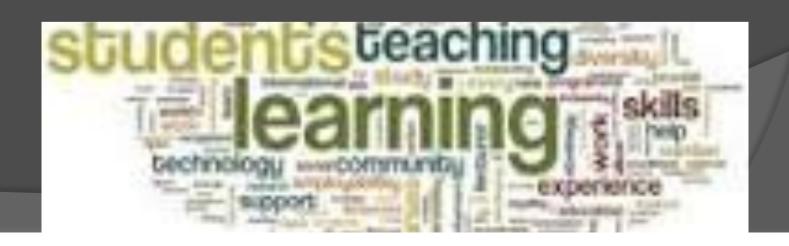Magda Fourie-Malherbe

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# EMPLOYING INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH TO IMPROVE TEACHING AND LEARNING IN SOUTH AFRICAN HIGHER EDUCATION: CHALLENGES AND POSSIBILITIES

# Overview of the presentation

1. Introduction
2. National level: focus on the Teaching Development Grant
3. Evolution of the TDG
4. Institutional level: Examples of good practice
5. QEP: Towards evidence-based practice?
6. Challenges and possibilities

# Introduction

- Universities collect data on wide range of activities and functions, and for a variety of purposes (Lombardi 2013)
- Institutional information has at least two distinct audiences: external stakeholders and internal role-layers, constituting "the public and private lives of institutional research" (Neave 2003: 11)
- Information used to demonstrate legitimacy (eg meeting policy goals) and to drive institutional behaviour (eg budget allocations)
- Underlying motive of improvement/enhancement of quality  - also of teaching and learning

# National level: focus on the Teaching Development Grant (TDG)

- 1997 White Paper envisaged new funding gramework with 'goal-oriented' funding to, inter alia, improve quality of research and of teaching and learning

- 2004 new incentive-based Funding Framework introduced Teaching Development Grants as means of enhancing performance across the system

- Funding became one of the steering mechanisms

- Clear links established between funding and system and institutional planning (eg enrolment plans determining funding through block grants)

# Evolution of TDG

- 2004: TDGs intended to support underperforming institutions (measured as difference between national norms and actual institutional output)
- Institutions allocated proportional shares of TDG according to output
- For these calculations both system and institutional data were used
- 2006: Institutions required to submit proposals for use of TDG – no criteria provided
- Funding mainly used for ad hoc 'academic development' initiatives (Boughey n.d.)
- 2007: Ministerial Task Team on HE TDGs appointed

# Evolution of the TDG (2)

- Minsterial Task Team Report, 2008
- Challenges identified:
  - Absence of policy to guide utilisation of TDGs
  - Used for wide variety of activities – some which should be funded through other mechanisms
  - Manner in which TDG is managed at institutional level varies widely
  - Perception that TDGs are impermanent and unpredictable
  - Non-alignment of use of TDGs to other associated goals (eg development of new generation of academics)

# Evolution of the TDG (3)

- 2012: DHET to more intentionally steer the use of TDG to support and strengthen teaching at universities
- Produced set of broad criteria which TDG initiatives would need to be aligned to

# 2013 Ministerial Statement on the Management and Utilisation of TDGs
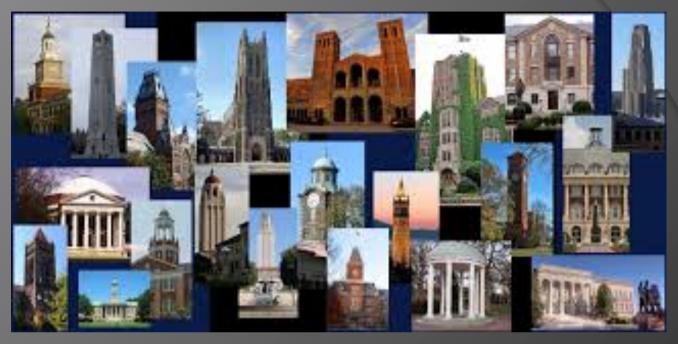
Principles underpinning use of TDGs:

- Transformation involves increased access with reasonable chance of success
- TDG must be effectively utilised to support institutional Teaching and Learning Strategy
- T&L for student success should be central
- Activities funded through TDG should be target-driven – "to contribute directly to the achievement of institutional learning outcomes" – graduation rates and student success rates

# 2013 Ministerial Statement on the Management and Utilisation of TDGs

- Evidence-based: "A deep, detailed and nuanced understanding of student performance at the institution, based on for example: cohort studies and other research which seeks to uncover reasons for poor and good student performance, research into innovative and productive teaching and learning practices, etc., should inform the selection and implementation of teaching development activities".

# DHET expectations

- Systematic, coordinated and structured institutional Teaching Development Plans

- Concrete, measurable success measures (quantitative and/or qualitative) should be set

- Standard definitions of quantitative HE success indicators provided

To what extent have these expectations of DHET been met by institutions?

# Institutional level

- Scrutiny of either institutional strategic plans or T&L policies, plans, strategies of nine institutions

- Mix of institutional type and rural/urban

- Investigation reveals an absence of clear indications that institutional research informs T&L practices or improvements

# Examples of plans with clear indicators and targets

- Mainly enrolment (size & shape, success, throughput and graduation rates)
- Some examples of targets:
  - Capacity development of academic staff (eg 35% academics without appropriate qualifications enrolled for appropriate PG studies in 2015)
  - Student support (eg 50% of undergraduate programmes with tutorial support)
  - Managing academic workload (eg decrease ratio of FTE students to FTE research/instruction staff)

# QEP" Towards evidence-based T&L excellence? (CHE 2015)

- "The shift towards evidence-based management and decision-making has become part of a global thrust…" (p.178)
- "These data gathering exercised, though, require careful formulation of well-posed research questions rather than post-hoc interpretation of 'available statistics'" (p.178)
- "The purpose of setting up data collections systems is to be able to use the patterns that emerge as the basis for making decision about suitable interventions and environmental changes…" (p.178)

# QEP: Examples of good practice

- "…an integrated management information system, which is capable of reporting on HEMIS and operational data"
- "…insight into programmes that are fully enrolled and those which need to be filled"
- "…serves as the information hub of the University…involves the integration of data from multiple sources…"
- "…Student Tracking System…generation of enrolment system reports assist to promote a culture of evidence for student success and strategic interventions"

# Challenges and possibilities

- "At an institutional level, there are, nonetheless, ways in which the potential for the exercise of agency in relation to teaching and learning could be maximised" (Boughey 2013: 63)
- DVCs : T&L, programme co-ordinators and researchers in Centres for Teaching and Learning art mentioned.
- I would argue that similarly institutional researchers should start exercising their agency wrt providing institutional information on T&L for informed decision-making and effective implementation, but how?

# Challenges and possibilities (2)

- Promoting a collaborative and coordinated approach to institutional data collection and analysis on teaching and learning
- Broadening the research base to also include results of academic studies and research on T&L done by academics
- Engaging in more comparative research among SA HEIs

# Challenges and possibilities (3)

- Integrating research approaches and methods (eg quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods, policy analysis, evaluation research, etc) to provide more nuanced pictures
- Translating research findings and facilitating improvement and innovation

# Thank you for your kind attention!