. Recommendations**

Timelines for the writing and submission of the Review Report

Weeks 1-2 after review site visit	The chairperson of the panel compiles the first draft of the review report with input from the panel members and then circulates it for revision/confirmation by the panel members.
Weeks 3-4 after review site visit	The chairperson adjusts the report according to the input from the panel members and writes the final report.
	The chairperson sends the final report to the DIRAP
	DIRAP forwards the report to the stakeholders within UFS.

B. SUPPORT UNITS

8. SELF-EVALUATION REPORT GUIDELINES SUPPORT UNITS

Introduction to Support Unit External Review

The primary purpose of the support unit external review is to assess and improve the quality and effectiveness of support service provisioning as well as its community involvement and research activities/outputs where applicable. The review assesses also the efficiency of the resources that support the different functions of the unit. The external review process consists of three main phases: 1) self-evaluation by the unit, 2) external peer evaluation, and 3) development and implementation of the improvement plan, which is the plan of action executed to address issues that the review identified as needing some attention.

Self-Evaluation Report (SER)

The review exercise starts with the internal self-evaluation, which leads to the writing of a Self-Reflection Report (SER). The Self-Evaluation provides the opportunity for the unit to reflect on the effectiveness of its support provisioning and its internal quality maintenance and improvement strategies. Generically, the sections of the SER focus on the strategic direction and objectives of the unit, quality maintenance and improvement processes, aspects of unit structure, governance and management, administration and other operations, external relationships, research and resourcing. Guidelines with regard to the different sections of the SER are provided below.

Section 1: Introduction

1.1. General Background

The first part of the introduction sets the context of the unit under review in terms of the strategic role, purpose and position of the unit within the context of the Institution. It includes a brief history of the establishment of the unit and the evolution of its support services/programme offering in response to the changing landscape of higher education in South Africa, the profile of the students and other related internal and external environmental factors. The section indicates the main areas of focus of the review directly associated with the terms of reference. Where applicable, Table 1 may be used to refer to the progress made in addressing the recommendations arising from any previous reviews of the unit. Any actions and action plans under execution in response to previous professional reviews/accreditations should be referred to and attached as addendum to the SER.

Table 1: Recommendations Arising from Previous Reviews

Recommendation	Progress Status C, IP or R	Progress Description

Key:

- *C: Completed;*
- *IP: In Progress;*
- *R: Response with regard to factual inaccuracies or disagreement with the recommendation*
 - *In the case of R, a written response, endorsed by the relevant Dean and DVC/Registrar, must be attached as an Addendum to the SER*

1.2. Unit Information

The second part of the introductory section includes the description of the profile of the unit in terms of staff and student data. The student data section presents the data of both the undergraduate and postgraduate students in terms of the demographics and numbers of students who are associated with the unit or who have received support service from the unit over the past 3 years. Support service provision data may provide an overview of the support services and programmes provided by the unit, showing trends of support provision over the period of three years. Staff associated data should represent the profile of the unit in terms of demographics, numbers and terms of appointment, qualifications, research outputs, etc. Where relevant, the professional/statutory body associations and accreditation standards needs to be indicated.

The Institutional Information Systems section of DIRAP may supplement the data provided by the unit where necessary.

Section 2: Strategic Intent**2.1. Strategic Direction and Objectives**

This section is meant for the unit to review the purpose of its existence with regard to its strategic direction, positioning, plans and priorities as well as support service focus. The unit evaluates its progress towards its strategic plan and attainment of its intended mission, goals and performance objectives in line with the strategic positioning and priorities of the Institution. The unit needs to make particular reference to the strategic goals of the Institution contained in the Strategic Plan of the Institution. The units should reflect on the extent to which it is achieving its objectives in making its intended contribution towards the development of students according to the specific support service it offers. If the unit is associated with a professional/statutory body or council, the extent to which the unit is conformant in this regard needs to be specifically evaluated.

2.2. Responsiveness to the Integrated Transformation Plan

In this section, the unit reflects on the extent to which its strategic direction, objectives and practice are responding to the Integrated Transformation Plan (ITP). The unit outlines its ITP related plans and objectives and reviews the progress it has made towards the implementation and achievement thereof.

Section 3: Management and Organisational Structure:

In this section of the self-evaluation report, the unit reviews the appropriateness and effectiveness of its organisational structure (organogram), leadership and deployment of staff in terms of the following:

- Unit structure (organogram) and staff holding accountability at all levels
- Description of the position(s), roles and responsibilities of the management and leadership personnel/team and the discussion of effectiveness thereof
- Sufficiency of general support, specialised and/or support leadership within the unit
- Communication strategy, which entails the communication channels within the unit and the overall strategy used to enhance or ensure optimal communication within the unit. This includes coordination of unit meetings and intervals thereof, various timeframes for the submission of reports where applicable, etc.
- Links of the unit with students and external stakeholders
- Motivation levels of staff: This relates to evident proactive leadership, and high levels of morale among staff members, as well as staff relationships in general
- Succession planning of the unit.

Section 4: Support Provision and Performance

The unit describes its support provisioning to students in terms of the array of programmes and services offered. It evaluates the effectiveness, appropriateness, responsiveness and quality of its support provisioning in consideration of the needs and challenges facing the students, detailing different reasons why students approach the unit for support. The unit also pays particular attention to initiatives specifically designed and implemented to provide students with academic skills support and development. It reviews how the support provisioning has evolved and grown in response to the change in the population and profile of the student body.

Section 5: Operational and Quality Systems and Processes

In this section, the unit evaluates the effectiveness and quality of the operations, processes, systems and mechanisms for ensuring that the support service meaningfully responds to the needs and expectations of the students and the institution.

The discussion could include consideration of the following:

- Documents such as handbooks, policies, standard operating procedures and calendar of scheduled activities and events that guide the operations and work of the unit
- Data and information management and compliance procedures and formats that guarantee security and protection of personal information and confidential records
- Staff accountability in ensuring provisioning of quality support
- Stakeholder satisfaction: Evaluation of the practice and service of the unit to gauge satisfaction of all stakeholders to inform planning and improvement. Examples in this regard include student, peer, professional bodies and other partners/stakeholders' evaluations and feedback
- Professional/statutory bodies/councils: Internal quality maintenance and improvement strategies used to guarantee quality assurance and standards compliance in accordance with the requirements of the external body/council, if the unit is associated with a professional or external body or council
- The unit's role and processes in monitoring improvement with regard to the findings/outcomes of the evaluations

Section 6: Relationships and External Engagement

The unit reviews its partnerships/relationships with the external community including the national and international professional/statutory bodies/councils. The needs of the community (specific, local and collective interest groups) that the unit serves are explored; and the community involvement projects are reviewed with respect to how well they address the needs of the targeted community. The unit reviews also the number of staff in the unit involved and those not involved in community associated projects, exploring reasons and/or factors that hinder involvement. It reviews also the extent to which its core practice gets to be integrated with community involvement and research.

For the internship programme, the unit reviews its administrative and governance arrangements in place for establishment of the unit as a place of work-integrated learning in consideration of the expectation of the relevant professional practice. The unit indicates the number of placements it offers as well as the number and names of partners involved. Other important considerations include criteria for selection and acceptance of candidates for internship placement; communication channels; designated liaison person for professional learning placements; code of conduct for interns and associated disciplinary processes; and protocols for grievances and disputes.

Section 7: Research, Internationalisation, and Innovation

In this section, the unit reviews its research practice and performance in terms of the research associated activities, partnerships and outputs. The unit evaluates the aspects of research in terms of the following:

- Involvement: Statistics, tables and graphs are used to reflect the research output of the unit and the range and scope of research activities in which the unit is involved.

- Research focus area/s: The research focus areas of the unit are identified, and the rationale thereof is explained in linkage with the institutional and national focus areas
- Ethical considerations: The unit assesses the effectiveness of the ethical process followed in overseeing ethical issues of the research undertaken within unit
- Environment: The unit evaluates the supportiveness of the unit environment and availability of resources in encouraging research engagement. It examines also constraints that staff regard as obstacles to their capacity to conduct research.

Section 8: Resources

In this section, the unit evaluates its human, physical, and financial resources deployment.

8.1. Human Resources

The unit reviews its human resource strategy in terms of its staff deployment, profile and development, including mechanisms for setting and monitoring equity targets for its staffing profile, and internship placements. The unit evaluates staff sufficiency according to its support service offering scope relative to the average student numbers they deal with per year. It examines the expertise within the unit in consideration of aspects such as the appropriateness of staff qualifications and experience with reference to the professional specialisation areas and levels, administrative role expectations and professional/statutory body membership/registration status (where applicable). It discusses what its equity targets are in line with the Integrated Transformation Plan, and to what extent it is achieving the targets. Aspects that deserve strategic consideration include succession planning, staff morale, staff development and diversity/demographics of the staff in consideration of the demographics of the current and projected student body profile

8.2. Physical Resources

The unit reviews the availability, provision, efficiency, appropriateness, condition/functionality, safety of facilities and equipment for execution of the mandate of the unit in terms of the core function of the unit, administration, research and community involvement.

8.3. Financial Resources

The unit evaluates its financial resources status in terms of aspects such as budget allocation; financial sources, control and generation; and alignment thereof to unit plans and priorities.

9. Concluding Remarks

9. EXTERNAL REVIEW REPORT GUIDELINES FOR SUPPORT UNIT REVIEWERS

The external review report is structured according to the headings and subheadings that are directly linked to the Terms of Reference of the review, as presented to the reviewers in these guidelines. Paragraph numbering is used to chronologically order the different sections and subsections of the report. The sections of the review report are the executive summary and introduction, key findings according to the different subsections, and recommendations.

Structure

The following structure is recommended for the report:

Title Page

The contents that are suggested for consideration in designing the title page of the external review report include indication of the name of the department under review, the faculty and the Institution; the dates of the review site visit; authors of the review report and their institutional affiliation; and the date of submission of the report. An example in this regard is provided below.

External Review Report of
University of the Free State
Dates of the Review Site Visit
Authors and Institutional Affiliation
Date of Report Submission

Executive Summary and Introduction

This section of the review report provides an overview of the review with regard to the Terms of Reference. It highlights the focus areas of the review, the participant description, a brief overview of the process followed, a brief statement of the general impression of the position and practice of the unit under review, providing an overview of the achievements and the core areas of practice that need some improvement.

Key findings

The section is divided into subsections according to the different areas of focus/practice. It provides an evaluation of the state of the unit in terms of both the strengths/commendations and challenges, and the findings are presented in a manner that directly paves way to the establishment to the recommendations.

1. Strategic Intent

The review considers that the particular support unit has a purposeful, strategic role to play in enabling the Institution to achieve its vision and goals. This section examines the extent to which the vision, mission, strategic goals, objectives, priorities and activities of the unit are aligned to the strategic objectives and priorities of the Institution. The section reviews the extent to which the strategic plan of the unit articulates a clearly defined vision and identity for the unit in consideration of the strategic role the unit is meant to play within the Institution. It assesses the extent to which the unit is achieving its objectives and it interrogates how well the practice of the unit has adapted with regard to the needs of the university community according to the diverse profile thereof. It considers also the educational outcomes and graduate attributes, knowledge and competencies the unit wishes to purposefully support.

1.1 Key Findings

1.2 Commendations

1.3 Recommendations

2. Organisational Structure and Management

This section focuses on the organisational structure, leadership and management of the unit. It assesses the strength, functionality and efficiency of the organisational structure in consideration of the staff positions and associated roles, responsibilities and functions. The strength of the leadership of the unit is examined in terms of the role of the head of the unit, management practices and priorities, strategic leadership, and direction towards a definite identity and shared vision. Other factors of interest include staff morale and satisfaction; communication channels; lines of reporting; intentional accountability at all levels; and delegation that affords adequate time and attention to strategic functions.

2.1 Key Findings

2.2 Commendations

2.3 Recommendations

3. Staffing

This section of the review report addresses the staff composition and associated matters. The section focuses on the appropriateness of the qualifications and work experience of staff according to the academic/professional levels and disciplinary areas. In addition, staff composition is explored from the equity plan perspective and the extent to which the staff demographics are representative of the demographics of the country and the student profile of the Institution. It examines also the adequacy of staff with regard to the institutional enrolment numbers. Other relevant considerations include plans, policies and strategies associated with staff recruitment, talent management, staff retention, staff training and development, and terms of appointment (full or part time, permanent and temporary contracts).

3.1 Key Findings

3.2 Commendations

3.3 Recommendations

4. Physical Facilities and Infrastructure

This section focuses on the suitability of the facilities and infrastructure of the unit for the services it is meant to offer as well as the model and programmes of delivery thereof. The section considers the location, comfort and invitingness of the unit/offices within the university across the three campuses. It reviews administration space, office space, meeting rooms, individual consultation and group session rooms, client waiting areas, and other business spaces. It assesses the adequacy of the spaces to accommodate the current functions and the intended growth of the unit.

4.1 Key Findings

4.2 Commendations

4.3 Recommendations

5. Quality Assurance and Enhancement

This section addresses the systems and processes associated with quality assurance, maintenance and improvement. The section interrogates the systems, policies, processes and procedures that direct the work of the unit for conformance to the relevant local and international standards and quality assurance and enhancement expectations. Other considerations include the extent to which the unit collects and considers stakeholder, client and non-client feedback to inform/refine its strategic objectives; research and other strategies through which the unit ensures that it keeps systems and processes up-to-date with best practices, and record keeping that meets expectations.

5.1 Key Findings

5.2 Commendations

5.3 Recommendations

6. Performance

Each and every unit of the Institution is expected to operate according to the acceptable standards, legalities and laws of the country and to be at par with the practices of the counterpart institutional units. This section assesses the appropriateness and broadness of the array of services, curricular/co-curricular/support programmes, approaches and mechanisms. The review considers a comparative overview of the practice as established across institutions of Higher Education locally and globally and assesses the unit against what the practice is or what it ideally ought to be within the context of Higher Education, especially in the context of South Africa.

6.1 Key Findings

6.1 Commendations

6.1 Recommendations

7. Collaboration and Partnerships

This section of the report focuses on the visibility and identity of the unit for purposes of value for money, fitness for purpose and excellence in service to both the internal and external stakeholders of the unit. The section reviews the validity and strength of relationships the unit has with stakeholders such as the academic departments and other support units of the

University, relevant external departments/organisations, and the general community. The section also evaluates the range and effectiveness of the communication channels (including unit website) and networks (including staff and student advisory groups) used by the unit to communicate efficiently with both the user and non-user stakeholders. It examines the consistency in engagement with stakeholders at all levels and the extent to which relationships are explored to ensure that the practices and policies of the unit remain in alignment with best practices.

7.1 Key Findings

7.2 Commendations

7.3 Recommendations

8. Responsiveness to the Institutional Change and Transformation

This section focuses on the attempts the unit has made with regard to business process developments and new innovative ways of working that are intended at repositioning the unit for renewed strategic identity and advancement in line with the initiatives of institutional change and transformation. Considerations in this regard may include alignment to the 4th Industrial Revolution Strategy of the University; proactive approaches; online and other technological platforms; and languages support related initiatives.

8.1 Key Findings

8.2 Commendations

8.3 Recommendations

Recommendations

The report draws on all the recommendations based on the findings of the review. The recommendations are intended at assisting the unit to address challenges it is currently experiencing and weaknesses that may somewhat be associated with its services, approaches and strategies, so the unit may reposition itself for improved contribution to the University's goals and objectives and enhancement of the university community's experience with regard to internationalisation.

The recommendations need to be clear, actionable and positively expressed to inform quality improvement. They should be organised, titled and chronologically numbered according to the respective sections and sub-sections of the report.

ANNEXURE A: PORTFOLIO OF EVIDENCE - ACADEMIC AND SUPPORT

For both the self-evaluation and external review, the department/unit is expected to substantiate the evaluation with evidence in the form of documents, statistics/data and information. Evidence suggested for the review includes the following:

- Departmental/unit strategic goals and plans in line with the vision, mission and strategic priorities of the Institution
- External evaluation reports of previous cycles
- The diagram depicting the organisational structure of the department/unit, inclusive of both the academic and support staff, and the statement of the department's strategic management indicators and anticipated future developments
- Overview on financial position, including opportunities and constraints
- Staff profile of the department/unit and comments on academic and support staff adequacy
- Information on staff development and training
- Information on programmes and/or modules/courses offered by the department, including departmental handbooks and rulebooks, annual reports, notes, online provisioning, module/course structures, requirements, module outlines/study guides with curriculum content and learning outcomes, teaching and learning and assessment strategies, samples of dissertations and theses, etc.
- Assessment as represented by samples of test and examination papers, course assignments, practical assessments, associated assessment criteria and reports of external examiners and moderators of exit level modules for the previous five years
- Workload model detailing distribution of academic work, inclusive of teaching and learning, research, community involvement and administration
- Departmental student data (provided by DIRAP), including enrolment patterns, throughput and dropout rates, undergraduate and postgraduate student numbers in programmes/modules, graduate/success profiles and attributes and student-staff ratios
- Information on module/programme evaluations and other surveys conducted by the department/unit
- Research output associated evidence, including the national and international research standing and associated list of recently published articles, book chapters or books, collaborative projects and RNF rating
- Committee membership lists
- Internal and external peer feedback
- Information on community involvement contributions by staff and associated Memoranda of Agreement/Understanding (MoA/MoU)s where applicable
- Documentation such as policies, processes, procedures and guidelines

ANNEXURE B: DEPARTMENTAL REVIEWS: A CRITICAL APPROACH (PREVIOUS APPROACH)

In alignment with the Teaching and Learning Strategy of the university the departmental reviews are focused on the improvement of teaching and learning and require staff to articulate their understanding of teaching and learning and to explain how they know that what they do is working.

At the same time the review requires departments to reflect on their contribution to the UFS's research enterprise and to the advancement of knowledge in their different disciplines. What elements in the university, faculty or department environment can be identified as enablers or obstacles for the development of a productive research culture? This includes the quantity and quality of postgraduate education taking place at the department, the level of research publications and other discipline-specific research outputs as well as the place that research occupies in the department.

The review asks all academic departments to reflect on the same aspects of teaching and learning and research by means of a series of questions, the answers to which have to be supported by evidence. This approach allows for: [1] consistency; [2] transferable learning across the university (e.g. sharing good practice from one department to another); and [3] more meaningful institutional data (e.g. creation of reliable trend data and analysis).

The new approach to academic quality reviews requires a shift from simply collecting and triangulating data to a sharp focus on causative behaviour. The emphasis is thus on:

- Departments' ability to read underneath empirical evidence to understand what and how processes, structures, policy, resources, etc combine to help or hinder good teaching and learning and the development of a research culture.
- Departments' ability to explain which interventions work, where and why and, conversely, why interventions or practices successful in one context are not effective in another.
- Finally, it emphasises faculties' and departments' capacity to identify reasons for re-thinking and re-conceptualising what they do, in order to do it differently.

Departmental reviews are formative in intent. The outcome of a review is an evaluative report that provides a series of recommendations and commendations. Reports must be followed by improvement plans that have to be submitted to the Academic Committee (AC) of Senate. DIRAP and CTL can support academic departments in the development of these reports. The evaluation of these reports needs to be done within faculty specific committees headed by deans and be submitted to the AC of Senate.

Departments are requested to answer in writing the questions under the different headings. In all cases departments must make use of evidence to illustrate how they deal with specific issues. For example, if a department profiles its students it needs to show a) what elements constitute the profile (e.g. AP score, NBT mark, schooling, socio-economic status, language of instruction), and how profiles are used to adapt teaching and learning. If a department uses

success rates as indicators of the effectiveness of teaching and learning it must demonstrate with an example how this is done.

Honesty and openness are preconditions for quality enhancement; therefore, it is perfectly acceptable for departments to not have in place many of the elements identified below, or to have them in place partially.

The following are the areas of assessment and the relevant questions to be answered by departments.

TEACHING AND LEARNING

1. Knowledge of the students

The limitations of the high-school curriculum and the overall deficiency of the South African schooling system require HEIs to be able assess students' potential to succeed in higher education, but also requires a greater and closer follow-up of students at departmental and faculty level to ensure that all of those who can succeed do succeed. The following questions should be answered by the department:

- How does your department participate in enrolment and academic planning? What principles/approaches do you use to plan enrolments?
- What kind of knowledge of your potential students do you have at the time of admissions and placements? How do you use this knowledge?
- Do you profile your students in any way? What kind of thinking goes into an attempt to profile students? How is this knowledge used to improve the process of teaching and learning? What are the difficulties encountered by academics in this process?
- How does the department support its academics in developing the necessary skills to teach responsively? How does the faculty support the department in this regard?

2. Content and process of teaching and learning

- How does your department understand graduate attributes and what role they have in teaching and learning?
- What constitutes a large class in your department?
- What are the most common problems you encounter in teaching large classes and how are you managing them?
- How do you make use of technology, assessment, tutorial support, etc. to improve teaching and learning?
- How does your department ensure that students have achieved the expected module/programme outcomes?
- How do you use external moderation/examination and other forms of benchmarking programmes?

3. Academic literacies and curriculum development

For a variety of reasons students come into HEIs without sufficient elements of academic literacy to support the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competences in their chosen professional or academic fields.

- How does your department think about academic literacies and with what results?

- How does your department think about curriculum? Is there a holistic notion of a programme? How is this achieved and assessed?
- What support do you get at faculty level in relation to curriculum development?
- How do academics in your department juggle disciplinary changes, student needs and the teaching of soft-skills in curriculum design which engages students in active and purposeful learning?

4. *Teaching renewal*

While the issue of the obstacles to learning posed by poor schooling tends to be the focus of institution's concern about student performance, the issue of the quality and appropriateness of teaching is less often looked at systematically.

- How does your department understand teaching as an area of academic performance?
- How are academics supported to become better teachers?
- Where does leadership in the area of teaching and learning reside at the faculty?
- How does the department/faculty identify and deal with unprofessional practices in teaching and learning?
- What is the role and effectiveness of the faculty teaching and learning committee in relation to enhancing teaching and learning?

5. *Interface between teaching and learning and research*

One mark of a good research-led university is the quality of its undergraduate curriculum and the manner in which undergraduate students are exposed to research in their programmes.

- How does your department include research in the undergraduate curriculum?
- How do you ensure that your senior students are sufficiently ready to articulate with a postgraduate degree? How do you know that this is achieved?

RESEARCH

1. *Postgraduate education*

- What mechanisms do you use to test research readiness (knowledge of methodologies, ability to write academically, technical skills, etc.) at different levels in postgraduate education?
- What criteria do you use to select supervisors and external examiners? How do you ensure that the pool of available examiners is diverse, and it is periodically renewed?
- What processes do you use from the proposal to the defence/examination stage to ensure the quality of postgraduate students' theses and dissertations? How do you know this is effective?
- What are the department's approaches to postgraduate education? How do you develop a research/academic culture among your postgraduate students?
- How would you characterise your department's reputation as a site for postgraduate education? What would you like to change and/or improve about it? How can you go about it? What obstacles do you encounter in achieving this?

2. *Staff research outputs*

- What role does research play in the department? [a] who is involved in research (and why);[b] what is research's current influence on departmental teaching and learning;

and [c] how do the departmental and individual research agendas relate to discourse in the discipline.

- How do you benchmark the research produced in the department?
- What criteria or model do you use to allocate research funds in the department?
- How do you ensure that your department operates at the cutting edge of your discipline?
- To what extent does your department generate research income through contracts, patents, commercialisation, etc?
- To what extent is your department involved in collaborative research regionally, nationally and/or internationally? What impact do these collaborations have for the department as a whole?