



higher education  
& training

Department:  
Higher Education and Training  
REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA



# WORKSHOP REPORT FOR

## MENTORS AND MANAGERS

12 - 14 MARCH 2019



## Introduction

This brief report details the contents of workshops with mentors and managers working on the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP), held from the 12th to the 14th of March 2019. These workshops were held as a response to requests from universities during the Department of Higher Education and Training's (DHET) site visits. The aim was to provide a space for nGAP mentors and managers to share their experiences of the Programme and to give the DHET an opportunity to listen, clarify and respond. Part of the rationale, through this sharing of experiences and learning, was to build a shared understanding of the role and implementation of the nGAP in the public higher education sector. Several important issues and recommendations emerged from these meetings that need to be considered by universities and by the DHET as the nGAP grows and develops into the future.

## About the workshops

There were two days of workshops with the nGAP mentors. The limitations of the venue necessitated two one-day workshops with half of the group on one day and the other half on the second day. The mentor group consisted of senior academics and scholars chosen to work with nGAP lecturers in a supportive role. The role of the mentor is defined in the nGAP Standard Operating Procedures (SoPs) as:

- guiding the nGAP lecturer in developing and following a career development plan,
- advising on matters related to teaching, curriculum development, and assessment planning,
- and helping lecturers make sense of navigating the university context in which they are working.

The nGAP managers had a one-day workshop. Managers have the responsibility of connecting nGAP lecturers with mentors, managing all funding related to the Programme (e.g., research-related funding, mobility opportunities, development opportunities), and ensuring that issues related to the support and development of nGAP lecturers on their campuses are dealt with timeously and effectively. Taking on these responsibilities enables nGAP lecturers to settle into their academic roles and make steady progress through the Programme's two phases.<sup>1</sup> Each group—managers and mentors—was representative of the public university sector, with all 26 public universities invited to the workshops with a cross section of the universities well represented over the three days.

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<sup>1</sup> These two phases are: Phase 1 or years 1-3, where lecturers have a 20% teaching load and an 80% research load so that they can focus on a dissertation project or their publishing; and Phase 2 or years 4-6. In year 4 the split changes to 50/50 between research and teaching and in years 5 and 6 lecturers carry a full academic workload with respect to teaching and administration.

In both workshops, representatives from the DHET, Ms Angie Magabane and Ms Mandisa Cakwe (chairperson), opened the meeting with an overview of the nGAP, the role of the DHET *vis-a-vis* universities, the implementation and management of the nGAP, and the purpose of the workshop at hand.

In the two workshops with the mentors (12 & 13 March, 2019), the DHET presentations and comments were followed by short presentations from two mentors<sup>2</sup> on their experiences of and learning from mentoring early career nGAP lecturers. In the workshop with nGAP managers (14 March 2019), two managers shared their experiences with the group<sup>3</sup>.

Participants were divided and engaged in small group discussions and feedback sessions, focused on identifying 'burning issues' and key aspects of the Programme that needed to be aired and discussed. Each workshop closed with a plenary session drawing out recommendations for further iterations of the nGAP, and a vote of thanks from the DHET representatives.

This report used the summaries created for each of the workshops to provide a critical overview of key issues arising from all three workshops and to capture the full set of recommendations and insights that will be of value to universities and to the DHET moving forward.

## **'Burning' issues**

This section summarises the 'burning' issues raised by the mentors and managers. It is organised thematically, combining insights from all three workshop reports.

### ***Ownership and purpose of the nGAP***

Comments were made regarding the ownership of the nGAP in relation to the mentoring role, especially in the case of mentoring an nGAP lecturer who resigns from one institution to take up employment at another university during the six-year period of the Programme. An illustrative quote raised this:

*...So basically, the question is why is the nGAP tied to a university and not rather to DHET? So that it doesn't matter where the person is but they're within the system of higher education in the country. (12 March 2019, p. 27)*

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<sup>2</sup> 12 March 2019: Prof Basseyy Antia (University of the Western Cape) and Prof Philip Kutame (University of Zululand); 13 March 2019: Dr. Sindisiwe Vibetti (Tshwane University of Technology) and Prof Philip Kutame (University of Zululand)

<sup>3</sup> 14 March 2019: Prof Robert Morrell (University of Cape Town) and Dr Amanda Hlengwa (Rhodes University)

These kinds of questions indicate a complete misunderstanding of what the Programme is about. The assumption seems to be that the nGAP is primarily a scholarship and this misses the fact that those appointed with nGAP funding are lecturers and full-time employees of the university; they therefore 'belong' to the university and not to the DHET.

The nGAP fits into the larger [Staffing South African Universities Framework \(SSAUF\) framework](#), which then has to be connected with each university's plans and steps for probation and promotion. This is what the DHET expects from institutions who are allocated nGAP posts. The idea is that institutions buy into an understanding of the SSAUF as an academic staffing pipeline. As such, when lecturers on the nGAP have successfully completed the Programme, they could qualify for the Future Professors Programme (FPP) and later for the Higher Education Leadership and Management Programme (HELMMP).

The question of ownership of the Programme was echoed in, or linked to, numerous calls for the DHET to step in and give directives to institutions with regards to various aspects of implementing the nGAP. These calls for DHET intervention may stem from a lack of clarity in the sector of how the nGAP fits within the wider SSAUF.

As Ms Cakwe and Ms Magubane explained in all three workshops in their introductory remarks, the nGAP is not brand-new idea; variations of similar programmes with external funding have existed for *some* universities prior to this. The fundamental difference with nGAP is that it is a systemic response funded by DHET in partnership with public institutions. The Programme's particular focus on transforming the sector through targeted employment and development of particularly black and female academics may be newer. It is important to remember that its role and purpose is more than placing bodies in teaching and research roles, as it has a specific goal of transforming the higher education space. As one of the DHET's representatives explained in the nGAP manager's workshop:

*What exactly are we actually transforming with this programme? Inequality in the system, and we've got a list there of inequality because when you talk about inequality people would only think about race and gender. There's a whole list there that we're looking at; your disability, your patriarchy, your culture, language and knowledge. These are all the things that we are planning to make sure that this programme addresses in terms of transformation and most importantly, the quality in our higher education system, teaching and learning, curriculum, research and engagement, leadership, management and governance. (14 March, 2019, p. 6)*

This is crucial to understanding the mentoring and development roles as they contribute to the growth of the nGAP lecturer as an academic. Academic development on the part of mentors and

nGAP managers was highlighted in Dr Hlengwa and Prof Morrell's presentations in the manager's workshop, where they discussed using their universities' criteria for promotion as a way to structure ongoing academic career development planning. The DHET's response to this concern—especially regarding ownership of the Programme—was to remind participants that the role of the DHET is to encourage and enable universities to make full use of the available programmes, funding and initiatives, and never to enforce policy or action. Universities have autonomy over their policies and processes and the DHET aims to work with universities to optimise programmes such as the nGAP, rather than instructing universities on exactly what to do and how to do it.

One point of note is that rather than having a policy document to govern the work of the different SSAUF programmes, the DHET has developed a Ministerial Statement, which is easier to update and change using feedback from universities on aspects of their experiences. This indicated further the Department's role as a guiding and supportive partner, rather than as interfering with internal institutional policies. A related point made by a participant at the manager's workshop (and noted in the DHET's welcome at all of the workshops) is that the sector is differentiated. While systemic interventions such as the SSAUF and University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP)—and programmes under the umbrella of those structures—strive to align with university structures and practices, these interventions are not 'one size fits all'. Therefore, the implementation and management of programmes such as nGAP will differ depending on the university context. Thus, the DHET can only work effectively as a partner and enabler, and not as an enforcer of one dominant way of enacting the nGAP.

### ***Role of the nGAP mentors***

Concerns were raised around the role of mentors, especially the need for support and perhaps even initial orientation for mentors. It seems, from some of the plenary feedback, that not all of the nGAP mentors necessarily understand their role *vis-a-vis* the above-mentioned aims or purposes of the nGAP. If this is the case, mentoring may actually work to undermine rather than enable the nGAP's ability to lead the kind of transformation envisioned by the DHET.

There was confusion expressed in the mentors' workshops, especially around what aspect of development should be included in the mentorship role. Given that the first few years of the Programme provide the lecturers with the space to pursue a postgraduate qualification (usually a PhD, but also an MA in some cases), there is a fairly common assumption among mentors that research mentorship should be the focus. This seemed to be the case mainly for mentors who understood their role to include substantial supervision support. In some cases, this became necessary because the lecturer's PhD supervisor was based in another institution hampering constant and consistent PhD supervision. The mentor sessions then seemed to focus on the PhD

progress, in some cases at the expense of conversations and guidance on other crucial aspects of the academic role, such as teaching, student engagement, curriculum design and career planning. Managers can play an important supportive as well as developmental role here, as indicated by Dr Hlengwa in her presentation to the nGAP managers.

*...nGAP mentors are not necessarily chosen because they have experience in mentorship and the confusion around what a mentor is [despite] whether or not they've received the [nGAP Terms Standard Operating Procedures] documents, is that they almost want to act as supervisors... [creating] very shaky ground [for mentees about] mentoring into the academy ...but in an institution like mine even the mentors are sometimes needing conversations around what that [academic mentoring] means. (14 March 2019, pp. 10-11)*

The workshop inputs highlighted the difficulties some universities, especially the rural-based ones, have had in finding sufficient quality mentors for their nGAP lecturers. There was a suggestion made of adopting group mentorship, where the mentees may come from different disciplines but would all meet with one experienced mentor together on a regular basis to share experiences, build career plans and so on. While it was noted there may be merit to the notion of matching a mentor and lecturer in the same discipline, especially when it comes to career planning, publication strategies and professional membership, there may also be a role for collective, cross-disciplinary mentoring.

The mentor workshops highlighted several additional 'burning' concerns related to enacting the mentoring role:

- **A lack of induction:** A challenge that was pervasive across all groups was the lack of induction not only to what the expectations are for mentoring, but into the purposes and structure of nGAP on the whole. Mentors needed clarity and access to the original documentation containing the SoPs. These become especially important to regulate and provide guidance to mentees/nGAP lecturers that are in a different university to that of the mentor.

A specific challenge here, for mentors working with lecturers outside of their own universities, was understanding the logistics of funding face-to-face meetings. Several mentors were hesitant about insisting on face-to-face meetings with mentees, but found that telephonic and virtual meetings limited their ability to build a successful mentoring relationship.

- **The 20% workload:** Mentors sometimes found themselves in conflict with the lecturers' HoDs when they had to advocate for mentees, particularly when it came to what

constituted the 20% workload in the Development Phase of the Programme (Phase 1). This concern connects with larger concerns about the purpose and structure of the nGAP, and understanding that nGAP lecturers are full-time staff, even though they have a reduced teaching load in the Development Phase to facilitate the completion of a MA or PhD qualification.

- **Remuneration inconsistency:** The remuneration of mentors seems to be a challenge, as it seems to be inconsistently applied, with some institutions drawing on the mentor line item in the budget to providing payment and other institutions choosing to re-direct those funds.
- **Voluntary versus obligatory mentorship:** Some mentors were given a directive to be a mentor by authority figures within the university, whereas others were invited to volunteer their time. This has implications for building a relationship with a mentee. Further, there is inconsistency in the sector about changing mentors should the mentor and lecturer find that their relationship has broken down or is not working effectively. The interpretation in some institutions is that a mentee is 'stuck' with a particular mentor for the entire Programme.
- **Holistic versus research-intensive mentorship:** Questions were raised about the suitability of the research supervision role also incorporating mentorship. In some cases, it was reported that supervisors played a mentoring role and vice versa, especially where a mentor had not been appointed or the supervisor worked at another university geographically distant from the nGAP lecturer's university. The mentors also noted a potential conflict of interest, especially in the case where the mentor who is also the lecturer's supervisor is not based in the same university as the nGAP lecturer.
- **Reporting inconsistency:** A further burning issue was evident in the questions raised about reporting, such as: What is the legitimate reporting structure? Does the mentor 'report' to the nGAP manager or HoD with regards to nGAP-related matters concerning the lecturers? Mentors raised concerns of inconsistency with how they were expected to be reporting on progress of the lecturers. In some institutions reports are submitted more than once a year; in other institutions mentors have only reported once in two years, despite the fact that DHET requires annual reports on all lectures on the Programme.

### ***Role of the nGAP managers***

Many of the concerns raised at the end of the previous section could be addressed by a stronger and more collegial relationship between the mentors and the nGAP manager in each institution. However, the managers themselves raised several burning issues related to their appointment, induction, and remuneration experiences. Several reported a lack of support from their institutions. Given that the mentor and nGAP manager concerns are so similar, it would seem that these issues could be addressed simultaneously.

The two opening presentations in the manager's workshop painted a particular picture of the role of an nGAP manager. However, it became clear during the group and plenary discussions that this was not a sector wide interpretation of the manager role. At the core of both presentations was the understanding and interpretation of the role of the manager as an academic developer, underpinned by a nurturing, critical, connective approach to the role. The presenters described their roles as encompassing the following:

- helping new academics meet one another and other mid-career academics who can be useful contacts;
- holding regular social and more formal developmental meetings;
- creating a dedicated space for the nGAP within larger university Academic Development structures that may already exist;
- negotiating and mediating with line management and also with HR and Finance.

The nGAP manager role is much more than just an administrative role: what is clear is that the nGAP manager role is primarily framed by academic staff development principles with a strong emphasis on relationship-building underpinned by an ethic of professional care.

The plenary session that followed the two presentations, as well as the breakaway group discussions, highlighted inconsistencies in the nGAP manager workload allocation across the sector. These inconsistencies were linked to complaints about remuneration for this role as well as the lack of administrative support. The DHET representatives heard from several participants about how the nGAP manager role was an additional responsibility without any consideration of existing overall workload. Although the nGAP manager role is not strictly an administrative role, it does come with substantial administrative responsibilities, thus the lack of administrative support was expressed as an additional burden. This is why some managers felt it would be fair to be remunerated for this additional work. It became evident that for some colleagues, the additional responsibility of being appointed nGAP Manager without consultation or consideration of existing workload caused a great deal of resentment and unhappiness.

In other universities, though, especially where the nGAP resides within the academic development unit or teaching and learning centre, where the management role and responsibility is conceived as a legitimate part of the work allocation, concerns about remuneration and poor institutional support were less noticeable. The way in which nGAP managers are appointed and supported—administratively and financially—has implications for how this important coordination and development work is done, and that in turn has implications for the success of the nGAP in meeting its larger systemic goals.

Participants in the manager's workshop said to the DHET:

*... when you suggested to the DVC's that they nominate someone that's precisely what they did. They simply nominated someone without even thinking about the HR implications and so forth. The universities are looking to you [DHET] for guidance, so if you [DHET] say okay, we leave it to the universities to do x, y, and z, they won't know what to do. ... the general consensus is that nGAP managers are not that happy. It's not just me, you know, I've spoken out and other people have as well, some people might be quiet might also not be happy. So, if you [DHET] could communicate with the DVCs, communicate with the universities [about the role, recruitment, support and remuneration of nGAP managers]. At the end of the day, if people are disgruntled it compromises the quality of the work that they will eventually do. (14 May 2019, p. 48)*

This quote indicates the understanding of the Programme as a whole and therefore how the role of the nGAP manager is conceived. It shows little understanding of what the role entails and therefore who should be nominated for the role, and what impact the additional responsibility will have on the existing workload. There seems to be little or no consideration as to whether or how the additional work should be remunerated if it is not already part of the nGAP manager's role in academic staff development. The last sentence in the quote speaks to a desire for better communication strategies between the DHET and institutions, to ensure consistency in the messages regarding nGAP processes within each university and between universities.

### **Communication channels and consistency**

It is clear from the feedback in all three workshops that communication between the DHET and universities is not uniformly clear and successful. In particular, the DHET representatives noted in their inputs that the Department regularly sends out communique related to the Programme. In some universities this is relayed quickly to the relevant stakeholders but this effective communication within institutions is not consistent across the sector. There may also be a correlation here between the universities with quick and clear communication channels and capacity to respond effectively to the calls for institutional applications for nGAP posts, timely submission of annual reports and participation in other developmental opportunities. This leads to a situation where the same universities keep applying for and awarded posts while others lose out, which perpetuates worrying inequalities in the system as a whole.

There are two points to highlight here, drawing on participants' feedback:

- Universities need to be encouraged or assisted in creating stronger communication channels, especially in terms of sharing information around new calls for funding

applications and calls for proposals from universities for the different programmes that are part of the SSAUF.

- There needs to be capacity development built into the system around grant proposal writing and budget management around applying for grants, so that new voices can join the space and be awarded funding. This is especially the case for universities that have historically weaker systems, which affect their success rate for grant proposals.

A further point, related to the DHET's role and also to the issue of communication, is that while Ms Cakwe and her colleagues are available for consultations, DHET should really be contacted only after university processes and avenues have been explored (i.e. nGAP lecturers should not be contacting DHET directly with matters that should be resolved through internal institutional processes). It is relatively clear that universities need to take much greater responsibility for their internal communication processes, especially around sharing the purpose, structure, role and management of the Programme.

### ***Financial matters***

A final part of the nGAP manager's role, touched on by the mentors as well, concerns financial 'literacy'. It seems that the level of success and progression that nGAP lecturers achieve is linked to a large extent to being able to access and use the funds allocated. This determines the nGAP lecturers' ability to register for postgraduate qualifications on time, attend disciplinary conferences, participate in international mobility opportunities, sort out logistical arrangements to meet with a mentor and/or supervisor, and obtain important research-related resources (e.g., research equipment). But, many of the nGAP managers do not have a clear sense of where the budget is located and controlled within the university or how to successfully navigate the university's internal processes to access the funds. This jeopardizes the entire Programme. The result is mismanagement of allocated funds, causing a great deal of frustration and confusion. The managers' workshop (echoed in the mentors' workshops) highlighted the need for support around finance management.

### **Recommendations**

The prior sections have provided an overview of the conversations in all three workshops, summarised as 'burning' issues for mentors and managers in the nGAP. This final section of the present report pulls out the specific recommendations that arose from the workshops. These recommendations focus mainly on development of, and support for, academics in these roles. For ease of reading they are presented in the table below.

**Table 1: Recommendations to the DHET and universities**

Issue	Raised by	Recommendation
<p><b>Communication and support:</b> Helping mentors and managers across national and regional contexts connect and share advice, support and resources.</p> <p>Recognition that a mentoring relationship is between humans and that means managing human relationships especially when personalities clash or difficulties arise.</p> <p>DVCs are not necessarily fully conversant with the nGAP SoPs and Ministerial Statements leading to uneven procedures in</p>	<p>Mentors and Managers</p> <p>Mentors</p> <p>Managers</p>	<p>The development of an Inter-institutional sharing platform endorsed by the DHET but managed/facilitated by institutions. These can be regionally or nationally coordinated to debate and share advice on topics of mutual concern, e.g. workload split for nGAP lecturers; assisting with publishing, etc.</p> <p>There could be different spaces for managers and mentors, but through DHET-led events, such as induction workshops, shared concerns could be highlighted and addressed.</p> <p>In the absence of institutional resources relating to mentoring, the suggested inter-institutional platform could be a space to share ideas on how to effectively manage difficulties in mentoring relationships.</p> <p>A report needs to be shared with the DVCs by the DHET, perhaps through a face-to-face workshop in which the DHET and DVCs can grapple with the SoPs and work out key inconsistencies that seem</p>

<p>appointing nGAP managers and supporting this role.</p>		<p>to hinder the nGAP, such as where the Programme should be housed, who should manage it, and what kinds of support are needed.</p>
<p><b>Relationship management in mentoring:</b> Addressing the concerns on the possibility of creating over-dependency by nGAP lecturers on mentors, how to hold mentees accountable for their own progress, and what can be used to encourage/motivate them to make progress.</p>	<p>Mentors</p>	<p>More regular meetings for nGAP lecturers within regional contexts in particular (e.g. Gauteng region, Western Cape region). These can be formal colloquia where nGAP lecturers present short papers on their research; social meetings where they chat and share issues they are confronting and how they're coping. These could be coordinated by nGAP managers and funded with nGAP lecturer funds.</p>
<p><b>Data and feedback on the Programme as a whole:</b> Drawing on the collective desire to understand how the nGAP is working, what contribution it is making to transformation of the HE sectors.</p>	<p>Managers and mentors</p>	<p>There was a recommendation made that the DHET commission a report or share whole-sector information on the shape, size and progress of the nGAP. Managers especially want to know how the Programme is doing in terms of the contribution it is making to transforming the HE sectors. <b>*A mid-term review report will be available soon. Focuses on the first three years of the nGAP partially address this concern and recommendation.</b></p>
<p><b>Finance and money concerns:</b> Concerns that money comes in from the</p>	<p>Managers</p>	<p>The recommendation here is that there be clearer lines of communication around who</p>

<p>NRF and the DHET and not all nGAP managers are kept ‘in the loop’ by their universities or the NRF or the DHET about the funds available, how it has been allocated and so on. This leads to under-spending and frustration.</p>		<p>is providing the funding, how it needs to be applied for, and who has ‘ownership’ of the funds (NRF, University, DHET). This speaks to the DHET and DVCs providing clearer communication roles and responsibilities. DHET communicates directly with VCs and DVCs and will copy nGAP managers in the communication. The responsibility to relay the communication within the institution to Deans and other stakeholders’ rests with the institutional communication strategy.</p>
<p><b>Reporting from universities on the nGAP:</b> Concerns that the forms may hamper the honesty with which all parties capture their experiences, especially the nGAP lecturers, because everyone reports on the same form.</p>	<p>Managers</p>	<p>An online portal should be created where nGAP lecturers, mentors, supervisors and nGAP managers can report candidly on their experiences, struggles and insights. This could include automated reminders to those who need to report and the financial reporting that is part of the annual process.</p>
<p><b>Induction for mentors:</b> Mentors need some form of formal, collective induction, into the role of the mentor in early career development, informed by current research and practices.</p>	<p>Mentors and Managers</p>	<p>Regional workshops could be arranged to bring mentors together, especially those new to the role, with academic developers from within South Africa who have expertise in mentoring research and practice. These hands-on, practical, evidence-based sessions could introduce mentors to</p>

		the nGAP and the SOPs, as well as to practical advice and guidance on how to connect with and support mentees, what to focus on and how, and so on.
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