



3rd Annual Higher Education Quality Assurance Forum (HEQAF).

09-11 September 2026,
The Regent Hotel, KuGompo City

Theme: Transforming Higher Education for Quality, Equity, and Student Success in the Era of Disruptive Technologies and Artificial Intelligence

PROGRAMME



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Time	Activities	Presenter/Participant
07:30 – 08:30	Registration: Welcoming tea and coffee	All participants
Session 1: Welcoming and opening		
08:30 – 08:45	Welcoming remarks and official opening of HEQAF	Prof. T. Mgwebi: Vice-Chancellor & The Principal, Walter Sisulu
08:45 – 08:55	Background and overview of the forum	Prof. S. Makaula: Director Quality Management Directorate CPUT
08:55 – 09:05	Remarks from the Acting Vice-Chancellor and The Principal of the University of Fort Hare	Prof. M. Njotini: Acting Vice-Chancellor & the Principal of University Fort Hare
09:05 – 09:10	Acknowledgment of the Chairperson of the HEQC Standards and Capacity Development Committee	Prof. M. Linington: Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Teaching and Learning, Walter Sisulu
09:10 – 09:30	Presentation by the Chairperson of the HEQC Standards and Capacity Development Committee	Prof. S. Songca: Chairperson of the HEQC Standards and Capacity Development Committee
09:30 – 09:35	Introduction of the keynote speaker	Prof. L. Lalendle: Executive Director Quality Assurance, UNISA
09:35 – 10:05	Keynote address	Prof. K. Moahi: Vice-Chancellor & The Principal, Botswana Open University
10:05 – 10:20	Tea break	All participants
Session 2: Unpacking the sub-themes		
10:20 – 10:35	Unpacking the 2026 HEQAF main theme	Mrs O. Mokgatle: Executive Director, Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation, Walter Sisulu
10:35 – 10:50	Presentation on Sub-theme 1: Quality assurance and institutional culture	Mr C. Khoza: Director: Quality Management Directorate, Walter Sisulu
10:50 – 11:05	Presentation on Sub-theme 2: Curriculum transformation and future-fit qualifications	Dr L. Marhaya: Director Programme Accreditation and Curriculum Development Department, Vaal University of Technology (VUT)
11:05 – 11:20	Presentation on Sub-theme 3: Equity, Social Justice, and Transformation in Higher Education	Dr K. Lucas: Manager Quality Assurance: University of Limpopo
11:20 – 11:35	Presentation on Sub-theme 4: Artificial Intelligence, Digital Transformation, and Innovation in Teaching and Learning	Dr R. Nnadozie: Director, Institutional Planning and Quality Promotion: Rhodes University
Session 3: Paper presentations (breakaway sessions)		

11:35 - 12:50	4 Breakaway sessions for paper presentations	Dr P. Sekhejane: Deputy Executive Dean, Walter Sisulu
	Regency 3 & 4	
	Regency 1	Dr A. Makola: Acting Executive Director, Academic Planning, UNISA
	Regency 2	Mr .M Vongo: Quality Assurance Practitioner
	Terrace Room	Dr Z. Baleni: Senior Curriculum Development Specialist, Walter Sisulu
12:50 – 13:50	Lunch break	All
	Session 4: Continuation of paper presentations	
13:50 – 15:30	4 Breakaway session for paper presentations	Ms N. Gasa: UNISA
	Regency 3 & 4	
	Regency 1	Ms P. Cenge: Quality Project Manager, (Walter Sisulu)
	Regency 2	Ms S. Paulse: Director Academic Programme Planning, North West University
	Terrace Room	Mr F. Kwahene: Director Academic Planning, (Walter Sisulu)
15:30 – 15:45	Tea break	All
15:45 - 16:10	Session 5: Continuation of paper presentations	
16:10 – 16:15	Announcements	Programme director
19:00 – 22:00	Networking cocktail	All

Time	Activities	Presenter/participant
08:00 – 09:00	Registration: Welcoming Tea and Coffee	All participants
Session 1: Recapping and a keynote address		
09:00 – 09:15	Recapping and presentation of day 2 proceedings	Mrs O. Mokgatlhe: Executive Director: PME (Walter Sisulu)
09:15 – 09:20	Introduction of the keynote speaker	Dr K. Siqoko: Director: Directorate for Teaching and Learning Directorate (Walter Sisulu)
09:20 – 09:50	Delivery of the keynote address	Prof. F.S Nyathi: Pro-Vice Chancellor, Academic and Research (Welwitchia University: Namibia)
09:50 – 10:20	Tea break	All
Session 2: Presentations by the regulatory bodies		
10:20 – 10:40	Presentation by the Department for Higher Education and Training (DHET)	Ms N. Zulu-Siwela: Director : PME (DHET)
10:40 – 11:00	Presentation by the Council on Higher Education (CHE)	Dr S. Nene: Executive Director: Quality Assurance, Council on Higher Education (CHE)
11:00 – 11:20	Presentation by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)	Dr M. Makhafola: Chief Operating Officer, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)
Session 3: Parallel Roundtable engagements		
11:20 – 13:20	Sub-theme 1: Quality assurance and institutional culture	Panel Moderators Dr M. Sibugashe: Director, Academic Planning and Quality Advancement, Nelson Mandela University (NMU)
	Sub-theme 2: Curriculum transformation and future-fit qualifications	Prof Gobingca: Senior Lecturer (Walter Sisulu)
	Sub-theme 3: Equity, Social Justice, and Transformation in Higher Education	Mrs E Ansen: Senior Quality Officer (CPUT)
	Sub-theme 4: Artificial Intelligence, Digital Transformation, and Innovation in Teaching and Learning	Mr N. Ronald: Acting Senior Director, Quality Promotion, Durban University of Technology (DUT)
13:20 – 14:20	Lunch	All
Session 4: Presentation of roundtable feedback (15 min per moderator)		
14:20 – 15:20	Feedback session by roundtable moderators	Mr Mbongo: Director, Alumni Relations (Walter Sisulu)
Session 5: Reflection and concluding remarks		
15:20 - 15:50	Summary and direction of discussions	Prof. L Lalendle: Executive Director: Quality Assurance (UNISA)
15:50 - 16:00	Announcements & Group photo	Programme Director
19:00 – 20:00	Gala Dinner	All

Time	Activities	Presenter/participant
09:00 – 09:30	Registration: Welcoming Tea and Coffee	All participants
Session 1: Entertainment and recapping		
09:30 - 10:00	Recapping and presentation of day 3 proceedings	Mr C Khoza: Director, Quality Management (Walter Sisulu)
10:00 – 10:15	Tea break	All
Session 2: Panel Discussions		
10:15 – 11:15	Panel discussion to unpack the HEQSF from the perspective of the three external bodies	Ms N Zulu-Siwela: Department for Higher Education and Training (DHET)
		Dr S. Nene: Executive Director: Quality Assurance, Council on Higher Education (CHE)
		Dr M. Makhaola: Chief Operating Officer, South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA)
Session 3: Announcements & closing remarks		
11:15 – 11:20	Announcements	Programme Director
11:20 – 11:30	Closing remarks	Prof. M. Linington: DVC Teaching and Learning
11:30 – 12:00	Collection of lunch	All
12:00 – 15:00	Leaving for the excursion (Game Drive)	Programme Director
End of the Forum		

Abstract Presentation

Time	Regency 3 & 4	Regency 1	Regency 2	Terrace Room
Facilitators	Dr P. Sekhejane	Dr M Makola	Mr M Vongo	Dr Z Baleni
11:35 – 12:00	Actively elevating students' voice in a University of Technology academic journey through quality assurance Author: Mrs Ernestina Ansen, Victor Koswana, Tetfu Mahlalela, Nolukolo Dayile, Elisha Van Der Westhuizen, Renee Weideman, Zandile Sholoko, Dr Siyanda Makaula	Transitioning from compliance-driven quality assurance to a quality culture Authors: Dr Mziwakhe Sibukashe, Ms Vuyiseka Sityoshwana, Ms Anne-Mart Olsen & Dr Itumeleng Morolong	Reimagining Quality Assurance in Higher Education: Cultivating Quality Culture for Assessment Integrity and Continuous Improvement in the Digital Era. Author: Mr Bongumusa Ngcobo	Rejection as a Catalyst for Growth: Reframing Access as a Quality Dimension in Higher Education Author: Miss Nomfundo Smiso Muthwa
12:00 – 12:25	Student Engagement as a Catalyst for Quality Assurance: Reflections from SEQASS Workshops Authors: Dr Tebogo Victoria Kgope & Prof Lumkile Lalendle	Role of records management system in ensuring quality and compliance of qualifications in South Africa's public higher education institutions Authors: Mr Faneriwa Shanan Mahlaule & Mr Isaac Mpho Mothiba	Advancing Quality Culture in the Digital Era: Repositioning Internal Quality Assurance for quality improvement and enhancement in Higher Education Author: Ms Helen Matshoba	Evaluating the effectiveness of Internal Quality Reviews and Co-Curricular Academic Practices at a University of Technology. Author: Ms Zandile Portian Sholoko Renee Weideman, Nolukolo Dayile, Zandile Sholoko, Ernestina Ansen, Elisha Van Der Westhuizen, Tetfu Mahlalela, Victor Koswana, Siyanda Makaula
12:25 – 12:50	Stakeholder Engagement as a Catalyst for Building a Quality Culture in Higher Education Authors Mr Patrick Ngobeni & Prof Lumkile Lalendle	Performing Decolonisation: Epistemic Spectatorship and the Limits of Curriculum Transformation Author: Dr Tebogo Victoria Kgope	Implications of Generative Artificial Intelligence for University Writing Centers: Focus on Students' Over-reliance, Academic Integrity, and Ethical Awareness Author: Ms Perfect Okojie	Decolonising Legal Education Through Street Law Outreach: Advancing Epistemic Justice and Inclusive Learning in South African Higher Education Author: Mr Kamva Mbangata

Lunch Break 12:50 – 13:50				
Facilitators	Regency 3 & 4 Ms N. Gasa	Regency 1 Ms P. Cenge	Regency 2 Dr A Mapfumo	Terrace Room Mr F. Kwahene
13:50 – 14:15	Artificial Intelligence, Educational Quality, and Work Readiness of Food and Nutrition Students at Walter Sisulu University Author: Dr Lukhanyo Semele	Regulating Artificial Intelligence in Higher Education: A Constitutional, Human Rights and Governance Analysis of Quality Assurance in South African Universities Author: Mr Mlondolozu Mvikweni, Paul S Masumbe	Afrophobia and the Quality Learning Experiences of International African Students at South African Universities: A Fanonian and Ngũgĩan Decolonial Perspective Author: Ms Lindi Tlou	AI Literacy as a Core Graduate Attribute for Future-Fit Qualifications Accepted Author: Dr Nosipho Mavuso Conference Theme: Curriculum Transformation and Future-Fit Qualifications
14:35 – 15:05	A Fit-Gap Analysis of Digital Skills and Support Provision for Hybrid Postgraduate Students Author: Mr Tshepo Rabotapi	Reimagining Teacher Education for Sustainable Transformation: A Systematic Review And Conceptual Framework from South Africa Author: Dr Oluwayemi Ibukunoluwa Odularu	Bridging the Algorithmic Divide: Artificial Intelligence, Digital Equity, and Academic Success in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review Author: Dr Olutoyin Olaitan	From Student Voice to Institutional Response: Rethinking Student Participation in Quality Assurance Author: Mr Refiloe Tšephe
15:05 – 15:30	Navigating Postgraduate Learning in a CODEL Environment: Challenges and Opportunities for Academic Success. Author: Miss Nqobile Sylvia Mnisi	A Scoping Review on e-Learning in Nursing Education at the Tertiary Level: The Benefits, Challenges, and Implementation Factors Author: Mrs Nolukolo Zibaya, N. Zibaya, N. Lebogo & N.G. Mangi	Students and Student Leadership Engagement in Quality Assurance: Advancing a Culture of Shared Responsibility in Higher Education Author: Mr Justice Phuti Molebala	From Compliance to Collaboration: Integrating Peer Learning and Student Engagement into Quality Assurance for Sustainable Quality Enhancement. Author: Miss Lesedi Kegomoditswe Mahuse
Afternoon Tea break 15:30 – 15:45				

Facilitators	Regency 3 & 4 Ms N. Martins	Regency 1 Ms P. Cenge	Regency 2 Ms S. Mbhele	Terrace Room Mr F. Kwahene
15:45 – 16:10	Student Voice, Reflective Practice, and Academic Quality Assurance in Enhancing Higher Education: Reflections from the Student Engagement Project Authors: Mrs Mudanagundo Victoria Rakgase	Evaluating the Impact of Quality Improvement Planning on Departmental Quality Management Systems at a South African University of Technology (UoT) Author: Mrs Ernestina Ansen Elisha Van Der Westhuizen, Renee Weideman, Nolukolo Dayile, Zandile Sholoko, Tetfu Mahlalela, Victor Koswana, Siyanda Makaula	Accessing user satisfaction index in a comprehensive, open distance and e-learning institution in South Africa Author: Dr Ntombizonke Sizeni Makhathini	False Positives, Real Consequences: An Autoethnographic Exploration of AI Governance, Academic Integrity, and Student Success in Higher Education. Author: Ms Sanelisiwe Miya

Keynote Speaker

Profiles



Thandi Mgwebi

Thandi Mgwebi is Vice-Chancellor and Principal of iYinivesithi Walter Sisulu, a founding group Group Executive for Business Advancement at the South African National Research Foundation, with over a decade of leadership in research management and higher education. Her global academic training spans five universities across four continents, complemented by postdoctoral research and executive education. She brings a holistic, sustainability-focused leadership approach shaped by key roles at South African universities (DVC Research at NMU and TUT; Research Director at UWC). Thandi is an influential voice in science and development, serving on numerous strategic Boards and Councils, including the Leadership Council of the South African chapter of the UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN).



Prof. Margaret Joan Linington

Professor Margaret Joan Linington is a higher education leader, scientist, and academic with more than three decades of experience spanning university governance, teaching and learning, quality assurance, research, and institutional transformation. She holds a PhD in Science from the University of the Witwatersrand and a BSc (Agric) Honours degree cum laude from the Stellenbosch University.

Professor Linington has held senior executive positions across the South African higher education sector and is currently the Deputy Vice-Chancellor responsible for Teaching and Learning at iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu. She is widely recognised for advancing technology-enabled learning and fostering student success. A passionate advocate for equitable access to higher education, academic excellence, and socially responsive scholarship, Professor Linington continues to contribute to policy development, academic leadership, and the advancement of teaching and learning in South Africa.



**Mrs
Olivia Mokgatle**

Mrs Olivia Mokgatle is the Executive Director for Institutional Planning, Monitoring, and Evaluation at iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu University, a role she began in June 2023. She oversees institutional research, academic planning, and quality management. Previously, she served for eight years as the Director of National and Reviews at the Council on Higher Education (CHE), where she led the development of qualification standards and national reviews, notably for the Bachelor of Laws (LLB) and Doctoral Qualifications.

With over 40 years of experience in the education sector, including more than 20 years in higher education, Mrs Mokgatle has held various roles as a lecturer and quality assurance practitioner in Botswana and South Africa. She has worked at the universities of Botswana and Pretoria, focusing on quality-related activities. She holds a Bachelor of Science in Agriculture, a Master of Science in Agricultural Education, and a Diploma in Agricultural Education. Mrs Mokgatle has participated in various quality assurance initiatives globally, including the Harmonization of African Higher Education Quality Assurance and Accreditation (HAQAA) initiative. She is a qualified ISO Quality Management Systems Auditor, European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM) Assessor. She participated in the External Quality Assurance in Higher Education for SADC countries training hosted by UNESCO and DAAD-DIES and the Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education (QAA) in the United Kingdom (UK).



**Mr Christopher
Khoza**

Mr Christopher Khoza is a seasoned professional in higher education quality assurance and strategic management, currently serving as the Director of the Institutional Quality Management Directorate at Walter Sisulu University. He is pursuing a Doctor of Business Management degree and holds a master's in public management, among other qualifications.

His extensive leadership experience includes roles such as Acting Chief Executive Officer, Senior Manager at FoodBev SETA, and Manager of Quality Assurance at the University of Limpopo. Mr Khoza specializes in quality assurance, strategic planning, policy development, and organizational transformation. He is recognized for his strategic leadership and commitment to enhancing educational quality, regulatory compliance, and student success.



**Prof.
Lumkile Lalendle**

Professor Lalendle is an accomplished leader in higher education, holding a PhD in Educational Administration and Leadership from Michigan State University. With over thirty years of experience, he has advanced from Lecturer to Vice-Rector at a multi-campus university setting. His roles have included Head of Department at the University of Venda and Dean of Students at North-West University, where he served as a director on the Council on Higher Education (CHE), engaging with institutional audits. His work focused on transformation and quality assurance in South Africa's higher education sector. Currently, he is the executive director at the University of South Africa, overseeing planning, quality assurance, and monitoring functions. An active researcher and consultant, he also engages in social projects in the Eastern Cape and has contributed to national education initiatives, emphasizing quality, governance, and transformation in higher education.

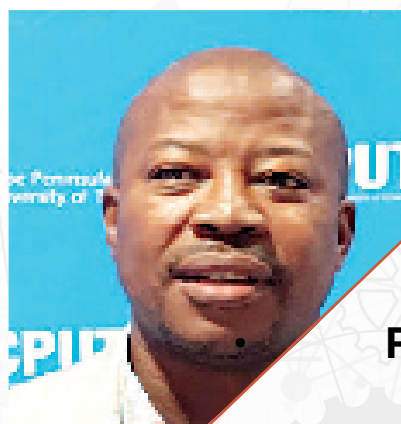
Prof Makaula is a higher education leader, a quality management and assurance professional, and an advocate for higher education quality through transformation, excellence, and accountability. He has a wide range of experience in university governance, management, and strategic leadership, stemming from his involvement in various university governance structures, including the Senate, Senate subcommittees, and university management committees. He has conceptualized and implemented quality management & assurance systems at various higher education institutions and contributed to intellectual discourses in the higher education policy environment. With his experience, he is able to navigate the complexities of university governance and management of the core academic business of learning, teaching, research, and community engagement. He earned his undergraduate qualifications at Walter Sisulu University (formerly the University of Transkei) and his doctorate and master's degrees from the University of Cape Town. He has extensive experience in developing and implementing national higher education policies, as well as institutional academic policies and quality assurance frameworks. He has strong professional links with higher education stakeholders, such as the DHET, CHE, and SAQA. He is currently a member of the National Standards and Reviews Committee of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), a member of the South African Qualifications Authority's National Qualifications

Framework (NQF) Review Panel, and a member of the Council on Higher Education's Higher Education Qualifications Sub-Framework (HEQSF) Review Panel. He is currently a Director for Quality Management at the Cape Peninsula University of Technology.

Prior to this, he served as Director of Quality Assurance at the University of Zululand and as a Senior Manager at the National Standards and Reviews Directorate of the Council on Higher Education in South Africa.

Currently, he is serving as the Chairperson of the Council at the University of Fort Hare and an Adjunct Associate Professor at Walter Sisulu University, South Africa

Prof. Makaula is a prominent figure in higher education, specializing in quality management and assurance. His extensive experience includes roles in university governance and strategic leadership, and he has contributed to various committees and policies related to higher education. He holds degrees from Walter Sisulu University and the University of Cape Town. Currently, he is the director of the Quality Management Directorate at Cape Peninsula University of Technology and serves on several important committees, including those of the Council on Higher Education and the South African Qualifications Authority. He also serves as the Chairperson of the Council at the University of Fort Hare and holds an adjunct associate professorship at Walter Sisulu University.



**Prof. Siyanda
Makaula**

Prof. Siyanda Makaula is a prominent figure in higher education, specializing in quality management and assurance. His extensive experience includes roles in university governance and strategic leadership, and he has contributed to various committees and policies related to higher education. He holds degrees from Walter Sisulu University and the University of Cape Town.

Currently, he is the director of the Quality Management Directorate at Cape Peninsula University of Technology and serves on several important committees, including those of the Council on Higher Education and the South African Qualifications Authority. He also serves as the Chairperson of the Council at the University of Fort Hare and holds an adjunct associate professorship at Walter Sisulu University.



**Prof. Kgomotso
H. Moahi**

Professor Kgomotso H. Moahi is the Vice Chancellor of Botswana Open University (BOU), having been appointed in March 2025 after previously serving as Acting Vice Chancellor since April 2023. Under her leadership, BOU is advancing its transformation agenda, guided by the BOU 2036 Strategic Framework, which aims to position the University as a leading institution for open and distance learning (ODL) in Botswana and the surrounding region.

Before taking on the role of Vice Chancellor, Professor Moahi served as Deputy Vice Chancellor for Academic Services, where she oversaw the divisions of Academic Services and Research, Innovation, and Partnerships. She joined BOU in 2020 as Deputy Vice Chancellor for Student Services, bringing with her extensive experience in academic leadership and research. Prior to her time at BOU, Professor Moahi had a distinguished career at the University of Botswana (UB), where she advanced from Lecturer to Full Professor in Library and Information Science. She held several key leadership positions, including Head of Department, Dean, Chair of the Committee of Deans, and Member of the Senate and Council; she also served as Acting Vice Chancellor.

As an accomplished scholar and policy leader, Professor Moahi has made significant contributions to information management, information and communication technologies (ICTs) in librarianship, health informatics, indigenous knowledge preservation, and information ethics. Notably, she led the academic team that developed Botswana's National ICT Policy (Maitlamo) in 2004 and took part in pioneering initiatives like HealthNet (1996) and BEANISH, which advanced district health information systems in Botswana. In 2017, she played a key role in bringing the CODATA International Conference to Botswana, an event that helped position the country within global open data and research networks. More recently, she chaired the National Committee on Open Science (2022–2023), which produced Botswana's first Draft Open Science Policy, now undergoing stakeholder consultation. Additionally, she is a member of the newly established Botswana CODATA National Committee, where she contributes to advancing global discussions on open science, data ethics, and equitable access to knowledge. A passionate advocate for Open Access, Open Science, and data-driven knowledge production, Professor Moahi continues to champion equitable access to information as a fundamental aspect of sustainable national development.



**Prof. Francis
Sifiso Nyathi**

Professor Francis Sifiso Nyathi is a Namibian scholar, legal practitioner, and higher-education leader whose work bridges academia, governance, and industry-relevant skills development. He currently serves as Pro Vice Chancellor: Academic & Research, of Welwitchia, and he is widely recognized for advancing quality assurance, curriculum reform, and TVET transformation in Namibia.

He holds a PhD in Applied Linguistics and Curriculum Studies from Southern Illinois University Carbondale (USA), alongside multiple degrees from the University of Namibia, including an LLB; he is an admitted Legal Practitioner of the High Court of Namibia. Before returning to university leadership, he practiced law as a partner at Sibeya and Partners Legal Practitioners.

Prof. Nyathi's leadership portfolio includes founding and directing key units at UNAM (Language Centre; Center for Quality Assurance), serving as UNAM Registrar, and shaping national higher-education policy as a founding member of the National Council for Higher Education (NCHE) and a Council Member of the Namibia Qualifications Authority (NQA). Most recently, he chaired the national TVET Transformation Taskforce, leading the strategic conversion of Vocational Training Centres into specialised TVET colleges. Prior to joining Welwitchia University's Executive Management team as Pro Vice Chancellor of Academic and Research, Prof. Nyathi served as the Registrar of the Namibia University of Science and Technology. A published researcher and award-winning writer, his scholarly and creative works focus on curriculum, language, and the moral imagination in African public life.



**Ms
Nontuthuzelo
Zulu-Siwela**



Dr Sanele Nene

Ms Nontuthuzelo Zulu-Siwela is an accomplished higher education professional and educator with more than three decades of experience in teaching, academic planning, quality assurance, and higher education policy. She currently serves as the Director: University Academic Planning, Monitoring and Evaluation at the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET), where she leads initiatives related to academic planning, enrolment management, programme evaluation, and university sector development.

Her career began in 1990 as a lecturer at Butterworth College of Education, followed by key roles in quality enhancement and academic planning at the Eastern Cape Technikon and the University of the Witwatersrand. She later served as Academic Programme Manager at Wits Business School before joining DHET in 2014 as Deputy Director:

Ms Zulu-Siwela holds a BA, BEd, MEd, and a Postgraduate Diploma in Adult Education, and is currently pursuing a PhD in Higher Education Studies at Rhodes University. Her expertise spans higher education policy, academic programme management, quality assurance, qualification development, and institutional planning.

Dr Sanele Nene is currently the Executive Director: Quality Assurance at the Council on Higher Education (CHE), where he has occupied a few positions since 2016. He has served in various national structures on higher education and the occupations and trades sectors. He holds a PhD in Political Science from the University of KwaZulu-Natal, where he also taught and held several positions.

His interests include public participation in democratic governance at various public institutions and the intersections between higher education and national politics. In his spare time, he serves as an independent commentator on current national and global affairs on various radio stations in the country.



**Dr Luyanda
Marhaya**

Dr Luyanda Marhaya is a higher education specialist, academic leader, researcher, and quality assurance practitioner with more than 20 years of experience in the South African higher education sector. His professional expertise spans quality assurance, programme accreditation, curriculum development, academic planning, teaching and learning, student success, and higher education policy and governance.

Dr Marhaya currently serves as Director: Programme Accreditation and Curriculum Development (PACD) at the Vaal University of Technology (VUT), where he provides strategic and operational leadership in the development, accreditation, review and management of academic programmes and qualifications. His portfolio includes supporting the University's Programme and Qualification Mix (PQM), strengthening programme development and review processes, and ensuring alignment with national higher education regulatory and quality assurance requirements. His career has included academic and leadership positions at several South African universities, including Walter Sisulu University, the University of Fort Hare, the University of Zululand, the University of Venda and the University of the Free State. At the University of the Free State, he served as Director: Academic Planning and Quality Assurance, contributing to institutional planning, quality assurance and academic governance. He has also served as Senior Manager at the Council on Higher Education in the Directorate of Qualification Standards and Reviews.

Dr Marhaya has also made significant contributions to higher education policy and quality assurance beyond his institutional responsibilities. He has served on national reference groups and panels, including the Department of Higher Education and Training's Foundation Provision Reference Group, where he contributed to evaluating university foundation programme applications and developing policy on foundation provision in South African higher education.

In 2025, Dr Marhaya was appointed by the Council on Higher Education (CHE) as a Peer Academic for Quality Reviews, contributing to national quality review processes across the higher education sector. His work in this capacity focuses on the themed review of online/blended learning. His scholarly interests include quality assurance in higher education, programme accreditation, curriculum development, student access and success, foundation and extended curriculum programmes, teaching and

learning, online and blended learning, and academic planning. Dr Marhaya is the author of *Does Extended Programme Provision Work in South Africa?*, reflecting his longstanding scholarly and professional engagement with foundation and extended curriculum provision and the challenges of widening access while supporting student success.

- He holds a PhD in Education, specialising in Higher Education, as well as postgraduate qualifications in Higher Education Studies and Academic Development, which includes the Postgraduate Diploma in Higher Education for Academic Developers from Rhodes University. His academic and professional journey reflects a sustained commitment to strengthening the quality, relevance, responsiveness and accessibility of higher education in South Africa.



**Dr Makhapa
Makhafola**

Dr Makhapa Makhafola is the Chief Operating Officer of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). He assumed this position on 1 August 2023. Dr Makhafola was the Director of the Management of the HEQSF Directorate at the Council on Higher Education. He obtained his PhD in Analytical Chemistry from the University of Pretoria and has worked for several Higher Education institutions in the Quality Assurance function, first as a director and more recently as an Executive Director, at the University of Zululand, Richards Bay Campus.

Dr Makhapa Makhafola is a seasoned scientist and quality assurance expert with a wealth of knowledge of and experience in the higher education sector. His work experience spans over two decades in the public and private sectors. Dr Makhafola also worked as the General Manager: Research & Development at Mintek. He is a highly accomplished and knowledgeable executive-level management professional. He has a track record of success in driving bottom-line performance of products and services across the mining and research and development industries. He served as a member of Umalusi Council and Chairperson of the DST/MINTEK Nanotechnology Innovation Centre Steering Committee. He is currently a member of the HyPlat Board. Dr Makhafola coordinated the Hydrogen South Africa (HySA) programme on behalf of the Department of Science & Innovation.



**Dr Remy
Nnadozie**



**Dr Kirsten Clare
Lucas**

Dr Remy Nnadozie began his career teaching Mathematics and Physics in his rural village. He later joined Shell Petroleum as a Community Development Officer. His career progressed through roles at the Human Sciences Research Council, Mangosuthu University of Technology, and the University of Johannesburg. He is currently the Director of Institutional Research, Planning, and Quality Promotion at Rhodes University.

Remy is an active researcher. In 2017, he was invited to contribute to UNESCO's Global Education Monitoring Report. He has served on the Council on Higher Education's audit panel. He is an active member of the Quality Assurance of Occupational Qualifications Committee (QAOQC) of the SA Quality Council for Trades and Occupations (QCTO).

Remy holds a BSc (Hons) in Mathematics, a Postgraduate Diploma in Knowledge and Information Systems Management, a Postgraduate Certificate in Education, an MSc in Applied Mathematics (Cum Laude), and a PhD in Applied Mathematics. He has also completed various short courses in machine learning, management development, and outcome-based monitoring and evaluation.

Dr Kirsten Clare Lucas is the Quality Assurance Manager at the University of Limpopo, with over 30 years of experience in higher education as both an academic and quality assurance practitioner. Since 2011, she has led initiatives in academic quality assurance, programme development, accreditation, and curriculum transformation.

Her work focuses on ensuring that higher education remains responsive, innovative, and relevant in an increasingly digital world. Dr Lucas serves on the Council on Higher Education (CHE) Accreditation Committee and is committed to advancing quality enhancement, data-informed decision-making, and institutional transformation to support student success and academic excellence.



**Prof. Sandile
Phinda Songca**

Prof Songca is the HoD for the Department of Biochemistry and Microbiology at the University of Zululand. Previously he was the DVC:T&L at UKZN, and before that at UNIZULU. Before this he was DVC: AAR at WSU where he had been coordinator for the turn-around framework projects, after serving as executive dean of the faculty of Science, Engineering, and Technology. Currently, he is also serving as a member of the HEQC of the CHE in his capacity as the chairperson of the NSRC. He has served as the representative of WSU and UKZN in their respective Provincial Skills Development Forums. During his five years as DVC:TL at UKZN, he served as the chairperson of the board of the UKZN Extended Learning. He was also a board member of the Eastern Cape Information Technology Initiative, as the head of the Human Resources sub-committee. He has also served as the coordinator of the National Research Network on e-Skills, an initiative of the erstwhile e-Skills Institute (eSI). He qualified with a Ph.D. from Queen Mary and Westfield College, University of London, in organic chemistry with a medicinal slant and possesses experience in this area spanning over three decades. He has attracted more than R70 million from NRF, SAAVI, DTPS, Anglo American, DeBeers, Sentrachem, and others. He has read more than 90 conference papers and published more than 120 articles in both local and international journals and books. He is actively involved in student supervision and has graduated more than 25 postgraduate students. He has 25 years of experience lecturing chemistry and biochemistry at Unitra, UZ, UNISA, UL, and WSU, from 1983-2008. He is married to Reverend Nokulunga Patricia Songca, a friend, partner, and ally of great influence for 38 years.

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Abstracts

Sub-theme 1

Quality Assurance and Institutional Quality Culture

Evaluating the effectiveness of Internal Quality Reviews and Co-Curricular Academic Practices at a University of Technology.

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Internal quality review is a peer-driven evaluation of programmes and qualifications aimed to ensure that threshold standards are being met (CHE, 2021). Therefore, it is an important mechanism for evaluating internal quality assurance systems and promoting a culture of quality in a Higher Education Institution. The effectiveness of an internal review depends not only on the review framework but also on how its key processes are conceptualised, coordinated and implemented. The study examines whether the five key identified aspects of the internal review process such as critical reflection, document checks, panel composition, stakeholder interviews and panel reporting contribute to the credibility, consistency and effectiveness of the internal reviews. Using a qualitative data collection method the study draws evidence from critical reflection sessions, document check reports, panel composition process, debriefing interviews and evaluation of panel reports. The findings indicate inconsistent understanding of review expectations, irregular evidence preparation, variations in panel expertise, limited stakeholder engagement, and inaccuracies and inconsistencies in the panel report affect the quality and reliability of the internal quality review outcomes.

However, several interventions and innovations were introduced, such as strengthened briefing and orientation sessions, improved document-check processes, clearer review guidelines, panel preparation and capacity-building, structured engagement of review participants and standardised reporting practices that include clear commendations and recommendations. The study concludes that the effectiveness of internal quality reviews is contingent upon the consistent, coordinated and systematic implementation of the key aspects underpinning the internal review process.

Keywords: Academic Quality, Internal Quality Reviews, Stakeholder Engagement, Evaluation, University of Technology

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Quality assurance (QA) in higher education has traditionally focused on internal processes for compliance to standards, accountability, and institutional evaluation. The students role has often been limited to providing feedback through surveys. This constrains meaningful student engagement in quality enhancement processes for ensuring student success, an important dimension QA. As higher education increasingly embraces participatory governance and continuous improvement, there is a need to reposition students as active contributors to quality assurance rather than passive recipients of institutional decisions. This conceptual paper examines how integrating peer learning and student engagement into quality assurance systems can transform QA from a regulatory function into a collaborative process of continuous quality enhancement. Drawing on scholarship on student partnerships, peer learning, organizational learning, and quality assurance, the paper argues that peer learning provides a practical mechanism for fostering dialogue, shared reflection, reciprocal feedback, and co-creation between students and institutional stakeholders. While acknowledging challenges such as organisational culture, power dynamics, and resource constraints, the paper concludes that peer learning functions as a student engagement strategy that promotes partnership, continuous improvement, thereby strengthening student success and fostering sustainable quality cultures. The paper recommends future research should empirically examine how peer learning and student engagement can be systematically embedded within institutional quality assurance systems to promote collaborative quality enhancement.

Keywords: Student engagement; Student partnership; Peer learning; Quality assurance; Quality culture; Sustainable quality enhancement.

Student Engagement as a Catalyst for Quality Assurance: Reflections from SEQASS Workshops

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Student engagement is increasingly recognised as central to quality assurance in higher education, positioning students not merely as recipients of knowledge but as critical stakeholders in shaping institutional processes. This paper reflects on the Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Student Support (SEQASS) project, with a focus on workshops conducted across selected regional contexts in two provinces in South Africa. These workshops brought together postgraduate students from South Africa and across the African continent to engage in areas such as Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL), curriculum transformation, assessment practices, student support, and the ethical use of artificial intelligence in research and academic writing. Using a qualitative reflective approach, the study draws on workshop reports and participant reflections, analysed through Gibbs' reflective cycle and Kolb's experiential learning framework. Findings show that the workshops created spaces for meaningful student participation, enhancing understanding of ethical clearance processes, institutional systems, and research tools, while building capacity in AI use and academic writing. Students also highlighted challenges including poor communication, limited access to resources, and inconsistencies in supervision and assessment processes. The paper concludes that structured engagement platforms such as SEQASS workshops are instrumental in empowering students as partners in quality assurance. It recommends strengthening communication systems, expanding training opportunities, and embedding student voices in curriculum and institutional processes.

Keywords: : Student engagement, Quality assurance, Curriculum transformation, Recognition of prior learning, AI in education

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Access to higher education is commonly measured by admission rates and participation statistics, yet far less attention has been paid to the lived experiences of students whose educational journeys are shaped by repeated rejection before eventual success. This paper explores how rejection can serve as a catalyst for personal growth while reframing access as a critical dimension of quality in higher education. Employing an autoethnographic approach, the study critically reflects on the lived experience of a young woman from a township in South Africa. Her aspirations for higher education were repeatedly disrupted by institutional rejection, socioeconomic hardship, and the emotional demands of employment.

The turning point emerged through admission to a CODEL university, whose open distance and e-learning model provided a flexible and inclusive pathway into higher education. This enabled academic success, culminating in the completion of a Higher Certificate and progression into the Bachelor of Laws. The paper situates debates on widening participation, student resilience, and quality assurance (QA). It argues that meaningful access extends beyond admission decisions to encompass institutional responsiveness, flexibility, and opportunities for students with non-linear educational trajectories. It further contends that rejection should not be understood solely as educational failure but as a transformative stage capable of fostering resilience, identity reconstruction, and academic achievement. The study contributes to higher education scholarship by proposing access QA as a student-centered QA dimension that recognizes alternative pathways to success and broadens how institutions evaluate equitable participation and student success.

Keywords: access to higher education; quality assurance; quality access; autoethnography; resilience; student success; widening participation; distance education.

Stakeholder Engagement as a Catalyst for Building a Quality Culture in Higher Education

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The Council on Higher Education's (CHE) Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) promotes a developmental approach to quality assurance that emphasizes accountability, continuous improvement, and the development of a quality culture in higher education institutions. Despite this, stakeholder engagement is often treated as a compliance requirement rather than a strategic process for quality enhancement.

This study explores how meaningful stakeholder engagement can strengthen internal quality assurance systems and support the implementation of the QAF. Using a qualitative, reflective approach, the study draws on professional experience in higher education quality assurance and a review of relevant literature and CHE policy documents. It examines the contribution of students, academic and professional staff, alumni, employers, professional bodies, and community partners to institutional quality assurance processes.

The findings indicate that meaningful stakeholder engagement improves institutional decision-making, enhances programme relevance, supports student success and graduate employability, strengthens accountability, and promotes continuous improvement. The study also identifies key challenges, including limited participation, inadequate stakeholder representation, and compliance-driven engagement practices. It argues that embedding stakeholders as active partners in quality assurance is essential for developing a sustainable quality culture and ensuring the successful implementation of the CHE Quality Assurance Framework in South African higher education institutions.

Keywords: Quality Assurance, Stakeholder Engagement, Higher Education, Quality Culture, Continuous Improvement

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Students and Student Leadership Engagement in Quality Assurance Student engagement is increasingly recognised as a cornerstone of quality assurance in higher education, promoting accountability, continuous improvement, and institutional excellence. This paper examines the role of student leadership in advancing quality assurance through the Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Student Support (SEQASS) initiative. It argues that students should be viewed not merely as recipients of educational services but as active partners in shaping institutional quality and enhancing the student learning experience. Drawing on South Africa's history of student activism, the paper highlights the transition from protest-driven advocacy to meaningful participation in institutional governance and quality enhancement. It demonstrates how structured student engagement strengthens academic standards, improves service delivery, and supports evidence-based decision-making. The SEQASS initiative provides a practical framework for embedding student participation in quality assurance through systematic feedback, monitoring, reporting, and collaborative problem-solving. The paper further emphasises that quality assurance is a shared responsibility requiring collaboration among students, academic staff, university management, and student support services. Student leaders serve as ambassadors of institutional values by promoting accountability, encouraging constructive participation, and ensuring that concerns are supported by credible evidence before escalation. Such an approach fosters institutional responsiveness and cultivates a sustainable quality culture. The paper concludes that meaningful student engagement is essential for building student-centred and resilient higher education institutions. The SEQASS model demonstrates how collaborative quality assurance practices can strengthen institutional effectiveness, improve student success, and contribute to sustainable transformation and innovation in South African higher education.

Keywords: Student engagement; Student leadership; Quality assurance; Higher education; SEQASS; Institutional governance; Student-centred learning.

Transitioning from compliance-driven quality assurance to a quality culture

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Despite the broad policy recognition of quality as a shared institutional culture, the structural separation between quality assurance and academic development units in South African universities inadvertently fragments a quality culture, with each unit advancing complementary goals in relative isolation. This paper examines the conditions under which collaboration between these, often distinct, units can serve as a foundation for transitioning from compliance-driven quality assurance to enabling an authentic quality culture.

Drawing on a reflective institutional case study conducted at Nelson Mandela University, the study analyses the collaboration between the Academic Planning and Quality Advancement Unit and the Teaching Development Unit, encompassing quality reviews, academic planning processes, and capacity development initiatives for academic staff. The study employs practitioner reflection, document analysis, and workshop feedback as its primary data sources.

Findings indicate that reframing compliance-oriented processes as shared opportunities for building staff understanding of quality as an institutional value enabled meaningful dissolution of operational silos. The study also identifies the enabling mechanisms and structures that sustain such collaboration over time, holistically advancing the quality of the academic project.

The study contributes a practice-based account of inter-unit collaboration to the literature on quality culture in the South African Higher Education context. It argues that teaching development and quality advancement can be mutually reinforcing and recommends that universities explore the structural conditions that enable sustained, integrated collaboration between these units as a deliberate strategy for embedding a quality culture beyond regulatory compliance.

Keywords: quality culture, compliance, collaboration, teaching development, quality advancement, higher education

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Student participation is widely recognised as essential in higher education quality assurance. Current practices are commonly facilitated through surveys, feedback mechanisms, and student representation. However, while student voices are increasingly heard, the extent to which institutions meaningfully respond and translate feedback into tangible improvements remains limited. This paper addresses the critical gap between student feedback collection and institutional responsiveness. It argues that many quality assurance systems prioritise consultation without ensuring accountability or closing the feedback loop.

This analysis, based on a systematic review of studies published between 2015 and 2025 using the PRISMA framework, reveals that student participation is often confined to feedback mechanisms, with insufficient emphasis on institutional action and monitoring. The analysis reveals that existing systems prioritise consultation over accountability, resulting in limited evidence of actions taken in response to student concerns. The paper introduces the concept of institutional responsiveness as a critical dimension in student-centred quality assurance. A call for a paradigm shift from amplifying student voice alone to ensuring the capacity to respond effectively. Embedding responsiveness enhances institutional accountability while fostering continuous quality improvement aligned with students' lived experiences, ultimately improving student success and satisfaction. The study recommends reframing quality assurance and offers practical insights for higher education institutions to move beyond tokenistic student engagement. Future studies could examine innovative approaches to enhance transparency and responsiveness in student participation processes.

Keywords: student engagement in quality assurance, institutional responsiveness, student-centred quality assurance, student participation, student voice

Role of Records Management System in Ensuring Quality and Compliance of Qualifications in South Africa's Public Higher Education Institutions

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Effective records management is essential for ensuring the integrity, quality, and compliance of academic qualifications in South Africa's higher education institutions. Various legislative and regulatory frameworks mandate these institutions to maintain sound record-keeping systems that support accountability, accreditation, and the continuous improvement of qualifications. However, persistent challenges related to inadequate records management practices, fragmented information systems, and poor administrative coordination continue to undermine the accreditation process and the credibility of qualifications. This study aims to investigate the role of records management in improving the quality and compliance of qualifications within South Africa's public higher education sector. It adopts a structured qualitative systematic literature review approach, drawing on international scholarship on records governance, information integrity, and quality assurance frameworks. The analysis is guided by the Records Continuum Model and institutional quality assurance theory to explain how records management systems influence accreditation outcomes. It was found that the absence of integrated electronic records management systems and limited staff capacity contribute significantly to non-compliance and delays in the accreditation process. Furthermore, institutions with structured records governance frameworks demonstrate stronger assurance outcomes aligned with national standards. The findings demonstrate the causal mechanisms through which poor records governance leads to accreditation risk, including data inconsistencies, audit failures, and regulatory non-compliance. The study proposes a framework that can strengthen institutional capacity for compliance and quality assurance.

Keywords: Records Management, Qualification Credibility, Higher Education Institutions, Accreditation Compliance, Quality Assurance

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This literature paper examines the evolving relationship between quality assurance (QA) and institutional quality culture in contemporary higher education. Advances in artificial intelligence (AI), digital technologies, online learning, and changing student expectations have challenged traditional QA approaches that focus primarily on compliance and accountability. The literature highlights the need for adaptive quality assurance frameworks that support innovation, flexibility, and student-centred teaching, learning, and assessment. While compliance-driven QA systems remain essential for accreditation and accountability, the literature suggests they are insufficient for sustaining educational quality in rapidly changing higher education environments. Greater emphasis is therefore placed on fostering a quality culture characterised by collaboration, shared responsibility, professional trust, and continuous improvement. Such a culture encourages academic staff to engage actively in quality enhancement rather than viewing QA as an administrative requirement. The review identifies participatory approaches, including professional development, reflective practice, and communities of practice, as important mechanisms for strengthening institutional ownership of quality processes. Effective Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) systems are also critical for maintaining assessment integrity and academic standards through clear governance, moderation processes, constructive alignment, and staff development. Furthermore, the literature underscores the importance of data-informed monitoring and evaluation to support evidence-based decision-making and continuous improvement. The findings suggest that sustainable quality assurance in the digital era requires balancing regulatory compliance with a strong quality culture that promotes innovation, academic integrity, and ongoing quality enhancement.

Keywords: Quality Assurance; Quality Culture; Higher Education; Quality Enhancement; Digital Learning.

Actively elevating students' voices in a University of Technology academic journey through quality assurance.

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The 2009 Higher Education Quality Committee study identified challenges such as students' limited understanding of Quality Assurance (QA) processes and unclear student roles. The 2016 #FeesMustFall movement reinforced the need for a more inclusive, student-centred higher education system. Despite progress, the 2020 Council on Higher Education (CHE) Conference highlighted ongoing gaps in student engagement, including limited participation in QA and quality promotion, inadequate engagement platforms, insufficient capacity development, and weak integration of student feedback into institutional decision-making. These issues informed the CHE's 2023 Integrated Good Practice Guide on Student Engagement, which promotes stronger student participation and governance. In line with these developments, a University of Technology (UoT) adopted a Smart Student Engagement strategy to strengthen student leadership, participation, and quality enhancement. To address low student involvement in quality assurance and policymaking, the Quality Management Directorate introduced a participative-reflective-collaborative model, supported by the Quality Management and Assurance Policy, to enhance student engagement in institutional processes and improve learning experiences. The paper examines the evolution of the UoT's student engagement model in promoting transformative learning and social capital, highlighting the value of student voices in QA. Using a participative-reflective-collaborative model, the study employed open-ended questions and structured quality conversations within an ethnographic, qualitative, and reflexive generative approach from 2020 to 2026. Findings show that integrating student voices into quality structures strengthens governance, accountability, student agency, and continuous quality enhancement. The UoT's shift from traditional engagement to transformative learning demonstrates the important role of student participation in improving educational experiences and academic quality.

Keywords: Engagement, Collaborative, Participation, Reflexive, Students

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Higher education institutions (HEIs) face mounting pressure to navigate complex, rapidly shifting external environments shaped by regulatory demands and emerging global trends in quality assurance (QA). These include policy reforms, technological advancements, digitalisation and digitalisation, evolving stakeholder expectations, and intensifying accountability requirements by regulators. Collectively, these forces are fundamentally redefining the scope and purpose of internal quality assurance (IQA), repositioning it from a compliance-driven function to a strategic driver of improvement, enhancement and an enhanced quality culture. These global QA practices in higher education are also increasingly moving away from narrow, compliance-driven approaches towards more comprehensive systems of QA that are adaptable, and improvement and enhancement focused. This paper critically examines how policy reforms, digitalisation and digitalisation are reshaping IQA practices, with particular attention to their potential for enhancing institutional responsiveness and agility. It further explores how the growing reliance on emerging technological advancements and policy reforms is transforming IQA This transition positions QA practitioners as central agents to drive the transition however they are constrained by lack of resources. Grounded in institutional theory, the paper proposes a framework that connects technological advancements, digitisation and digitalisation, quality improvement and enhancement to an improved quality culture. It concludes by arguing that IQA must be reconceived as a catalyst for innovation and institutional effectiveness within an increasingly dynamic higher education landscape.

Keywords:: Digitalisation, digitisation, quality improvement, quality enhancement and compliance

Assessing user satisfaction index in a comprehensive, open distance and e-learning institution in South Africa

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User satisfaction plays a critical role not only in a comprehensive, distance e-learning (CODEL) environment, but across all service industries. CODEL regards it as a critical indicator of service quality and effectiveness. This study assesses the feedback mechanisms on the user satisfaction index within a CODEL environment, focusing on how students interact with and perceive library and information services, digital platforms, and support systems. The study adopted a literature review assessment of the feedback mechanisms. The literature review explores feedback in distance education, focusing on its types, purposes, timing, implementation, and impact on students. The existing literature guided the categorization of feedback, examining three dimensions: Overall satisfaction, Library impact measures, and Library metrics. The Pulse library survey emerged as the most common feedback mechanism currently used by academic libraries in South Africa and abroad. Findings revealed that CODEL users are satisfied with the library, though there is room for improvement in some respects. The satisfaction level was emphasized in the area of training provision, library buildings, and availability of information resources. The study highlighted the importance of continuous assessment and user-centered service design in improving satisfaction levels. The study concluded that enhancing digital infrastructure, strengthening user support services, and promoting information literacy are essential strategies for improving user satisfaction in a CODEL institution. Recommendations for an extensive user needs analysis were proposed.

Keywords: User satisfaction, service quality, Pulse library survey, impact measure, satisfaction level.

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This reflective study examines insights gained through participation in the Student Engagement in Quality Assurance and Student Support Project for Master's and Doctoral students at the University of South Africa. The project highlighted student voice as a central component of quality enhancement, recognising that meaningful and sustainable improvement in higher education is a shared responsibility among students, academics, professional staff, and institutional leadership. Student perspectives, as partners, were identified as valuable sources of evidence to inform African-led, contextually relevant solutions to higher education challenges and for promoting continuous quality enhancement beyond compliance requirements.

Drawing on the principles of reflective practice, this study examines the relevance of transformative educational frameworks, including Bloom's Taxonomy, for strengthening teaching, learning, and assessment practices in higher education. Particular attention is given to the significance of coherence in academic writing, the role of health and wellness resources in managing the pressures associated with the academic journey, and the value of institutional resources. The findings suggest that sustainable academic development is enhanced when institutional practices are grounded in students lived realities, supported by structured frameworks, and informed by reflective engagement. The study concludes that integrating student voice, African-centered approaches, and established quality assurance mechanisms can enhance student success, support student well-being, and contribute to a more inclusive, responsive, equitable, and transformative higher education environment.

Keywords: African-centred education, reflective practice, quality assurance, Bloom's Taxonomy, higher education

*Evaluating the Impact of Quality Improvement Planning on Departmental Quality Management Systems at a
South African University of Technology (UoT)*

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Quality assurance in South African higher education has evolved from a compliance-driven approach to one focused on continuous improvement. A Quality Improvement Plan (QIP) has emerged as a tool for strengthening Departmental Quality Management Systems (DQMS) by providing a structured mechanism for implementing review recommendations and fostering a quality culture. DQMS refers to the integrated framework of monitoring mechanisms, quality reviews, and improvement practices used by academic departments to assure and enhance their academic project. According to the Council on Higher Education (CHE, 2021), a QIP consists of actions developed in response to internal or external quality reviews to address gaps and enhance quality. Although QIPs are used as a mechanism for quality enhancement, there is limited evidence of their impact on the DQMS. This study therefore seeks to evaluate the extent to which QIPs contribute to key aspects of quality including quality promotion, accountability, cultivation of a quality culture and continuous quality improvement within academic departments at a UoT. Guided by the quality culture theory as outlined in Schindler's dimensions of quality, namely purposefulness, transformation, excellence, and accountability (Schindler, 2015), the study adopts a qualitative case study design. Data were collected through an analysis of departmental QIPs over a defined period. The findings indicate that QIPs strengthens DQMS by enhancing accountability, promoting quality governance and decision-making, recognition of excellence, and supporting sustainable capacity-development initiatives. The study concludes that a QIP serves as a critical and effective mechanism for strengthening DQMS by fostering and embedding a culture of quality.

Keywords: Improvement, Quality, Quality Management Systems, Quality Culture, Quality Enhancement

*Performing Decolonisation: Epistemic Spectatorship and the Limits of Curriculum Transformation***Author: Dr Tebogo Victoria Kgope** Email: kitsobophelo@gmail.com

Former Statistician General Dr Pali Lehohla has observed that while access to higher education in South Africa has expanded, the transformative value of qualifications for Black graduates remains uneven, often reproducing structural inequalities. This paper interrogates the persistent gap between the rhetoric and practice of curriculum transformation in universities. Drawing on conceptual and policy analysis, the author introduces the notion of epistemic spectatorship to describe a condition in which decolonisation and Africanisation are publicly affirmed but insufficiently embedded in institutional and epistemic structures. While reforms have been undertaken, these remain uneven in their engagement with Indigenous Knowledge Systems (IKS), African languages, and alternative epistemologies. Focusing on four domains, curriculum responsiveness, Africanisation, language integration, and future-oriented skills, the analysis suggests that prevailing approaches risk producing forms of epistemic tokenism, where African knowledge is symbolically included but marginal in high-stakes knowledge production. At the same time, increasing alignment with global labour market demands, often grounded in dominant Western paradigms, may reinforce an extractive knowledge orientation that undervalues locally grounded epistemologies. As a result, many graduates experience epistemic dislocation, being prepared for systems that do not fully sustain their lived realities. This calls for a shift toward epistemic reconstitution, positioning African knowledge systems, languages, and intellectual traditions as foundational to curriculum design. It contributes to ongoing debates on quality, relevance, and transformation within the HEQAF framework.

Keywords: Africanisation, African universities, Curriculum transformation, Epistemic inequality, Graduate outcomes

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Background: Rapid advances in artificial intelligence (AI) are reshaping workplaces, knowledge production, and professional practice, creating new expectations for graduate capabilities in the digital economy. Yet AI-related competencies remain unevenly distributed across higher education curricula and are often confined to technology-oriented disciplines. This study aims to examine how AI literacy can be conceptualised and embedded as a core graduate attribute across undergraduate qualifications.

Methods: This conceptual paper employs a thematic literature review of contemporary scholarship published on AI in higher education, curriculum transformation, graduate attributes, and future skills. Guided by Graduate Attributes Theory and digital literacy frameworks, the review analysed literature published between 2020 and 2025, selected for its relevance to undergraduate teaching, employability, and curriculum design. The analysis focused on identifying core dimensions of AI literacy, strategies for curricular integration, and implications for institutional practice.

Results: The review identifies AI literacy as a multidimensional competency encompassing understanding of AI systems, critical evaluation of AI-generated content, data literacy, ethical awareness, and responsible decision-making. It further finds that interdisciplinary curriculum design, authentic assessment, and discipline-responsive pedagogies support meaningful integration. The study's key contribution is to position AI literacy not as a specialised technical skill, but as a cross-cutting graduate attribute that extends critical thinking, communication, problem-solving, and lifelong learning in AI-rich contexts.

Conclusion: AI literacy should be institutionalised as a core graduate attribute through policy, curriculum reform, and staff development. Embedding it across disciplines is essential for preparing ethically responsible, adaptable graduates for an AI-driven society.

Keywords: AI literacy, curriculum transformation, graduate attributes, future skills, employability

Sub-theme 3

Equity, Social Justice, and Transformation in Higher Education

Navigating Postgraduate Learning in A CODEL Environment: Challenges and Opportunities for Academic Success.

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Postgraduate studies in Quality Assurance are critical for developing advanced skills in designing, implementing and auditing, standards across industries like education, healthcare so forth. They also facilitate career advancement by providing expertise in risk management, strategic planning and performance measurement.

Postgraduate education is a significant aspect of higher education that has a fundamental influence on the global economy, governance, and social justice. However, most postgraduate students go through diverse experiences as they struggles with constructing their identities toward becoming, inter alia, researchers. This article reflects on the author's lived experience during her postgraduate education at one of South Africa's higher education institutions (HEIs). As a result, based on the lived experience the author identified six themes that revolve around the experience of postgraduate students which are: postgraduate studies, quality assurance involvement in students' success, student voice(s), student and supervisor relationship, access to funding and relevant lived experience(s) the challenges and opportunities on the path to graduation and employment.

The study recommends that to ensure that the right knowledge is produced for a knowledge-based economy and evidence-based practice, challenges associated with postgraduate education need to be addressed, with particular emphasis on student and supervisor training for all postgraduate students, development of clear guidelines for postgraduate research supervision, and recruitment of high-potential postgraduate students. The article provides a better understanding of the challenges faced by postgraduate students in South Africa's HEIs, which adds to the invaluable gold-filled cracks of the once broken vase reassembled through the eyes of a postgraduate student.

Keywords: Postgraduate Studies, Quality Assurance, Student Voice, Student and Supervisor Relationship, Funding, and Lived Experiences

Afrophobia and the Quality Learning Experiences of International African Students at South African Universities: A Fanonian and Ngũgĩan Decolonial Perspective

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Persistent afrophobic attacks and symbolic violence in South Africa continue to undermine higher education transformation by compromising the safety, dignity, sense of belonging, and quality learning experiences of international African students. According to (Ngobeni, 2018), hostility toward Black Africans by other Africans or South Africans, especially prejudice directed at migrants creates a psychological and epistemological challenge for international African students on South African university campuses. Instead of seeing the university as a liberating, pan-African space for intellectual progress, international students frequently see it as a hostile frontier. This has a direct impact on the quality of their education and the transformation of the student population. There is polarisation on what drives this type of behaviour. Understanding why and how restoration could be accomplished is critical given the sector's commitment to transform not only in terms of student diversity, curriculum transformation, or creating a platform for student voice, but also to dismantle the colonial and apartheid bondage that affects our mental freedom, epistemic freedom, appreciation of brotherhood, our language, and to restore the impact of the past that continues to live post-colonial transition. The study will examine the lived experiences of ten international African students from three universities: the University of Pretoria, Tshwane University of Technology, and Sefako Makgatho Health Science University. The research will be conceptualised based on the theoretical perspectives of Frantz Fanon and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o. Bringing together Fanon's and Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's perspectives might demonstrate how nationalist chauvinism undermines academic quality, institutional development and restoration efforts.

Keywords: Afrophobia, epistemic freedom, nationalist chauvinism Graduate outcomes

Reimagining Teacher Education for Sustainable Transformation: A Systematic Review and Conceptual Framework from South Africa

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Teacher education has become a global priority in advancing sustainable development, educational transformation, and innovation within rapidly changing social, economic, and technological environments. Higher education institutions are increasingly expected to prepare teachers who can respond effectively to issues of diversity, sustainability, digital transformation, and social justice. This paper explores the reimagining of teacher education for sustainable transformation through the development of a conceptual framework informed by systematic review evidence from global literature. The study employed a systematic literature review methodology to identify, evaluate, and synthesise peer-reviewed literature published over the last decade. Relevant studies were retrieved from EBSCOhost, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar. The review followed a structured process of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and thematic synthesis. The review identified major themes shaping contemporary teacher education, including transformative learning, digital pedagogies, sustainability integration, inclusive education, curriculum innovation, and interdisciplinary collaboration. The findings also revealed persistent challenges, including unequal access to educational resources, resistance to curriculum reform, inadequate preparation for emerging educational demands, and limited institutional support for innovation and sustainability practices. Based on the reviewed evidence, the paper proposes a conceptual framework for sustainable teacher education that emphasises curriculum flexibility, experiential learning, technological integration, critical reflection, social justice, and community engagement. The framework advocates for teacher education programmes that are context-responsive while remaining globally relevant. This study contributes to ongoing international debates on the future of teacher education and provides practical insights for policymakers, universities, and researchers seeking to strengthen sustainable and transformative educational practices.

Keywords: Teacher Education, Sustainable Transformation, Curriculum Innovation, Educational Sustainability

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Successfully supporting postgraduate students in hybrid learning environments requires alignment between institutional resources and students' digital realities. Guided by the Fit-Gap Analysis framework, this quantitative study assessed the digital readiness of postgraduate education students for participation in a hybrid postgraduate programme. A structured questionnaire measured competencies in learning management system use, Microsoft Office applications, academic literacy, Turnitin, email, cybersecurity, AI literacy, internet connectivity, device access, and awareness of institutional support services. Descriptive statistics and fit-gap analysis were used to compare students' digital competencies with the programme's technological requirements.

The findings revealed several critical gaps between students' digital readiness and programme expectations. Participants demonstrated intermediate proficiency in basic digital skills, including Microsoft Word (M = 4.1), PowerPoint (M = 4.0), Moodle navigation (M = 3.9), email (M = 4.2), and cybersecurity practices (M = 3.5). However, proficiency was considerably lower for advanced academic and digital skills, including AI literacy for advanced applications (M = 2.5), Turnitin and plagiarism management (M = 2.7), advanced academic searching (M = 2.9), Moodle advanced features (M = 3.2), and advanced Microsoft Office functions (M = 3.3 - 3.4). In addition, inconsistent internet connectivity and limited awareness of institutional support services created further barriers to effective participation in hybrid learning.

The study recommends integrating digital-readiness audits into postgraduate admissions, strengthening induction programmes, providing targeted training in advanced digital and AI competencies, improving communication of support services, and addressing digital access inequalities. These can strengthen institutional quality assurance, promote equitable participation, and improve postgraduate success in hybrid learning environments.

Decolonising Legal Education Through Street Law Outreach: Advancing Epistemic Justice and Inclusive Learning in South African Higher Education

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South African legal education remains constrained by Eurocentric epistemologies, language exclusion, and insufficient community engagement, perpetuating epistemic injustice despite constitutional commitments to transformation. This paper examines whether Street Law outreach programmes can serve as decolonising pedagogies that advance epistemic justice and inclusive learning. Drawing on transformative constitutionalism as articulated by Langa, epistemic justice theory from Fricker, and Ubuntu pedagogy developed by Naidu and Delomoney, the study analyses the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Street Law module through qualitative documentary analysis of student testimonials, programme reports, and community partner reflections documented by Hicks and Nomnganga. The methodology integrates case study analysis with critical reflective practice, examining knowledge co-production between university learners and marginalised populations. The significance lies in addressing three gaps: Eurocentric curricula, digital and language barriers, and disconnection between legal theory and lived realities, concerns highlighted by Nel and Rammala. The paper recommends that law faculties mainstream community-engaged learning as a core requirement, integrate Ubuntu pedagogy across all modules following Naidu and Delomoney, develop multilingual legal education resources as proposed by Sheehan, Solwa and Beneke, and establish formal partnerships with traditional authorities as demonstrated by Hicks. It further calls for institutional investment in critical AI literacy to prevent digital inequality from deepening epistemic exclusion, a warning issued by Nel. By positioning students as active participants in social change rather than passive recipients of doctrinal knowledge, Street Law programmes cultivate graduates who are academically competent, socially conscious, and equipped to realise South Africa's transformative constitutional promise as envisioned by Langa.

Keywords: Decolonisation; epistemic justice; Street Law; Ubuntu pedagogy; transformative constitutionalism

Sub-theme 4

Artificial Intelligence, Digital Transformation, and Innovation in Teaching and Learning

Bridging the Algorithmic Divide: Artificial Intelligence, Digital Equity, and Academic Success in Higher Education: A Systematic Literature Review

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The proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI) and disruptive digital technologies in higher education has intensified longstanding structural inequities, raising urgent questions about whose academic success is genuinely advanced, and whose is systematically undermined by technological transformation. A differential adoption of AI tools across socioeconomic, geographic, and institutional contexts risks deepening rather than ameliorating the digital divide, particularly for marginalised and historically underserved student populations. Students in resource-constrained and Global South contexts face compounding barriers, including inadequate infrastructure, limited digital literacy, algorithmically embedded bias, and limited capacity for inclusive AI governance. These factors mediate academic trajectories and compound educational disadvantage. This study presents a systematic literature review (SLR) synthesising empirical and theoretical evidence on the triadic relationship between AI integration, digital equity, and academic success in higher education, with deliberate epistemic attention to the structural conditions shaping technology-mediated learning in contexts of inequality. Adhering to PRISMA 2020 standards, a structured search was conducted across Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar, covering peer-reviewed literature from 2020 to 2025. The SPIDER framework operationalised the research question; the Mixed Methods Appraisal Tool (MMAT) assessed the quality of the research; and thematic synthesis identified convergent and divergent patterns across heterogeneous study designs. The review reveals that equitable AI integration is contingent upon deliberate institutional governance, context-sensitive infrastructure investment, and culturally responsive policy frameworks. Recommendations based on the findings include a framework for algorithmic justice and actionable policy for inclusive, ethically grounded AI adoption at the intersection of race, class, geography, and structural equality.

Keywords: Artificial intelligence, digital equity, academic success, algorithmic justice, Global South

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The role of Writing Centres in higher education is declining as reliance on Generative Artificial Intelligence (Gen AI) tools increases. This narrative review draws on recent studies and perspectives to examine how students' overreliance on Gen AI reduces the effectiveness of Writing Centres. The review also explores the mistrust that Writing Centres face as Gen AI tools are rapidly integrated into university learning environments. Employing a narrative research design, qualitative findings are used to investigate the impacts of Writing Centers and Gen AI, the extent of students' dependence on Gen AI tools, and the interactions between these factors. To address this issue, a narrative literature review was conducted using scholarly articles sourced from platforms such as ResearchGate and ScienceDirect, focusing on publications from 2020 to 2026. A theoretically informed thematic approach was used to synthesise the findings. Thematic analysis identified excessive reliance on Gen AI, the respective impacts of Writing Centres and Gen AI, and concerns about academic integrity and ethical awareness. This paper provides current insights into the implications for ethical awareness and academic integrity in the context of AI, highlighting the necessity for explicit academic regulations and ethical frameworks. Additionally, it offers guidance to students on making responsible decisions about the use of Generative AI tools in higher education. It outlines strategies to promote academic integrity among higher education stakeholders.

Keywords: Generative AI, Higher education, Writing center, Academic integrity, Ethical awareness

A Scoping Review on e-Learning in Nursing Education at the Tertiary Level: The Benefits, Challenges, and Implementation Factors

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This scoping review aimed to identify and synthesize the existing evidence on e-learning in tertiary nursing education, following the Joanna Briggs Institute framework for scoping reviews. A comprehensive search was executed across six databases—PubMed, CINAHL, ERIC, Scopus, ScienceDirect, and African Journals Online (AJOL)—focusing on studies published in English from 2014 to 2025. After screening 487 studies by title and abstract, 48 were ultimately deemed eligible and included in the analysis, which was conducted using thematic methods. The analysis revealed four principal themes: i) Both nursing students and educators generally hold positive perceptions of e-learning while raising concerns regarding inadequate technical support; ii) E-learning significantly enhances student autonomy and critical thinking skills, with mobile technology facilitating access to resources and reducing feelings of isolation during clinical placements; iii) Persistent barriers in South Africa—such as infrastructural deficits, insufficient connectivity, financial constraints, and digital literacy gaps—hinder effective engagement; iv) Institutional and contextual factors influencing e-learning adoption necessitate curriculum decolonization and initiatives to bridge the digital divide. The review underscores the transformative potential of e-learning in nursing education, emphasizing that effective implementation requires substantial investment in ICT infrastructure, digital literacy, and professional development for educators. Future research should explore long-term outcomes of e-learning, the experiences of nurse educators, and the relationship between e-learning and equity.

Keywords: : e-learning, undergraduate students, nursing education, tertiary level, online platform

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The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI) within higher education institutions presents transformative opportunities for teaching, learning, assessment, and institutional governance. However, the increasing reliance on algorithmic systems raises significant legal, constitutional, and regulatory concerns relating to academic integrity, data protection, equality, accountability, and procedural fairness. Within the South African higher education landscape, the deployment of AI-driven technologies has outpaced the development of coherent legal and institutional governance frameworks, creating uncertainty regarding compliance with constitutional obligations and quality assurance standards. This study investigates the extent to which existing South African legal and policy frameworks adequately regulate the use of artificial intelligence in higher education quality assurance. Drawing from the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, the Protection of Personal Information Act, higher education legislation, institutional governance policies, and international human rights instruments, the paper critically examines the intersection between technological innovation, student rights, and institutional accountability. Particular attention is given to issues of algorithmic bias, digital exclusion, privacy protection, and universities' duty to ensure equitable access and academic fairness in technologically mediated environments. Adopting a qualitative desktop research methodology, the study analyses legislation, case law, policy documents, academic literature, and comparative international regulatory frameworks. The paper argues for a rights-based regulatory model that balances technological innovation with constitutional imperatives of dignity, equality, access to education, and administrative justice. It concludes by proposing legal and governance reforms to strengthen quality assurance mechanisms in the digital era.

Artificial Intelligence, Higher Education Law, Quality Assurance, Constitutional Rights, Digital Governance

Artificial Intelligence, Educational Quality, and Work Readiness of Food and Nutrition Students at Walter Sisulu University

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This qualitative study explores the influence of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on educational quality and work readiness among Food and Nutrition students at a South African university. The study engaged 20 purposively selected students doing their second year of study through semi-structured interviews to examine their experiences with AI in learning, assessment, and professional preparation. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Findings reveal a nuanced impact of AI on educational quality. Participants reported that AI-enhanced tools improved access to information, supported personalised learning, and contributed to better academic performance through timely feedback and academic assistance. However, a dominant concern was the over-reliance on AI, which participants perceived as limiting critical thinking, practical skill development, and independent problem-solving competencies essential for professional practice in Food and Nutrition profession. Furthermore, while AI was viewed as beneficial for theoretical understanding, students expressed uncertainty about their readiness for workplace demands requiring hands on skills, ethical judgement, and decision-making. Concerns about academic integrity and the authenticity of student work also emerged as significant challenges. The study concludes that although AI presents innovative opportunities for enhancing higher education quality, its unregulated use may undermine key competencies required for work readiness. It recommends a balanced integration of AI, combining technological tools with experiential learning approaches to ensure the development of both academic excellence and practical competence.

Keywords: Artificial Intelligence (AI), Educational Quality, Work Readiness, Food and Nutrition Students, Higher Education.

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The increasing use of artificial intelligence (AI) tools in higher education has raised significant concerns regarding academic integrity, assessment practices, and student success, particularly in relation to AI detection systems and the risk of false positive identifications. This autoethnographic study examines the author's lived experience of being falsely accused of AI usage in an Honors research paper and the subsequent academic, emotional, and psychological consequences.

Through systematic self-reflection and critical analysis, the paper explores how AI detection processes and institutional responses shaped the author's mental health, academic progression, and acceptance into a Master's programme. The study situates this experience within broader discussions on AI governance in higher education, including ethical use of AI tools, the reliability of detection systems, and institutional decision-making in cases of suspected misconduct.

Key findings highlight the profound emotional and psychological strain associated with unsubstantiated AI allegations, as well as the dual role of AI as both a valuable learning tool and a source of institutional uncertainty. The paper further identifies gaps in AI governance, particularly in relation to due process, policy clarity, and staff preparedness in interpreting AI detection outputs.

By foregrounding lived experience within a scholarly framework, this study contributes to ongoing debates on AI governance, academic integrity, and student success in higher education, and calls for more transparent, ethical, and student-centred approaches to AI-enabled assessment practices.

Keywords: AI Governance, Ethical AI Usage, False Positives, Academic Integrity, Student Support





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