

Centre for Higher Education Professional Development (CHEPD) Report

INTRODUCTION

As a learning-teaching¹ centre of the Faculty of Education (FEDU) at the North-West University (NWU), with a focus on professionalising academics as Higher Education teachers, the Centre for Higher Education Professional Development (CHEPD) was launched on 20 October 2023 in Potchefstroom. However, as soon as the appointment process of its director was finalised in September 2022, and assumed duty on 1 November 2022, the centre's work commenced. The main focus was to set the Vision, Mission and Goals, as outlined below:

VISION

To be an internationally recognised centre in Africa, distinguished for engaged professional development scholarship of academic staff, social responsiveness and an ethic of care.

MISSION

To shape Higher Education teachers who are interdisciplinary, critically reflective, responsive to changing contexts, reflexive, and able to take on the identities of scholarly practitioners, alongside their disciplinary/professional identities.

GOALS

Before the end of 2022, the centre set itself three goals:

- **Goal 1:** Oversee and manage the development and offering of formal and structured academic programmes to professionalise academics as Higher Education teachers.
- **Goal 2:** Promote knowledge generation and dissemination in learning and teaching in higher education, responsive curriculum design and assessment, as well as the integration of learning and teaching technologies for student access, retention, success and throughput.
- **Goal 3:** Establish, build and nurture scholarly networks of Higher Education expertise at faculty, institutional, national, continental and international levels.

The mission, vision and goals as outlined above have continued to inform, and thus, drove the centre's work and activities since January 2023, eight months before its official launch on 20 October 2023. Therefore, this report on the work of the centre records its activities from November 2022. The report is organised according to each goal, as listed above, particularly with a focus on what has been achieved to date.

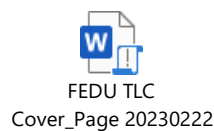
¹ Learning and Teaching has a slightly different nuance. It puts an emphasis on explaining something by the learner, and the teacher deliberately elicits students dormant knowledge, skills and understandings that are critical in learning new concepts. The focus is always on encouraging students to tell the class something, to explain to each other. In essence students get to teach. This is an aspect Teaching and Learning does not have.

Goal 1: Oversee and manage the development and offering of formal and structured academic programmes to professionalise academics as Higher Education teachers.

To align its activities to this Goal, the centre set up several initiatives that led to encouraging successes. These initiatives occurred between November 2022 and June 2023. They were focussed mainly on a systematic setting up of the intellectual/scholarly infrastructure for the centre. This involved a setting up of a variety of consultative meetings with critical stakeholders that the director considered to be key elements necessary to the centre's success. The initial group of stakeholders was identified both within the Faculty of Education (FEDU), as well as other faculties and specific support entities at NWU. Consultations with Deputy deans of Teaching and Learning (DD:TL) and Research and Innovation (DD:R&I), as well as with Research entities directors featured at the beginnings of the centre.

The meetings within the FEDU were mainly around the Structured MEd in Higher Education Studies that was to be reinvigorated through a careful engagement with the 2018 Senate Committee for Academic Standards (SCAS) recommendations that led to its suspension until certain concerns raised by this committee were attended to.

The Cover Page of the Teaching and Learning Committee (TLC) meeting clearly indicates the aspects that received attention during engagements with relevant FEDU roles players:



Meetings with stakeholders outside of the FEDU were with the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL), the DD:TL of other faculties, and the directors of faculty-based centres similar to CHEPD. All of these engagements played a role in informing the development of CHEPD's strategic responses to the 2018 SCAS recommendations, leading to the serving at various structures and eventual approval of the revised Structured MEd in Higher Education Studies. Enrolments in this MEd are already open, and 2025 will see the enrolment of the first cohort of students. As shown in Table 1 below, the module component aligns itself with Goal 1:

Table 1: Structured MEd in Higher Education Studies curriculum

Year-level relevant to changes: Year 1			
First semester		Second semester	
Module name and code	Cr	Module name and code	Cr
Higher Education in a transforming and decolonising context (SMHE811)	16	Research Methodologies in a Transformational HE context (SMHE821)	16
Curriculum design in a transforming HE context (SMHE813)	16	Managing and enabling learning in a HE context (HMHE812)	16
Agency and scholarship for enhancing responsiveness in HE landscapes (SMHE815)	16	Leadership in a transforming HE context (HMHE817)	16
Total semester 1	48	Total semester 2	48
Total credits for year 1			96
Year 2			
First semester		Second semester	
Module name and code	Cr	Module name and code	Cr
Research Mini-Dissertation (SMHE 873)	90		
Total semester 1	90	Total semester 2	
Total credits for year 2			90
TOTAL			186

With the support of the Qualification and Academic Programme Planning (Q&APP) Curriculum specialists, as well as the Centre for Teaching and Learning (CTL) Curriculum and Learning designers, and academic staff from selected schools in the FEDU, the centre embarked on the development of Module Outline Documents (MODs) of three of the six modules. Using the facilities at the Sports Village in Potchefstroom, the Team worked on Friday, 13 October 2023 from 8:30 to 17:00, which was followed by regular conversations in smaller teams until 15 December 2023. The photos below show the highlights during this exercise:





As an additional strategy to deliver on Goal 1, the centre planned to use MODs for *Research methodologies in a transforming HE context* (SMHE821), *Managing and enabling learning in a HE context* (HMHE812), as well as *Curriculum design in a transforming HE context* (SMHE813) in developing three Short Learning Programmes (SLPs). Of these three SLPs, *Research methodologies in a transforming HE context* (U31 100 1) has received 9 enrolments and is currently on offer. Set to run for 8 weeks, the SLP began with a 3-day face-to-face contact ensure that participants could meet to ensure a healthy acquaintance before they engage with the academic content in teams. Given the centre's mandate to generate its own revenue, developing the MODs in the Structured MEd in Higher Education Studies into SLPs was timely. As each student paid R12000.00, the centre has already started the accumulation of urgently needed financial resources. Given an already established interest among the NWU academic staff, *Managing and enabling learning in a HE context* (U30 100 1), as well as *Curriculum design in a transforming HE context* (U33 100 1), could both be on offer in the second semester of 2024.

Finally, to ensure that the content development of the six modules for the Structured Master's is of high academic standard, quality and is cutting edge in terms of scholarship covered in them, the centre secured the services of internationally renowned scholars who are leading researchers, academics and intellectuals in Higher Education Studies. These are colleagues with proven record in the field and the respected voices that continue to shape cutting edge research conversations. It is envisaged that by the end of June 2024, all six modules will be ready for further work by the CTL Instructional Design Team and will be in the Learning Management System by the end of 2024. The centre anticipates healthy enrolments as the SLPs are already marketing the MEd, but also the centre more broadly.

Goal 2: Promote knowledge generation and dissemination in learning and teaching in higher education, responsive curriculum design and assessment, as well as the integration of learning and teaching technologies for student access, retention, success and throughput.

To achieve Goal 2, the centre applied and successfully secured a three – year (2024 -2026) Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) funding under the University Capacity Development Grant (UCDG). The funding represents a positive response from DHET to the application for the CHEPD project submitted in 2023. The title of the project is *Strengthening the Centre for Higher Education Professional Development:*



UCDG_Project-11
CHEPD.pdf

As seen in the link, the goal of the project is 'to establish within the North-West University a Centre for Higher Education Professional Development'. The total amount secured through the success of this application for funding is R5,331, 325.00.

The promotion of knowledge generation and dissemination in learning and teaching in Higher Education requires this type of funding to employ staff, develop strategic scholarly activities and afford necessary expertise. Through this funding, the centre has managed to develop three activities that will enable it to 1) recruit academic and support staff required to coordinate and administer its work; 2) design, develop and teach formal academic programmes to promote knowledge generation and dissemination in learning and teaching in Higher Education; and 3) create spaces for critical conversations on teaching and learning in Higher Education. Table 2 below presents the budget summary, as well as indicates the project activities through which the centre will achieve Goal 2:

Table 2: Summary budget to promote knowledge generation and dissemination

Total funds required by year	2024	2025	2026	Total
Activity 1: Coordination and administration	R 1 494,124.00	R 1 570 299.00	R 1 650 432.00	R 4 714 855.00
Activity 2: Design, develop and teach formal academic programmes	R 161 250.00	R 119 306.00	R 134 160.00	R 414 716.00
Activity 3: Critical Conversations on Teaching and Learning in Higher Education	R 62 112.00	R 139 642.00	R -	R 201 754.00
Total for project	R 1 717 486.00	R 1 829 247.00	R 1 784 592.00	R5,331, 325.00

With further income generation through the offering of formal academic qualifications for academics, the centre hopes to expand its staffing complement. As the centre's commitment for the near future is to develop a *PGDip in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, and soon after a *Professional Doctorate in Higher Education Studies*, current staff capacity would not be enough to further attain Goal 2.

Goal 3: Establish, build and nurture scholarly networks of Higher Education expertise at faculty, institutional, national, continental and international levels.

The expertise in the NWU's FEDU in higher education studies already exists and is represented in various forms. These are represented in various schools in the FEDU: *School of Curriculum Studies*, *School of Language Education* and *School of Psycho-Social Education*. Further collaborations have been established with a selected number of faculties within the NWU

context. These include the Engineering Faculty's Engineering Education unit, Health Sciences' Centre for Health Professions, as well as the Faculty of Economics and Management Sciences' colleagues working with programmes on professionalising academics in their environment. These collaborations are beginning to bear fruits, with the *PGDip in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education* promising to create a programme with core modules for all academics from all faculties within the NWU may need to enrol, as well as specific modules specific to their disciplines.

At national level, further collaborations have seen the centre representing the FEDU and NWU at various institutions and platforms. Invitations to deliver Keynote addresses, facilitation of workshops for academic departments committed in capacitating their staff as university teachers, represent the examples of how the centre's footprint is beginning to form beyond the NWU context. Institutions such as the Central University of Technology's Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching (CILT), the Durban University of Technology's Centre for Teaching and Learning, Sol Plaatje University's School of Education, the Stellenbosch University's Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, Rhodes University's Centre for Higher Education Research in Teaching and Learning, University of Fort-Hare's Centre for Teaching and Learning, as well as the University of Cape Town's Centre for Higher Education Development, are examples of centres similar to CHEPD at national level with which strong bonds and collaborations have been established, set up and nurtured. Below is a record of photos taken in the course of engagements at selected institutions:







Amongst other things, these engagements have also served as opportunities to market CHEPD and its SLPs. Two visits to two Eastern Cape universities that have already occurred are an example of this. The two universities are Rhodes University and the University of Fort-Hare. Both universities enabled meeting strategic leaders in Staff Development units tasked to professionalise academics as university teachers. At Fort Hare, Dr. Patricia Muhuro (pictured below in November 2023) of the Teaching and Learning Centre (TLC) was encouraged and inspired after a discussion on the CHEPD SLP brochures with the centre’s director:



As the conversations continued, it emerged that the TLC academic developers in which she works urgently needed capacitation in order to competently develop formal curricular in academic programmes for academic staff, as well as to adequately offer regular support to academics and students. As there are at least *nine academic developers* who need such capacitation in her environment, the idea of having these colleagues enrol in the centre's second semester SLPs is under consideration. It also emerged that some of her colleagues need to enrol for postgraduate studies in Higher Education to strengthen their contribution in the professionalisation of academics as university teachers. With the Structured MEd to be offered in 2025, the prospects for the centre are encouraging.

At Rhodes University, the conversations centred around the offering of the CHEPD SLPs to academic staff in the Education Department, particularly the NGaP appointees, as well as newly appointed academics who have recently started their academic career. According to Dr Clement Simuja (pictured below in November 2023) of the Faculty of Education, *6 colleagues*, mainly in the Education Department, are currently looking for courses that will enhance their understanding of the Higher Education context:



It appears that most academics who wish to conduct research and/or enroll in the field of Higher Education studies do not have the necessary intellectual and academic background to qualify. Some require further tuition for non-degree purposes (NDP) in order to develop their understanding and knowledge of Higher Education field of study before they can develop research proposals and be admitted in the Rhodes University's Centre for Higher Education Research in Teaching and Learning (CHERTL). Given its research focus, CHERTL does not offer learning and teaching SLPs in the same way that CHEPD does. Thus, CHEPD SLPs are ideal for offering the necessary academic background to academic staff members who wish to redirect their careers from schooling research and instead specialise in Higher Education.

At the African continent level, a benchmarking exercise at three universities with centres similar to CHEPD has already been scheduled for 28 May to 3 June 2024. The benchmarking tool indicates the components this exercise is designed to attain.



Benchmarking
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The universities to be visited in Egypt are the Arab Open University, the University of Hertfordshire, and the American University in Cairo. This benchmarking exercise has coincided with a Keynote Address Invitation of the CHEPD director at the *Africa English Language Teaching Association 8th International Conference* to be hosted by the University of Hertfordshire, Cairo. It is at this conference that the director will focus on further strengthening international networks in Higher Education teaching and learning.

In terms of networking overseas, colleagues who work in the FEDU at Queen's University Belfast and the University of Bristol continue to collaborate with the centre in shaping the professionalisation of academics as university teachers. Prof Dina Zoe Belluigi, a Reader in Higher Education Studies at the School of Social Sciences, Education and Social Work at Queen's University Belfast, is one of the key role players CHEPD has earmarked for a keynote speaker role at one of the upcoming curriculum conversations on educating for the 21st century globalising, internationalising, transforming and decolonising Higher Education. Her work continues to inspire CHEPD in its pursuit for international standing. The photo below was taken in August 2023 at one of our engagements in Johannesburg when she (second from left) visited the University of Johannesburg in 2023.



The University of Bristol collaboration is made possible by a long association that began in 2017 of the centre's director with Dr. Sue Timmis, Reader/Associate Professor in Education at the School of Education. The director and Dr Timmis worked together on a three-year project

called Southern African Rurality in Higher Education (SARiHE). This scholarly collaboration culminated in the publication of a book by Routledge (*Rural Transitions to Higher Education in South Africa: Decolonial Perspectives*, Routledge: London). Prof Timmis continues to work across the African continent and will be a great contributor to the overall vision of CHEPD. The picture below was taken in 2019 at the Society for Research in Higher Education (SRHE) after a conference panel discussion during which the Team presented its findings. Prof Timmis is at the centre in the photo below:



Finally, emanating from the director's scholarly work since 1 November 2022 of resuming the role in CHEPD, as well as continuing with institutional, national and international networks as presented in this report, the following academic publications and academic conference presentations represent scholarly productivity since:

PUBLICATIONS

Mgqwashu E.M. (2023). 'The changing profile of university students calls for a decolonial re-thinking of higher education'. Daily Higher Education News (DHEN). 25 August. <https://www.usaf.ac.za/the-changing-profile-of-university-students-calls-for-a-decolonial-re-thinking-of-higher-education-says-professor-emmanuel-mgqwashu/>

Mgqwashu, E.M. (2023). Rethinking support for university teachers in a decolonising Higher Education context: the role of Academic Developers. Journal of Education. No. 92. <https://doi.org/10.17159/2520-9868/i92a02>

Mgqwashu, E.M. (2023). [A timely question: How can we not talk about becoming a professor in the context of a neoliberal and decolonising higher education?](https://doi.org/10.14426/cristal.v11i2.660) *Critical Studies in Teaching and Learning*. Vol. 11, No. 2. <https://doi.org/10.14426/cristal.v11i2.660>

Mgqwashu, E.M. 2023. To 'train' or to 'educate' for doctoral work? – that is the question: A review of Doctoral Training and Higher Education in Africa' S Afr J Sci. 119 (3/4), Art. #15740.

<https://doi.org/10.17159/sajs.2023/15740>

Lukas Homateni Julius, Sioux McKenna & **Emmanuel Mgqwashu** (2023): The conflation of English competence and academic literacy: A case study of three Namibian universities, *Innovations in Education and Teaching International*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14703297.2023.2251948>

Mgqwashu E.M. (2023). 'Becoming a professor at a time of decolonisation, marketism'. University World News. 6 April 2023.

<https://www.universityworldnews.com/post.php?story=20230405184502285>

CONFERENCES

Keynote Address: "Theorising Teaching and Learning of English from a decolonial lens". Africa English Language Teachers' Association (ELTA) International Conference. **University of Hertfordshire, Egypt**, May 2024.

https://drive.google.com/file/d/18s4hSxuN205_tv6M4wBpPKRnUKlBmhy8/view?usp=sharing

Parallel Session Presentation: "Theorising Teaching and Learning from a decolonial lens: A view from the South". South African Educational Research Association International Conference: Education(al) Foundations, Education(al) Futures: 30 October – 3 November 2023. Blue Lagoon Hotel, East London.

Plenary Panel Presentation: "Revisiting 'epistemological access' from a decolonial lens: whose epistemology?". International Conference on Language, Multilingualism and Decolonisation Practices: 12 – 14 July 2023. University of the Free State.

Keynote and workshop facilitation: Decoloniality Symposium, Centre for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, Durban University of Technology. 4-6 December 2023.

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1FjPULOZE2gwugnQOsEVD3h8xDBIFOaGv/view?usp=drivesdk> (Letter of invitation).

Writing Retreat Facilitation: Book Writing Project, Centre for Innovation in Learning and Teaching, Central University of Technology, Bloemfontein. (6 – 8 December 2023).

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1oIPYTKx0qPYUiGMrTXS3yzgxhbREFm7g/view?usp=drivesdk> (Letter of invitation).

Presenter: Multilingualism in the Teaching and Learning of Mathematics in Higher Education: "Theorising Teaching and Learning of mathematics from a decolonial lens: The value of Place-based participatory narrative research methods". University South Africa Colloquium, Stellenbosch Institute for Advanced Study, Stellenbosch University: 17 August 2023.

Presenter: Scholarship of Teaching and Learning: "Theorising Teaching and Learning from a decolonial lens: The value of Place-based participatory narrative research methods". Centre for Teaching and Learning Colloquium, North-West University: 25 July 2023.

Guest Presenter: School of Education Seminar Series: "Reimagining Higher Education: Is the Knowledge of the Powerful always Powerful Knowledge?". Sol Plaatje University, Kimberly, South Africa: 12 June 2023.

Discussant: "Language, Literacy and Decolonization" Seminar by Prof Pam Christie. SARCHI Teaching and Learning Seminar Series, University of Johannesburg, SA: 24 May 2023.



CONCLUSION

Amongst other things, it is the centre’s view that this report indicates a healthy trajectory. The accomplishments over the period CHEPD have been in existence are encouraging. Not only has CHEPD’s SLPs been successfully introduced, but the interest also shown by participants extends to a willingness to enrol for master’s studies in Higher Education to be offered in 2025. CHEPD’s relationships with other institutions locally and beyond South Africa’s borders mean the centre is well on its way to achieving its vision, mission and goals. The strategies already in place appear to be working. With further strategic thinking, the centre stands a chance to put FEDU and NWU on the national, continental and international map in ways that are truly innovative, creative and responsive to current and anticipated developments in Higher Education sector more broadly.

Professor Emmanuel Mgqwashu

Director: [Centre for Higher Education Professional Development](#)

19 April 2024