

# Rhodes University

## Policy on Curriculum Development and Review

### Introduction

The term 'curriculum' is generally used to refer to the syllabus - the list of subjects, topics and the text included in a course of study. It is more than that. It incorporates subject content and skills, the manner of teaching and assessment that is followed, the philosophical outlook of the teacher and who the learners are. Curriculum is both the planned process, the actual implementation of the teaching and the students' 'experiences' of the learning process.

Increasingly, without necessarily compromising academic autonomy, Universities are being held accountable to the learners, Government, parents, industry and the wider community. They are expected to produce graduates who do not only know the content, but who also have the capability to provide human resources to satisfy the needs of the country.

Internationally there is an awareness of a need for people in higher education constantly to be developing and reviewing curricula in accordance with the changing circumstances. In South Africa, because of the developments in the country and in higher education in particular, changes in curricula are imperative. Through the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) and the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) an integrated national framework for learning is being established. Such developments will impact on every education programme in the country. The development and review of curricula should take into account national education policies and the social economic environment within which graduates will work. Curricula also need to be sensitive to the range of learner backgrounds. The explosion of information through modern technology creates circumstances with new challenges for educationalists. New approaches to designing curricula should equip learners with the skills to access and manage knowledge rather than just imbibe knowledge.

### Principles

- **Learning outcomes** which include knowledge and understanding of a subject as well as cognitive, general and professional skills should be explicitly stated for each course or programme and these should be the pivot around which the whole course is developed. This is in line with the SAQA and NQF requirements.
- **Consultation** is the key feature of curriculum development. The question to be asked is not what the lecturers can offer, but what the needs of the learners and society are. Stakeholders should therefore be co-developers of a curriculum. These normally include current and past students, academics, professional bodies and employers in both the private and public sector.
- **Reviewing processes** should be part of a curriculum plan in order to accommodate new ideas and knowledge as well as to avoid rigidity. Such changes should be informed by developments in the world of learning as well as movements in a particular discipline.
- **Equity and redress** are issues that need to be accommodated in the curriculum. The curriculum needs to have a clear plan on how learners who do not have adequate academic preparation will be accommodated and developed. In short, how learners with differential entry levels can all reach the same required exit levels needs to be clearly stated.
- **Diversity** of the student body and teaching personnel calls for a curriculum which is sensitive to the different backgrounds and outlooks of those engaged in the teaching and learning processes.

## Policy

- In the development of curricula departments / schools should clearly formulate their aims as well as learning outcomes. This will facilitate the identification of specific outcomes for various courses and modules. Such planned outcomes need to be explicitly communicated to learners and should appear in the university calendar and other relevant documents.
- In addition to specifying outcomes, curricula should be learner-centred and describe content, skills to be mastered and fundamental viewpoints. The nature of the learning experience including teaching methods and forms of assessment of learner attainment should be clearly stated.
- The regular review of curricula should be standard practice in every department. Given the rapid pace of change, it is suggested that curricula should be reviewed every three years and that at six year intervals a more comprehensive overhaul be undertaken.
- In developing and reviewing curricula wide consultation should take place with students, key players, potential employers and academics from other institutions. Interdisciplinary curriculum planning should be encouraged.
- In planning curricula, departments should accommodate as far as possible the diverse linguistic, cultural and religious backgrounds of learners. Support and developmental programmes to facilitate access to courses by those students that need such services should be clearly outlined.
- Heads of Departments / Course Co-ordinators will be required to report via the Teaching and Learning Committee to Senate on a regular basis in respect of their development and review of curricula.