

# Quality Education News

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## Good governance leads good schools

### Dear Friend of Quality Education



2011 Winners of the first Proudly South African/CGF School Governance Award

**Congratulations, Victoria Girls' High School! The school is the inaugural winners of this nationwide School Governance Award. The School Governing Body team poses for the photographer.**

The Sandton Convention Centre was the splendid setting for a special occasion. It was the grand venue for the 2011 Proudly South African Homegrown Awards. For the first time there was a School Governance Award. Schools – public or private – were invited to enter the competition. The only condition was that participating schools had to be members of Proudly SA. (Membership for all schools is free).

The results of the Proudly SA/ CGF Awards were:



#### Winner:

Victoria Girls' High School, Grahamstown, Eastern Cape  
[www.vghs.co.za](http://www.vghs.co.za)

#### 1<sup>st</sup> Runner Up

St Peter's School, Rivonia, Gauteng  
[www.stpeters.co.za](http://www.stpeters.co.za)

#### 2<sup>nd</sup> Runner Up

Glenwood High School, Durban, Kwa-Zulu Natal  
[www.glenwoodhighschool.co.za](http://www.glenwoodhighschool.co.za)

Very well done to those schools and every other school that participated. The overall standard of entries was very high. All the participating schools were committed to ensuring that excellent school governance was in place.

Nadia Czeredrecki-Schmidt is Head of Department - Publicity at Victoria Girls' High School. She was asked what made this school so special in providing Quality education. Two factors mentioned were that the school wasn't afraid of change (for example: being willing and acting proactively on curriculum change) and also the quality of teachers in the staffroom. Nadia claimed that the teachers at Victoria Girls' were the most passionate about teaching than any other school in the country!

When asked about what makes for a good School Governing Body (SGB), she cited a number of criteria. Firstly, every SGB member needed to be prepared to give up time to serve the school. A good SGB had a wide range of skills represented around the board table. She mentioned the value of professionals such as accountants and lawyers. A third criterion was that an effective SGB was able to think long-term. What, for example, building projects were in the pipeline five years into the future?

A good SGB has members who continually think about what is in the overall best interests of the school. Decisions taken are based on what is good for the school as a whole, not on governors' personal preferences. The SGB knows the importance of having open communication with the community. They have put in place the different forums where parents, staff and students can interact with each other.

Good governance also involves having a sound relationship with the local District Office of the education department. (Victoria Girls' is a public school.) The school leadership works hard at having an harmonious relationship with their officials. It adheres to policy requirements, does the necessary paperwork and does things properly.

Nadia and everyone at Victoria Girls' are thrilled at the School Governance accolade given to them. Yet she is also mindful of how much effort is required. She astutely observes, 'It takes a lot of hard work to be a Quality school; it's not instantaneous.'

Next year all public schools will be having their SGB elections. May the present members and new ones do your school proud. You might even like to have as a school goal, free participation in the 2012 Proudly SA/ CGF School Governance Awards.

As the year races towards an end, warm wishes are extended for a happy holiday season. If you celebrate religious holidays at these times, may they be days be filled with Blessings, Joy and Peace.

Sincerely

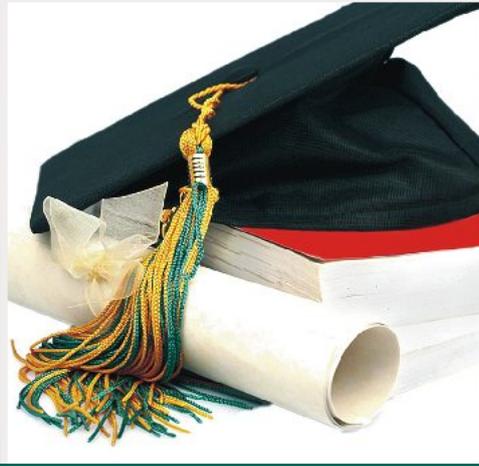
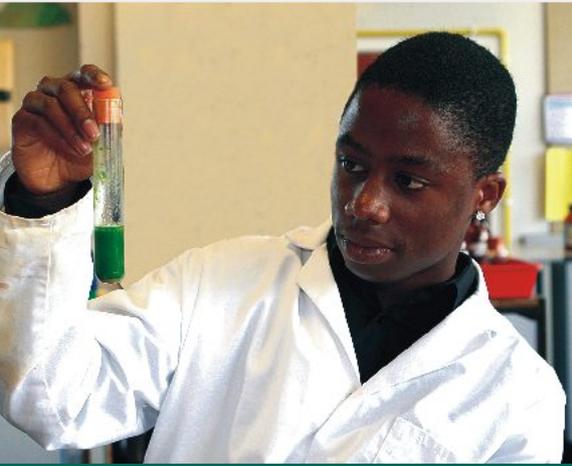
*Richard Hayward*



This newsletter is edited by SAQI and distributed to those schools benefiting from their participation in the MySchool programme. MySchool acts as a conduit which raises and delivers essential funding for education and social development on a sustainable basis. This enables members of the community to participate in the future development of our nation.



# Bridging the Basic to Higher Education gap



**The statistics are scary. About 40% of students who enter a South African tertiary education fail. Compare this to an 80% success rate in first-world countries. This lack of Quality education has huge negative consequences. Millions of rands are wasted; thousands of students waste a year or more of their productive working life. Students can be traumatised by the experience of failure when often the real reasons are not their fault. Rather, the school and tertiary education systems have failed them.**

Ten Quality Assurance (QA) strategies are suggested to improve the success rate at tertiary institutions. Six could be implemented within the school system and the other four at college or university.

## Quality Assurance strategies to bridge the gap

The first six strategies apply at school level.

### **1 Rigorous continuous assessment**

In the history of our country there was once the rallying cry amongst millions of learners: Pass one, pass all. That mind frame still persists in certain district, regional and provincial education departments. Learners are undeservedly promoted from one Grade to the next. District officials put pressure and/or order schools to promote failing students to the next Grade. Cruel reality strikes when the students write standardised exams at the end of Grade 12.

Such a mindset is unfair and sabotages the ethics of QA; learners are promoted to Grades where they're unable to cope. Use QA to set and abide by benchmark criteria to determine whether or not a student is to be promoted.

### **2 NEEDU (National Education Evaluation and Development Unit)**

The Unit aims to do QA assessments at educational institutions

across the country. At present, there is very little inspection and /or Whole School Evaluation of schools. Nobody likes people looking over their shoulder checking on their work. Yet it has to happen if we are to maintain and improve standards.

When NEEDU visits schools and education department offices, it should have 'clout'. That means having the statutory power to insist that its improvement recommendations are carried out. NEEDU needs the authority to deal decisively with incapable, incompetent and indolent personnel.

### **3 ANA (Annual National Assessment) tests**

In 2011, the first ANA nationwide assessment tests were done. Those tests were done in Grades 2 to 7 as well as in Grade 10. ANA tests can – if sensibly, sensitively and scrupulously honestly administered – do much to improve education. ANA is showing signs of being an effective Quality Assurance mechanism.

It has been asked what the relevance of an ANA test administered in Grade 2 is to bridging the academic gap between Grade 12 and a tertiary institution. If ANA assessments steadily raise the bar in each successive Grade, the present huge gap between Grade 12 and tertiary education will be gradually narrowed. First-year failure rates will fall.

### **4 Career guidance**

How often have you heard it said that someone changed courses at a tertiary institution and that it made a winning difference? Too often students enrol for the wrong courses. Poor career advice is given by well-meaning parents, parents and friends.

Schools need well-qualified career guidance teachers. They would be able to give meaningful advice based on the learners' academic ability, personality and skills.

## 5 Umalusi (Council for Quality Assurance in General and Further Training)

Umalusi can raise the tertiary admission requirements. At present, the basis in the school system is the Grade 12 National Senior Certificate. Professor Jonathan Jansen of the Free State University has been one of many who is scathing of the tertiary admission standards set by Umalusi. Too many Grade 12s are presently being given false hope of being able to cope with the academic rigours required of a tertiary education.

## 6 Post-Grade 12 year

Too few schools are able to prepare learners for what awaits them in a tertiary institution. At poorly resourced schools which are in the overwhelming majority in South Africa, there aren't science laboratories, libraries with internet facilities and computers. The majority of schools feed learners a diet of skills that help them jump through the hoops of examination questions. Too few schools give enough attention to encouraging creative and independent thinking.

A post-Grade 12 year will focus the curriculum on the intended field of study at tertiary level. Higher order thinking skills can be given greater focus in class sizes that usually have fewer students than the average Grade 12 class.

The last four bridging strategies apply to tertiary institutions.

## 7 Rigorous selection process of student teachers ... and other students

Finland has one of the finest education systems world-wide. Only the top 10% academic performing leavers are accepted for teacher training. If you're not so lucky, you can apply for law and medicine! Compare the situation to South Africa. Admission requirements into our education faculties are about the lowest of any faculty. Another difference between the two countries is that every Finnish teacher has to have at least a Master's degree. In South Africa a four-year degree suffices.

It's naïve to believe that high-level qualifications equate exactly with being a good teacher. There's isn't a direct correlation. The crucial factor should be the teacher candidate's character. Evaluations submitted by the learner's school teachers as well as psychometric tests (including emotional intelligence level) and the actual interview process should guide the selection committee.

The gate keepers in the faculty admission offices need to be reasonably confident that selected students have the potential to successfully complete their studies.

## 8 Bridging programmes

Tertiary institutions need to have bridging programmes. As mentioned before, the majority of schools have limited teaching resources. This results in learners having no 'hands-on' experience of working with apparatus and equipment that they're likely to encounter in certain tertiary institutions. Examples would be the natural sciences and technology fields.

There are technicons and universities that do much to bridge the gap. One instance is the University of Cape Town's (UCT) establishment of the Centre for Higher Education Development. It is a university-wide academic development programme. Most faculties have their own specialised development programmes. There's a special emphasis on first-year students.

## 9 Mentor system

Quality institutions have mentoring programmes to help newcomers settle in. Many schools, for example, have 'buddy systems'. The Grade 12 learner is assigned to a new Grade 8 learner to help that person settle in happily and successfully to the high school routine.

Higher education institutions could adopt mentoring systems. Even when there are huge numbers of students, core introductory lectures could be held. First-year students could be guided on how to meet the academic demands of the institution. If a student is in a hostel or residence, senior students could be mentors.

What about the lecturing staff themselves being involved in mentoring?! It would be salutary, for example, if the dean of the faculty were to hear from a first-year student that hardly any of the books on the recommended reading lists are available from the library. Are the academics aware of the many challenges that confront their students?

## 10 Quality audit of the tertiary institution

Fine brains don't necessarily make for fine lecturing. In the Quality Assurance process there's a need for 'on-site' evaluations of the lecturing staff's teaching ability. Ideally, anyone who has an appointment which entails lecturing should have the professional competency to teach well.

Quality audits would scrutinise the standard of the curriculum content. It would assess whether there are sufficient resources for all students. Unfortunately there are universities that 'pack them in' even though there are insufficient human, physical and teaching resources. Tertiary institutions welcome the state subsidy that they receive for every student that is enrolled. Quality audits would ask students in questionnaires and focus group meetings to evaluate their tertiary-level experiences. Academic and administrative staff would also make input.

Far too many students want a tertiary education when there are far too few resources. Every place at a tertiary institution is expensive and precious. How do we make higher education a successful experience for the students? We need to rigorously apply Quality Assurance practices at every level in the education system. If we were to do so, the move from basic to higher education would still be academically demanding but crucially ... it would be a very successful walk across that bridge for the huge majority of students.

*This is an adapted paper given by Richard Hayward at the AMC Quality Assurance in Higher Education Conference 2011.*



# We need NEEDU now!

In March 2001 the Inception Conference for NEEDU was held in Pretoria. What progress has the unit made in its role of quality assurance in the education system? The editor interviewed Mark Potterton, Chief Director in NEEDU. Among the questions asked were:

**Editor: What is the budget for the 2011/12 year?**

Mark Potterton: R 14 million

**Ed.: How many people are employed by NEEDU?**

MP: Four full-time, three part-time, two students and one researcher. During October 2011 interviews were held for 22 Deputy-Director posts. These new appointments will be deployed in the provinces.

**Ed: Why does there seem to be so little activity from NEEDU?**

MP: There have been advocacy meetings with various stakeholders to get 'buy-in' for NEEDU. Work has been done on the Bill and the draft has been approved by the Provincial Councils. The Bill will be tabled in Parliament next year and public comment will be invited.

To date five provinces have been visited which would include District Offices. An average of ten schools in each province has also been visited.

**Ed: Does NEEDU have standardised instruments that it uses**

**for assessing the quality level in an institution?**

MP: Not at the moment. Team members are presently assessing different models.

**Ed: There are 28,000 schools in South Africa and the NEEDU budget is so tiny. How will you be able to effectively quality audit the education system?**

MP: There are 81 school districts in the country. The starting point could be at district level where performance is evaluated in the district office. During the evaluation process of the district, NEEDU could visit a random sample of ten schools.

The editor comments that a starting point for NEEDU might be the Head Offices of the provincial education departments. NEEDU would need to figuratively go in with a guillotine. Heads should roll of those who are responsible for appalling delivery service in parts of the country. As with a fish, an education office or school rots from the head.

Where should NEEDU focus its quality audits? The editor observes that on 4 January 2012, the National Senior Certificate results will be published. Focus strongly on those under-performing provinces, district offices and schools. With such an approach, NEEDU can spend money wisely. Leave those places alone that are committed to quality education and are getting the good results. Give them 'light touch' audits to ensure that excellence is being maintained. It's also an excellent chance for NEEDU to thank them for their quality achievements.

## 2012 CPD (Continuous Professional Development)

At this time of the year the senior management team of quality-focussed schools are planning for next year. What are your CPD programmes? SAQI has a range of education leadership and management programmes. Programmes are adapted to the particular group (examples: education department officials, senior management and whole staffroom). For more details, please contact Vanessa du Toit (012-349-5006; [vanessa@saqi.co.za](mailto:vanessa@saqi.co.za)) or Richard Hayward (011-888-3262; [rpdhayward@yahoo.com](mailto:rpdhayward@yahoo.com)). Poor schools are sponsored.

*Thanks very much!*

The first email issue of *Quality Education News* published in 2006 reached an audience of hundreds. This issue will reach thousands. SAQI is most grateful to the associations, individuals, institutions, organisations and schools that distribute QEN to others. Special thanks go to Michelle Janse van Rensburg at **MySchool** card and Vanessa du Toit at **SAQI** for their valued input towards ensuring that the newsletter reaches all nine provinces. Aubrey Jansen of **aubrey jansen design** is the genius graphic designer who makes each page a visual treat. To everyone who is helping to make Quality education happen, many thanks.