



ANNEXURE 9

Scope and Terms of Reference of Commissions

Second National Higher Education Transformation Summit, 2015

The purpose of the Summit is to reflect on changes in the sector since the first 2010 HE Summit held at CPUT, and to provide opportunities for critical dialogues on transformation in higher education with a view to seeking consensus amongst stakeholders on content, priorities, key indicators and strategies to realise such transformation. The Summit will provide a broad platform for discussion, and may not address all transformation issues. The Summit will strive to achieve its aims through a rich mix of inputs and commission-based discussions.

There is a huge range of issues that falls under the banner of university transformation and many possible different layers of discussion. While the Summit must, on the one hand, allow for broad discussions amongst the widest range of higher education stakeholders, it must also be able to identify key national policy and planning issues to guide the systemic work needed over the next five years. “Transformation” should not be seen as some separate process taking place outside the core business of universities and the system. Areas that need to change and are labelled as “transformation” should be a central and core concern of all of those studying and working in the higher education system, whether those are students, academic staff, administrators, managers, Council members, activists or bureaucrats. Summit discussions are therefore central to national and university level strategic planning.

Moving from this premise, the Summit Commissions could potentially address any set of issues. The Commissions therefore have to be focused, and cannot address everything, but they must at the same time, allow a diversity of voices. What is clear from recent public debates, new forms of activism and debate on some campuses, and the analysis of the Transformation Oversight committee and others, is that the use of the term “transformation” to describe forms of change needed in our HE system may have become redundant, and is certainly over-used and perhaps superficially understood. It is for this reason that the Summit has not chosen to address every “transformation” issue, but rather to focus on burning issues, and trying to come to terms with some of the most acute challenges in the system. These are not necessarily only the issues that are being talked about the most or the loudest. The

discussions will be guided by the papers presented and the inputs of the respondents. It must be acknowledged that there is likely to be overlap between the commissions.

Each Commission will produce a report on its discussions, which will provide substance for the overall Summit report; a point form report back of key recommendations will be provided in the plenary on the final day; and discussions at the Commissions will feed into the process of producing a Summit statement. Commissions should attempt to articulate the key transformation challenges in the area under discussion and provide between 5 to 10 concrete strategies for improvement and action in that area, and also indicate the levels at which the strategies or actions should be implemented, as well as by which organisations. The Commissions should, wherever possible, provide concrete ideas about how the National Plan for PSET could take a particular issue forward. One way of doing this will be to encourage discussion about how funding, policy mechanisms, infrastructure, quality assurance and forms of leadership and management can assist progress in each area. Where commissions make proposals about actions and where possible enabling resources that are needed to address the issues, it will also be important that the role-players who need to put the actions in place are also clarified.

The Commissions will be supported by a range of discussion papers and briefing papers prepared for the Summit, by the inputs, presentations and discussions at the Summit, including during the Commissions. The papers can be found on the Summit website (www.dhet.gov.za/Summit).

Commission1: Institutional Environments

This Commission has a potentially huge scope, but unlike the previous Summit (that had sessions on student experience and staff experiences separately) this one focuses very specifically on institutional environments as needing to be addressed to advance change in higher education. By foregrounding institutional environments, the Summit is taking note of the fact that the lack of change to institutional culture is thought to be a major barrier to transformation, particularly on formerly white campuses.

The key questions to be explored are:

- What do we mean by ‘institutional culture’?
- How do we understand the institutional environments across the system?
- In what ways do institutional cultures currently constrain or enable institutions to be responsive to the needs of a democratic South Africa in the 21st century?

There are more specific questions about student experiences that link to student epistemological access and academic success, and that overlap with the session below. There is no specific Commission dealing with academic staff as there was previously, and so the voices of university staff in relation to their working environments need to be addressed here also.

- How do university staff experience living and working in higher education institutions?
- What are the challenges/obstacles that must be dealt with to ensure a higher education system that is welcoming and supportive of the diverse range of staff in South Africa and that provides all staff reasonable opportunities for success?

The Commission will need to address race, as a significant issue across the system. However, it will also need to balance the discussion with a focus on gendered environments, on issues of disability and other forms of exclusion and/or inclusion. The discussion should be focused on what kind of institutional environments we want to have, and what can be done to make positive shifts.

Commission 2: Access and Success - transitions into and through higher education

The key concern for this Commission is what we know about the relatively low student success rates across the system, the relatively low throughput rates and what can be done to improve these, which includes addressing epistemological access and the gap between school and university for many students. This includes a huge range of issues, including student financial support and the role of NSFAS, student housing and living conditions of students, the importance of teaching and the role of teaching staff (and their professional development), and the structure and flexibility of curricula. Issues of what is being taught and how are also important, and institutional environment discussions also relate to student success.

Key questions that might arise in this Commission include:

- What do prevailing patterns of student access and success suggest about higher education transformation?
- How do students experience living and learning in higher education institutions? In particular, what is the experience of students from historically disadvantaged groups, and students from poor economic backgrounds?
- What are the challenges/obstacles that must be dealt with to ensure a higher education system that is welcoming and supportive of the diverse range of students and that provides all students with a reasonable chance of success?
- What are the underlying epistemologies, assumptions and practices that underpin higher education curricula, teaching and learning? How do these constrain or enable quality and meaningful teaching, learning and research in higher education contexts?

Again, this Commission has a potentially broad brief, but must focus specifically on issues that are seen to directly affect the success of students in the system. Language may come up as a significant issue, and should be discussed here, though it may also come up in the Commission on Institutional Environments.

The issue of student funding and the call for fee-free higher education may be a priority discussion point in this commission.

Commission 3: Research and Engagement

Research and engagement, and specifically engaged research and the linkages between community engagement and research, will be the focus of the two papers being prepared for this Commission. This is important for asking the questions about underlying epistemologies, assumptions and practices underpinning higher education research in South Africa. It is also important for understanding the imperatives of policy to align HE and development and to move away from the focus on just increasing research outputs, but also improving quality and addressing the underlying assumptions of research.

A key issue for this commission will also be the next generation issues and the development of PhDs and scholars in their early careers.

Key questions might include:

- What support is the system providing for the development of new academics and what can be improved? The ‘Staffing South African’s Universities’ Framework (SSAUF) is critical here, but so are many other initiatives, such as the work conducted by the National Research Foundation and many institutionally-based initiatives.
- Are the current funding models adequate?
- What are the more intangible factors that impact on the development of academic careers and how can those be supported?
- Support for new and early career academics is one end of the spectrum. Transformation of the professoriate is at the other end, and this will also likely be a large focus in the commission. How do we grow the numbers of Black and women professors in the system?
- The link between research and innovation in higher education needs to be concretised. How do we create the support structures, the policies and the mechanisms that are needed for institutional research to lead to new innovations?

Issues relating to internationalisation and infrastructure may also come up here.

Commission 4: Leadership, management and governance

Key questions for this Commission to address are:

- What kind of leadership is required to shift current university cultures to address transformation concerns?
- Do the management and governance structures in South African higher education institutions adequately understand the transformation imperatives to which the sector generally, and their institutions specifically, must respond, and what their roles are in addressing these imperatives?
- What needs to be done to support deep understanding of transformation imperatives in governance and management of higher education institutions, and to develop the capacity to address these imperatives?

This Commission will probably address a range of issues and all forms of leadership and governance, including student leadership, the roles of Councils and Senate, the relevance of Institutional Forums, the challenges of student participation in university governance, and the challenges of university leadership in the current context.

Other issues that may be picked up in this commission relate to the broader purposes of institutions and this may be the place to discuss the purpose and value of a differentiated higher education system within a transformed, integrated and coordinated South African post-school education and training system. What kind of higher education institutions would give effect to the purpose (of building a coordinated and integrated PSET system)?

Participation in Commissions

Delegates will be requested to select the commission in which they would like to participate. Commission participation is on a first-come, first-serve basis. The maximum number that can be accommodated in a commission is 100. Once this number is reached, the registration for that

commission will be closed and delegates will be requested to register for another commission where spaces are still available.