



**HESA RESPONSE TO THE  
REPORT OF THE COUNCIL ON HIGHER EDUCATION TASK TEAM ON UNDERGRADUATE  
CURRICULUM STRUCTURE (August 2013):**

**A Proposal for undergraduate curriculum reform in South Africa:**

**The case for a flexible curriculum structure**

In August 2013, the Council on Higher Education (CHE) released the report of its task team on undergraduate curriculum reform for comment. The CHE requested feedback from individual institutions, which will be used to inform its advice to the Minister of Higher Education and Training on the desirability and implementation of an extended curriculum structure to bring about undergraduate curriculum reform.

As is immediately clear from the institutional submissions, the task was undertaken with care and thoroughness, with evidence of impressive institutional involvement at all levels, and senior academic oversight.

This document attempts to synthesise the different responses – in other words, to offer a sectoral response. It does not provide a summary of the CHE proposals themselves, or of the individual institutional responses, but rather highlights and groups the major commendations, reservations, and recommendations arising from the submissions.

In a nutshell, the institutional responses indicate that the proposal for a lengthened undergraduate curriculum as the norm, or default, is not supported. For the majority of institutions, the lack of support arises from the need for a wide range of issues to be clarified and satisfactorily addressed as a precondition for serious consideration of the proposal. In almost all cases, suggestions are put forward for alternative approaches to meeting the educational challenge. It is clearly not possible for a high level overview paper such as this to cover all these suggestions which are, in any event, understandably relatively underdeveloped at this stage: however, the main counter proposals are briefly outlined. These include such possibilities as introducing a more flexible approach to ‘foundational provision’, including foundation courses, extended programmes and augmented courses throughout the degree instead of the development of an additional year, the extension of the degree by a semester instead of a year with placement onto the lengthened or accelerated options only at the end of the first semester, more effective and innovative use of educational technology and Open Educational Resources, and the running of meaningful pilots to test out various aspects of the task team proposals before any wide-scale implementation could be envisaged.

The document is arranged as follows: (i) background and context, (ii) reservations and areas of concern, (iii) recommendations on how to proceed, and (iv) concluding remarks.

## 1. BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

The CHE 'Flexible Curriculum' proposal is based on a major, comprehensive investigation into the state of undergraduate education in South Africa. The proposal argues for increasing graduate output by improving the efficiency and quality of the educational process rather than by simply increasing the intake. Improved graduate output would be achieved, it argues, through systemic, structural change that would see undergraduate programmes lengthened by a year, with fundamental curriculum review and development at all phases of the undergraduate curriculum.

While all institutions acknowledged the need for improvement, the sheer scale of the effort required, along with the shortage of necessary expertise and capacity, has elicited the most strongly held opinions.

The reception of the proposal itself has been affected by several factors. Most notably, in the Teaching & Learning (T&L) domain, policy and intervention initiatives such as the CHE's Quality Enhancement Project (QEP) and the Department of Higher Education and Training's Teaching Development Grants (TDGs), as well as the qualification registration process led by SAQA and more recently the CHE's HEQSF alignment process, have absorbed much energy and institutional capacity over the last few months. While the QEP and TDG initiatives can be seen as complementary<sup>1</sup>, their concurrence might have tended to make decisions at this time to adopt a fundamental, systemic, structural approach appear less attractive and feasible.

By way of illustration, the QEP will, in its first 2½ year phase, target four focus areas. These are: (i) university teachers (including professional development, reward and recognition, workload, conditions of service and performance appraisal), (ii) student support and development (including career and curriculum advising, life and academic skills development, counselling, student performance monitoring and referral), (iii) the learning environment (including teaching and learning spaces, ICT infrastructure and access, technology-enabled tools and resources, library facilities), and (iv) course and programme enrolment management (including admissions, selection, placement, readmission refusal, pass rates in gateway courses, throughput rates, management information systems). In other words, the QEP aims to tackle a wide gamut of factors impacting on student success, but will not, in this first phase at least, target fundamental, systemic curriculum reform.

The DHET's Teaching Development Grants proposal process is currently underway, with the deadline for submission (the end of November) coinciding with that for the 'Flexible Curriculum' comments. The 'priority programme' areas for the TDG are: (i) the development of university teachers and teaching, (ii) tutorship and mentorship programmes, (iii) enhancing the status of teaching at universities, and (iv) researching teaching and learning. In addition, 10% of the total TDG allocation is set aside to support collaborative programmes that have national impact / significance. As can be seen, it is only this last category that easily relates to the CHE Flexible Curriculum proposal, although of course all have direct relevance to improving the T&L environment and indeed to building the kinds of capacity on which the proposal crucially depends.

Thus both the QEP and the TDGs adopt, in the main, a project-based (albeit aligned to institutional T&L strategies) institutionally-specific approach to the T&L challenge in higher education, whereas the CHE proposal calls for a structural, systemic approach. So, at more or less the same time, institutions have been involved in rather different planning and development scenarios, pointing strongly to the need for greater alignment between the various initiatives aimed at building and enhancing quality in the T&L environment.

As could be expected, since the higher education sector in South Africa is highly diverse, the institutional responses to the CHE proposal vary greatly, in several important respects. Much has been written on this diversity: from the

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<sup>1</sup> Indeed, it is clear that the intention of both the QEP and the TDG initiatives is to bring about durable improvements in teaching and learning, and through sharing successful initiatives to maximise impact, but their genesis and initial implementation is at the level of an institution.

point of view of the CHE proposal, the main factors that have, arguably at least, impacted on institutional positions include the following: differentiation, the average educational preparedness of the student body, and the institutional resource base.

### **Differentiation**

Officially, universities in South Africa are categorised into 'Traditional Universities', 'Universities of Technology' and 'Comprehensive Universities'. These typologies are influential (by way of example) in determining institutional priorities, academic offerings, relationships with surrounding communities and constituencies, recruitment possibilities and procedures. These differences impact on the complexity of the re-curriculation task required in the CHE proposal, and make more complicated the task of responding to proposals as a sector: for example, concerns that the CHE proposal will further entrench inequities are prominent in the submissions. This should not be understood as a negative perception on institutional differentiation in terms of mission and fundamental educational tasks, needed to serve the wide ranging development agenda of the nation, but rather that the differences in relation to the systemic nature of the CHE task team's proposals make arriving at a single response or speaking with a single voice both unlikely and unrealistic, and also probably undesirable.

For some institutions, undergraduate education is the major focus, with few postgraduate programmes being offered. For others, it is in the area of postgraduate programmes that growth is desired, and the proportion of students in undergraduate study is smaller. Clearly, the introduction of the CHE proposal would impact differentially on these two situations.

### **The average educational preparedness of the student body**

Diversity in this respect means that institutions experience student educational under-preparedness to different extents. At present, some institutions place students onto the existing Extended Programmes who would have gained regular admission elsewhere, and this has caused some tensions in the system. Because the number of students on Extended Programme has been such a small minority in most institutions, and because the EPs are associated with widening access, however, these tensions have not been major. For some institutions, the introduction of the Flexible Curriculum would see virtually the whole student intake on the extended version, while for others, a sizeable minority – and even in some cases a majority – would be placed onto the accelerated option. These different realities have impacted, as would be expected, on the reception of the proposal.

### **Resource base**

The historical underfunding of some institutions, the continuing reality that donor funding tends to favour historically advantaged institutions, and fee differentials (amongst other factors) have resulted in the development of very different capacities in various areas, not least of which is the kind of educational expertise on which the CHE proposal crucially rests. Since there is little appetite for the development of uniform curricula, it is no surprise that capacity and expertise is raised as a major constraint on the introduction of the Flexible Curriculum. It is worth noting, though, that 'capacity' is viewed somewhat differently, with some institutions pointing to the difficulty of building and incentivising relevant expertise and the general scarcity of this in the sector, and others seeing it more as the allocation of funding to acquire the expertise to undertake the work.

For these (and other) reasons, many of which are highlighted below, several institutional responses stressed that a 'one size fits all' solution as proposed by the CHE task team might not be appropriate, and questioned the use of aggregated system-level performance data on the grounds that these mask significant institutional variation.

## 2. AREAS OF CONCERN

The areas of concern have been clustered as follows, following the main features of the proposal:

- The nature and extent of the Teaching & Learning ‘problem’
- The extended curriculum as the norm
- Flexibility: extended and accelerated options
- Financial feasibility
- Capacity and relevant expertise
- Implementation issues

### 2.1 The nature and extent of the problem

First and foremost, it is widely accepted that higher education as a sector is not effectively meeting the educational needs of its students. The reasons for this are not uniformly agreed on, but the reality of poor throughput rates is accepted. However, several institutions questioned the extent to which the 2006 cohort performance reflects what is argued to be the impact of recent interventions in the T&L environment (the widespread introduction of ‘First Year Experience/Academy’ projects, writing centres, tutorial systems, etc.), and thus whether the challenge is now as severe as to warrant the wholesale response proposed in the CHE Flexible Curriculum document.

Nevertheless, it is universally accepted that the troublingly low graduation rates in higher education – even if there has been some recent improvements in the T&L environment - need to be addressed, and that higher education itself must take responsibility for at least the processes within its purview – that is, the education of the students it admits. The achievement of the CHE’s task team in developing and presenting ‘the case’ for educational reform, and thus achieving such widespread acknowledgement of the issues, is considerable, and is acknowledged in the submissions.

In general, there is widespread recognition that, de facto, the majority of the country’s undergraduate students is already on a ‘flexible’ curriculum, even though this is largely unplanned and can result in a somewhat incoherent educational experience for students. To that extent the issue is perceived as systemic. However, the diversity in the system is argued to be such that the difficulties are differentially experienced, and even that the proposed solution might exacerbate pecking orders and inequities through the official demarcation of extended and accelerated curricula.

A major strand in the submissions concerns whether the cause of the poor graduation rates can be laid entirely at the door of academic preparedness, or whether factors such as financial need, health, motivation, interest, effort, ‘institutional climate’ and so forth play almost equally important roles. The comment that the task team conducted a ‘limited analysis’ forms the basis for the view that more investigation into the causes of student failure is needed before the proposal is able to be considered fully.

There is general acceptance that the current Extended Programmes, which focus on the school / first year interface, cannot simply be expanded to accommodate the numbers of students who are envisaged to need support – that is, the majority of the current intake. Concerns are expressed, however, on whether the ‘access’ focus of the Extended Programmes – which is, as the proposal argues, their strength and their weakness<sup>2</sup> – will be lost in the move to the ‘efficiency’ solution that will benefit all students. Nevertheless, in general the need for a more radical and comprehensive response that addresses difficulties at key points throughout the curriculum is supported.

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<sup>2</sup> The CHE document also makes it clear that it is difficult to extrapolate the relevance of the current Extended Programmes model to the whole undergraduate educational challenge. This is largely because the EPs target the most at-risk students, making it difficult to identify a ‘control’ group against which to compare performance. Had the EPs been able to focus on the lower end of the students who had met the regular admissions requirements, rather than in many cases acting as an alternative access route, this comparison might have been possible, and EP graduation rates much improved.

Interestingly, it has taken some decades to build the kind of support for Extended Programmes that is now evident in the submissions. It could be argued that this acceptance has been gained partly at least on the basis of compromise - they have been 'grafted' onto existing curricula, leaving the latter largely untouched. The CHE proposal tackles this issue head on, insisting that the curriculum needs redesign at more than just the entry level. Several of the institutional responses to the CHE proposals, however, convey what appears to be a preference for maintaining, more or less, the status quo in relation to the basic curriculum, while effecting improvements in delivery and facilities and the general T&L environment.

## **2.2 The extended curriculum as the norm**

Overall, the proposal of the lengthened option as the norm, or default, is not supported at this time. The main arguments in this regard are that too many issues need clarity and further research, and that wholesale implementation needs to be preceded by some form of phasing or piloting. The 'one size fits all' nature of the proposal, as has been noted above, was raised as an issue in several submissions. Questions were raised about the appropriacy of the model across all disciplines and fields of study and for all qualification levels. The logic of the arguments here were essentially that if too many exceptions to the default model were accepted, the extended option as the default (the norm) would become increasingly untenable.

Several institutions expressing support for extending the duration of undergraduate programmes do so on the basis that the Honours year be incorporated. The CHE proposal states that at present only a minority of students (those intending to pursue postgraduate studies) currently take the Honours year, and argues that adding this demanding extra year would not address the issue that most students are not coping with the current structures. This is clearly a matter that needs resolution, touching as it does both on the vertical boundary of the undergraduate curriculum, and on the focus of the CHE proposal on the educational needs of all undergraduate students.

The precise nature of the lengthened curriculum was repeatedly raised as an issue. In particular, a number of responses pointed to the relative lack of specificity on what should constitute the foundational elements. The CHE proposal is argued to prioritise the 'academic development' (content, technical and skills) imperative at the expense of 'curriculum enhancement' (or 'transitions' vs. 'augmentation' in the language of some submissions) and there is perceived to be a lack of clarity on whether 'enhancement' opportunities would be offered to all students or only to students on the accelerated track who would have the time to undertake additional 'breadth' courses. The question was raised of whether the task team was satisfied that the students who currently graduate in minimum time are fully prepared as responsible and creative global and national citizens, for further studies for those wishing to pursue these, and/or for the world of work, and questioned whether the CHE task team had missed an opportunity to use the extra curriculum space and time to raise the general level of education in its broader sense. Clearly, both dimensions need to be addressed, and this is acknowledged in the CHE report, but it is not evident that they are adequately addressed in the proposals.

Many submissions raised the question about whether, if time was seen to be the major enabling condition for improved T&L functioning, it would not be less disruptive and equally efficient to simply extend the academic year. Options in this regard would be to add extra weeks to the beginning or end of semesters, to provide non-teaching breaks during semesters that would allow students to consolidate their work, or to run vacation or pre-university schools. Other submissions (and, indeed, the CHE report itself) pointed to the lack of success such essentially bolt on, quick fix, initiatives have had in the past, and to the strong likelihood of resistance on the part of academic staff who face considerable pressures – for example, to conduct and publish research.

## **2.3 Flexibility: extended and accelerated options**

The notion of 'flexibility' on which the proposal is based is that not all students need a lengthened curriculum, and that there should therefore be an 'accelerated' option. The submissions raised a number of concerns in connection with this.

A universal concern was whether the sector is able to undertake the complex task of assessing, on entry, who should and should not be on the accelerated curriculum. Some responses saw the undertaking as being a huge expansion of Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) as it is currently understood: the CHE proposals, however, speak of a 'variant' of RPL. To be feasible, such a variant would need to involve some form of affordable large-scale assessment. However, it was stressed that assessment expertise, both for development and interpretation of results, is in short supply in the sector. Lack of capacity and long standing reservations in relation to assessment on (or prior to) entry combine to make this crucial element of the CHE proposal a cause for grave concern.

In response to this difficulty, several submissions argued strongly for adding one semester to the current curriculum structure and using it for a series of foundational programmes for all students: such programmes would include generic developmental and enhancement material/content. At the end of the semester, students would be placed on the lengthened or accelerated curriculum option. This, it was argued, would greatly enhance the reliability and validity of the placement challenge. The curriculum design issue is a complex one, however. At one extreme would be the provision of generic courses: the question of whether such courses are effective in building the needed disciplinary, knowledge and skills basis was not addressed, but much experience in the sector would suggest that the transfer of learning from generic courses to disciplinary contexts is a real challenge (it led, by and large, to the introduction of Extended Programmes that are fully integrated into regular curricula, albeit it only at the junior levels, in place of the previous stand-alone Bridging Programmes). The design challenge of building curricula that would effectively serve the needs of both groups of students (that is, those who will proceed onto the extended or accelerated tracks after the first semester) is one that, in one form or another, has occupied much time and expertise in the sector and still raises considerable difficulties, and would need to be thoroughly explored. For example, while it would undoubtedly address many of the placement concerns, it might simply relocate and perhaps even intensify the curriculum development capacity challenges.

The question of whether the existence of two tracks ensuing from the flexibility would exacerbate differences between institutions was raised in all the responses in one way or another. The argument was that the reality that some institutions would have a sizeable proportion of students on the accelerated track, and others very few, would add to the prestige of the former at the expense of the latter – and indeed, that it might result in a 'bidding competition' to attract the best candidates. The creation of 'remedial' or 'bedrock' institutions was seen as a possible, albeit unintended consequence of the proposal: in the absence of consensus across the sector on the desirability of such functional differentiation, this was viewed as a serious concern.

The funding implications for institutions with a large proportion of students on the 'accelerated' option were also raised, as were timetabling and logistical issues associated with the proposal as a whole. The increased numbers of students arising from better retention would put pressure on facilities, and the existence of the two options – lengthened and accelerated – would make timetabling far more complex, it was argued.

### **2.3 Financial feasibility**

Strong concerns were raised about funding. The CHE proposal states that once the structure is in place, there would need to be a 16% increase in state subsidy, but that the costs per graduate would fall by 10%. Few could argue that this would not be an acceptable trade-off. However, the calculations are based on the belief that pass rates will improve. This is described by institutions as 'an act of faith', and, since the majority of students take an extra year anyway, widespread scepticism is expressed about the likelihood of achieving the levels of improvement in teaching and learning that would be needed to bring about the step change in graduate output on which the proposal's funding claims rest. Part of this scepticism arises from the argument that the reasons for student failure are not fully understood, and that the CHE proposal's attribution of this to academic under-preparedness is too uni-dimensional, downplaying as it does such factors as motivation, hard work, poor subject choice, poor teaching, provision of appropriate facilities to support student learning, etc. It should be said, however, that part of the scepticism arises

from reservations about the willingness of academic staff to put in the extra effort to substantially improve teaching and learning and – where willingness exists – on system capacity in this regard.

In addition to concerns about curriculum development related capacity, questions were also raised about how the funding gap could be met until the number of graduates improves, and about the across the board addition of adding another 120 funded credits, with some institutions arguing that funds should be allocated in a more nuanced way, on the basis of developmental work actually undertaken. Again, the issue of funding was raised in relation to institutions with a very large proportion of students on the accelerated curriculum.

The notion of using the Teaching Development Grant funds to help fund the costs of the lengthened curriculum was not supported: it was argued that such funds are more appropriately targeted at the ‘priority programme’ areas identified above, such as lecturer development, tutorial programmes and research into teaching and learning.

#### **2.4 Capacity and relevant expertise**

The low level of capacity in the sector in relation to curriculum design and implementation is a third area on which there is overall agreement, with serious misgivings being expressed about the feasibility of undertaking and introducing a re-curriculation effort of this magnitude in the foreseeable future. Strong concerns were also raised, as mentioned earlier, about capacity in relation to the placement of incoming students onto the extra year or accelerated tracks. The CHE proposal envisages some kind of national unit providing support for the transition period – that is, until the Flexible Curriculum structure is introduced. The proposal suggests that a small central expert staff core would work with institutionally-based experts. As several of the submissions emphasise, however, even those institutions with long traditions of academic development (in its broadest sense) currently feel hard-pressed and under pressure to meet their own needs. Recent recruitment efforts in the field, too, indicate a national dearth of expertise. Mention is also made of lack of clarity about the relationship between a national unit and institutionally-based expertise, particularly in light of institutional autonomy.

Concerns were also raised about the overall shortage of appropriately qualified staff in ‘regular’ academic posts at present, and the consequent difficulties envisaged in recruiting and retaining enough staff to undertake the additional teaching envisaged in the CHE proposal, particularly in the senior years of the curriculum.

#### **2.5 Implementation issues**

It was around implementation that many of the most serious concerns were raised, with all submissions expressing a need for more information and for some kind of piloting before decisions can be made. The sheer size of the undertaking as articulated in the proposal and the risk of very serious, systemic destabilisation and disruption was strongly emphasised. This is perhaps most vividly captured in one submission: “it is exceptionally reckless to change an entire educational system with no small-scale test whatsoever ...”. The CHE proposal argues, on the other hand, that the case for change is so dramatic and so evident, that recklessness might lie rather in doing nothing, or in simply re-arranging deckchairs, as it were. The need for piloting and/or some kind of phasing as a way forward, prior to serious consideration of the proposal, is picked up in the recommendations below.

### 3. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is clear that the sector does not support, at this time at least, the introduction of the Flexible Curriculum as the norm. The lack of support should not be read as wholesale rejection of the proposal. Indeed, a good deal of support for aspects of the proposal was expressed in the submissions, although none expressed the view that there was as yet sufficient clarity on the basis of which to proceed, and several put forward alternative suggestions.

In general, the recommendations fall into the following broad groups:

#### 3.1 The need for more clarity

Numerous areas were raised in the submissions on which there was argued to be a need for clarity before the proposal could be seriously considered. These include (but are not limited to):

- the establishment of some form of central expertise as proposed in the CHE report. The task team proposal is for the establishment by the DHET of a dedicated unit to provide support 'for the implementation process'. One of the issues is that it is not clear how long the 'implementation process' would be. Would it include monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum once introduced? Would it include the probably quite extensive period of research and preparation prior to its introduction? Given the generally accepted scarcity of credible and relevant skills in the area, who would staff such a unit? How would the relationship between the proposed DHET and institutional units work?
- the role of the National Recruitment and Placement Centre (NRPC) proposed by the DHET in relation particularly to the placement issue inherent in the Flexible Curriculum, and proposed changes to the NSFAS system. Is it possible that (although this is not intended by the CHE proposers) the NRPC might assume a prominent role in the placement of students into the lengthened or accelerated curriculum versions: if so, what would this mean for institutional autonomy and institutional educational contexts and affordances? How would the 'new' NSFAS system deal with different curriculum versions that plan for differential durations of time for the same qualifications, with the great majority needing support for a longer time, and with the greater number of financially needy students in the system as a result of better retention?
- the relationship between the various T&L initiatives currently being undertaken or considered in the sector (the CHE's Quality Enhancement Project, the CHE task teams proposals on the Flexible Curriculum, the DHET's Teaching Development Grants). This is not clear, and requires some alignment.
- the viability of other approaches to dealing with the seriousness and scale of the educational challenge identified in the task team proposal. The CHE proposal offers one approach: investigation is needed into the value and feasibility of varied, differentiated approaches to the problem. Examples of suggestions in this regard from the institutional submissions include: lengthening the academic year, introducing an extra semester at entry level to provide developmental and 'breadth' support and the placement of students into extended or accelerated routes only at the end of this semester, the provision of a wider variety of foundational provision throughout the degree without the insertion and development of an extra year, greater use of educational technology and Open Education Resources to provide extended and enriched learning opportunities, and building closer relationships with FET colleges and secondary schools to create smoother transitions for students coming into higher education.
- the extent and seriousness of timetabling and logistical issues. Most submissions pointed to possible difficulties and increased complexities in relation to these matters, and argued that they were not sufficiently elaborated in the CHE proposal.
- the issue of the Honours year and its relationship to the undergraduate curriculum, and
- the role of the CHE/HEQC in relation to the accreditation of new and modified programmes.

### **3.2 The need for a gradual, tested approach**

The overwhelming thrust of the recommendations, endorsed by all submissions, is that a gradual, tested approach is needed before the implementation of at least a version of the proposal could be considered. This would allow time for several necessary prior steps to be undertaken:

- Some form of piloting is essential before decisions can be made for the whole sector. Clearly, much discussion is needed how this could be undertaken. Serious reservations are expressed in the submissions about the possibility of pilots in selected institutions as it is believed that these would create tensions between institutions and might lead to some arbitrary decisions on the part of students on which offers to accept. Another possibility is to pilot the new curriculum structure across some subject areas or qualifications. Engineering (both the degree and the diploma programmes) is put forward as an option in this regard. A difficulty with this is that it is difficult to generalise on the basis of Engineering, with its quite tightly prescribed curriculum in terms of sequence and content to the more fluid, formative disciplines in Humanities and Science, for example. Further options could be to phase in redesigned curricula at the key transition levels as discussed in the CHE report, while expanding the current Extended Programmes. The point here is not to list all possible options, but to emphasise the need for some form of piloting to test the viability and feasibility of aspects of the proposal.
- 'To scale' effective professional staff development and capacity building initiatives need to be developed and rolled out, particularly in respect of curriculum development, design, and delivery. At present it is not believed that there is the required knowledge and capacity in the system to undertake the task as envisaged in the proposal. Judicious use of the TDGs and the QEP would be valuable in making this possible, but would need time, effective alignment, and careful steering.
- Serious, urgent steps in the sector as a whole need to be undertaken to ensure that the kind of work outlined in the previous point is properly recognised and incentivised. Several submissions referred to the relatively low status accorded to teaching (as compared, for example, to research) and this was argued to be inimical to the development and retention of the required levels of relevant expertise.
- Substantial work needs to be undertaken on the development of procedures and expertise in the area of placement. High stakes decisions of the kind envisaged in the CHE proposal need not only to be rigorous and sound, but perceived and experienced as such by all. If the flexible curriculum is to fly, believable, trusted and feasible streaming mechanisms that place students onto extended or accelerated options need to have been established before implementation.

#### **4 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

It is clear from the institutional responses that the CHE report has evoked much profound discussion and reflection. The processes of consultation followed by institutions, which in almost all cases included Senate, the senior Teaching and Learning committee structures, Faculty Boards, DVCs, and VCs, attest to the seriousness with which the research and the proposals were treated. HESA extends its congratulations to the CHE task team for the quality and rigour of its work.

The CHE proposals have found considerable support: there is recognition of the need for curriculum redesign and development not only at entry level, but at key transition points throughout the curriculum, and for the importance of improving the effectiveness of university teaching and the general teaching and learning environment. Support is less generally expressed for the radical, systemic nature of the 'Flexible Curriculum' proposal until such time as various quite fundamental questions and options, such as those raised in this document, have been thoroughly explored and investigated.

HESA is committed to supporting the CHE and DHET to address the systemic teaching and learning challenges faced by universities, and is more than willing to work with all concerned to bring this about. It looks forward to further sustained engagement in this regard.

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