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nGAP Lecturers Induction nGAP Mentors & Managers Workshops

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CONTENTS

1. Executive Summary	3
2. Introduction	4
3. Purpose of the workshop	5
4. Policy Framework on the Implementation of SSAUF and nGAP	6
4.1 University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP)	6
5. Funding Institutions: National Research Foundation (NRF)	9
5.1 Key discussions and comments on the NRF	10
6. Group Discussions on Challenges and Expectations	11
7. Being an nGAP Lecturer: Experiences, Challenges, and Lessons	13
8. Managing the Mentor-Mentee Relationship: Looking Back on Our nGAP Journey	14
9. Role of an nGAP Manager	16
10. Mentor Committee	17
10.1 Feedback and discussion on the mentorship committee	19
11. Presentation on Changes and Updates	21
12. Encouragement for nGAP Managers	21
13. Closing Remarks	22
14. Conclusion	23



1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2024 nGAP Lecturers Induction Workshop was held on 14-15 October in Gqeberha, Eastern Cape. The induction workshop marked a critical milestone in reflecting on the programme's decade long progress. Hosted by the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) and Nelson Mandela University (NMU), the event facilitated dialogue on embedding sustainability of the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) and advancing institutional ownership of the nGAP.

KEY OUTCOMES FROM THE WORKSHOP INCLUDED:

- **Strategic policy alignment:** the workshop featured an overview of policy imperatives derived from the National Development Plan (NDP) and the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) priorities, while positioning the nGAP a strategic instrument to realise the objectives of both the NDP and UCDP. The priorities include emphasis on skills development, diversity and inclusion in academia.
- **Challenges and insights:** participants were given opportunities to discuss challenges they experienced, and recurring challenges were noted as unclear workload expectations, delayed induction processes, limited mentorship capacity and funding constraints. Mentorship emerged as a focal point, with calls for structured training, wellness initiatives, and enhanced support systems for both mentees and mentors.
- **Mentorship Committee:** progress on the mentor committee's work was presented, including initiatives to address mentor needs, wellness and promotions criteria. All the research commissioned by the mentor committee is intended to define the gaps and determine the needs of not only the mentors, but nGAP lecturers.
- **Operational institutional dynamics:** discussions explored the transition of nGAP responsibilities to universities, the integration of funding and reporting systems, and strategies for improving programme communication and stakeholder engagement.
- **Embedding the nGAP:** DHET emphasised transitioning from national oversight to institutional independence, encouraging universities to adapt the programme to their contexts while maintaining its core objectives.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS INCLUDE:

- **Prioritising early induction and clarifying roles and expectations** to improve participant onboarding.
- **Strengthening institutional communication channels and establishing accessible resources** such as FAQs and regular webinars.
- **Tracking post-programme outcomes** to ensure sustained engagement of nGAP alumni in academia.
- **Expanding mentorship frameworks across similar DHET initiatives** to standardise support structures.

The workshop reaffirmed DHET's commitment to addressing systemic challenges while fostering institutional capacity to independently sustain nGAP's transformative impact. As the programme evolves, its emphasis on fostering diversity, building capacity, and advancing academic excellence remains pivotal.

2. INTRODUCTION

This report contains narrative presentations and outcomes of the New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) Lecturers Induction, nGAP Mentors and Managers Workshop held from 14 to 15 October 2024. The Department of Higher Education (DHET) and the implementing partner, Nelson Mandela University (NMU) hosted the workshop to reflect on the past 10 years of the programme and in an effort to build sustainability, with a focus on building sustainability and embedding nGAP within the higher education system.

Dr Phumeza Kota-Nyati, the Dean for Learning and Teaching from the Nelson Mandela University, in the welcoming address noted that this is a third round of inductions, and highlighting the programme's growth and tangible outcomes, illustrating the transformation within the higher education and training sector. nGAP directly supports the National Development Plan (NDP) 2030 goal of enhancing South Africa's higher education and training system. Aligned with NDP objectives, the programme aims to build a skilled and capable workforce, promote equal opportunities, and foster inclusion and redress by developing a diverse, representative academic workforce.

On the second day of the workshop, Ms Mandisa Cakwe, Acting Chief Director of the Teaching and Development Directorate (University Branch) at DHET, shared reflections on embedding and sustaining the nGAP programme. She observed that a lack of creativity in addressing certain challenges has contributed to their persistence within the system. While DHET oversees the programme at a national level, its implementation within universities is crucial to ensure that nGAP becomes an integral part of each institution's structure.

Looking ahead, Ms Cakwe emphasised that the ultimate goal is for universities to implement the nGAP programme independently, with minimal direct involvement from DHET. She announced that 2024 would be the final year the induction workshop would be organised by the national office; from then on, universities will determine how best to embed the nGAP induction process, whether regionally or at an institutional level. DHET will shift its focus to other priorities within the programme, such as strengthening the mentorship committee, and other new innovations and solutions that require both time and funding to fully mature.

Ms Cakwe noted that the next phase of the nGAP would be discussed at an upcoming DHET strategic meeting, where decisions will be made to guide the programme's future direction. In closing, Ms Cakwe highlighted that DHET's role is to provide the initial support and platform for stabilising programmes, while the responsibility for full institutionalisation lies with the universities. DHET will continue to support institutions in these efforts to ensure the programme's sustainability.

3. PURPOSE OF THE WORKSHOP

The purpose of the workshop reaffirmed DHET's commitment to addressing systemic challenges while fostering institutional capacity to independently sustain nGAP's transformative impact. Dialogue and networking opportunities were fostered as primary learning opportunities to draw insight into the nGAP.

Mr Calvin Pennells presented the purpose of the workshop. The 2024 nGAP workshop was designed as a collaborative space to strengthen understanding, share insights, and align expectations among all involved parties. Over two days, the workshop provided participants with a deeper understanding of the programme's role within the broader university development framework, fostered connections, and clarified the responsibilities of each role. Specifically, the objectives were to:

- Equip all nGAP participants: mentors, managers, and scholars with essential information to support their roles effectively.
- Situate the nGAP within the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) and the Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF) for a comprehensive understanding of its goals.
- Clarify the expectations and roles of key stakeholders, including scholars, mentors, supervisors, and managers.
- Facilitate the sharing of unique challenges, insights, and experiences encountered by all involved parties.
- Provide information on available funding opportunities for further studies.
- Foster networking and establish a platform for managers and mentors to connect.

The first day of the workshop was titled "nGAP Lecturers Induction Workshop," discussions centred around experiences, challenges, and lessons learned as an nGAP lecturer. Sessions also explored the mentor-mentee relationship dynamics and the responsibilities of an nGAP Manager.

The second day, continued from the mentor theme and focused on "Mentors and Managers Workshop," which featured the presentation of an established mentor committee and provided an in-depth focus on mentorship and management within the nGAP journey.

The workshop achieved its purpose by creating a shared understanding of nGAP's objectives and challenges, while providing actionable insights for participants.

4. POLICY FRAMEWORK ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SSAUF AND nGAP

This section outlines the strategic policy framework underpinning the nGAP, linking it to broader initiatives such as the Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF) and the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP). These policies serve to guide the programme's alignment with national development goals.

Ms Silindile Shabalala, the Deputy Director of the University Capacity Development at DHET presented on behalf of Ms Mandisa Cakwe presented the policy framework of the nGAP programme. The Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) bases its programmes on the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training . This policy framework defines DHET's priorities for developing and strengthening South Africa's post-school education and training (PSET) system. Building on the White Paper's vision, the National Plan for Post-School Education and Training (NPPSET) was developed to implement these priorities effectively. Together, the White Paper and the National Plan provide a roadmap for creating a cohesive and effective PSET system.

The National Plan on the PSET intends to respond to the challenges:

- Quality remains inadequate in many areas of the system, as such, this is reflected in high repetition and dropout rates.
- There are weak linkages between institutions and the workplace, with limited employer involvement in training.
- Systems, including data systems, are weak and poorly integrated.
- Quality assurance is lacking in many parts of the system.

4.1 University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP)

Prior to 2018, there were two grants, the research and development grant (RDG) and teaching development grant (TDG). In 2018, the two grants were collapsed into one grant, namely the university capacity development grant (UCDG) which funds every programme under the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) as an implementation programme that is focused on advancing the transformation agenda in university education in three critical areas: student development, staff development and programme/curriculum development.

The UCDP views transformation as both addressing persistent inequalities in higher education and building quality to enhance access and success. It serves as the umbrella for all training and development initiatives, including the SSAUF and nGAP. The UCDP is funded through various mechanisms, such as university contributions, other government grants, UCDG and DHET funding, and international partnerships, including collaborations with civil society.

4.1.1 Staffing South Africa's University Framework (SSAUF)

The Staffing South Africa's Universities Framework (SSAUF) is a strategic framework

designed to transform the academic workforce within South Africa's universities. It aims to build a diverse, skilled, and representative academic staff by focusing on the recruitment, development, and retention of new academics, particularly those from historically disadvantaged backgrounds. Through structured support programmes such as the nGAP, SSAUF promotes mentorship, career development, and capacity building to address academic staffing shortages. The framework works to ensure that universities reflect the demographic diversity and expertise required for a globally competitive higher education system.

4.1.2 The New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP)

The New Generation of Academics Programme (nGAP) is one of the programmes within the SSAUF. The implementation of the nGAP involves recruitment of new academics as part of a 4-or 6-year development programme. The programme is intended to support universities to recruit academics into permanent positions in line with their staffing and development plans.

The nGAP beneficiaries are appointed based on the staffing development needs of the university and universities apply for the positions through the DHET.

4.1.2.1 Key discussions and comments on the nGAP programme

The workshop provided an opportunity for attendees to discuss various aspects of the nGAP and seek clarification on processes, responsibilities, and programme guidelines. The following summarises the key insights and responses offered by DHET representatives and facilitators:

- A primary concern among attendees was the potential transition from nGAP to the Future Professors Programme (FPP). Participants wondered whether such a move would terminate their nGAP contract. It was clarified that while candidates transitioning to the FPP would retain their remuneration, they would forfeit other nGAP-specific benefits. Additionally, candidates could not participate in both programmes concurrently. However, as long as the candidate remained at the same institution, they would not incur any financial obligations to the university.
- Accountability within the nGAP programme was also a key topic, with questions raised about university obligations if a lecturer's contract were to be terminated prematurely, especially given that non-completion could result in up to R350,000 in penalties for candidates. It was clarified that any institution suggesting that an nGAP position was no longer available would be in error, as all nGAP appointments were intended as permanent contracts, a commitment upheld by Vice-Chancellors across participating universities.
- Some participants inquired about the possibility of using remaining funds post-PhD for equipment purchases. The response indicated that, with DHET approval, these funds could indeed be redirected toward research related equipment, provided that it directly supported the candidate's work. However, it was emphasised that the provision of basic tools of trade remained the responsibility of the university.

- In discussing capacity development, attendees expressed concerns about meeting institutional and programme objectives without creating conflicts. The response acknowledged that while some programme procedures might appear restrictive, they were established to align with both individual development and institutional needs. The nGAP programme was specifically designed to address the capacity needs of individual universities, and as such, cross-institutional transfers of capacity are not within the scope of nGAP. For departmental transfers within a university, institutions would need to initiate a formal change request with DHET, as stability within the programme remains a core objective.
- Budget limitations for international travel and conferences were another significant concern. DHET representatives acknowledged the challenge and explained that discussions were underway with other directorates to extend support for nGAP lecturers. Attendees were encouraged to seek mobility allowances through their own institutions where available.
- Workload determination was another point of tension, as participants questioned whether DHET provided guidelines. It was clarified that workload decisions were left to the discretion of individual universities and departments, recognising that each institution has unique requirements and operational structures.
- Finally, attendees voiced dissatisfactions over delays in candidate approvals and the impact of salary allocations on retention. The DHET acknowledged that the approval process was hierarchical, and executive management had been tasked with addressing these delays.
- Salary cost allocation was noted as a factor that sometimes drove candidates to seek other opportunities, highlighting the need for continued discussions on financial support for academic staff retention. It was noted that the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework (MTEF) is used as guideline to determine increments which gave a 4.3% increase for 2023 and 4.8% for 2024. Universities should make commitments to augment the funds granted by the DHET for the programme.

The framework stresses the critical role of structured policies in ensuring nGAP's success and integration into higher education. By addressing systemic challenges and fostering alignment with institutional goals, the framework sets a foundation for sustainable growth.

The discussions emphasised the need for greater transparency and clarity in the nGAP framework, particularly regarding workload expectations, mentorship support, and the integration of funding structures (contracts and salaries). The DHET noted operational inefficiencies and communication gaps that hinder the programme's full potential. Addressing these challenges will be critical for aligning nGAP processes with institutional needs and ensuring sustainable academic development. The workshop's discussions further highlighted the importance of ongoing communication and flexibility within the nGAP programme, emphasising the DHET's commitment to refining processes to support both institutional goals and academic growth.

5. FUNDING INSTITUTIONS: NATIONAL RESEARCH FOUNDATION (NRF)

The National Research Foundation (NRF) team presented an informative session on the funding opportunities available to support researchers at various career stages. The presentation opened with a note about the NRF's recent corporate restructuring, which included the creation of the Next Generation and Emerging Researchers Department. Following this update, the NRF team outlined the organisation's mandate and primary focus areas within South Africa's research landscape.

The NRF's key priorities include advancing knowledge by supporting research initiatives, providing access to essential research infrastructure, and supplying critical research equipment. Additionally, the NRF emphasised its commitment to transforming lives by offering postgraduate and targeted support for emerging and early-career researchers. Another priority is geared towards inspiring the nation, focusing on engaging the public in scientific endeavours to foster curiosity and a deeper appreciation of science. Finally, the NRF aims to strengthen the National System of Innovation (NSI) through strategic partnerships and the provision of system-wide information and insights.

A significant part of the presentation highlighted the NRF's Research Impact Agenda, which aims to enhance the potential impact of funded research. This agenda considers two main impact areas: knowledge impact, including advances in scientific understanding, methods, and applications, and societal impact, where research contributes to social, economic, or environmental improvements.

The NRF team also provided an overview of funding instruments that support academic progression, structured into categories:

- **Predocctoral and Early Career/Emerging:** Supported by nGAP, Postdoctoral funding, Thuthuka (TTK), the Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP), and the Young Academics Accelerator Programme (YAAP).
- **Post-PhD Early Career/Emerging:** Supported by TTK and BAAP.
- **Mid-Career/Exceptional Early Career:** Supported by Competitive Support for Unrated Researchers (CSUR) and Y-Rated funding.

The presentation then explored potential integrations between the NRF and the nGAP programme. While the NRF does not fund areas already covered by DHET through nGAP, it offers complementary resources, such as a Research Development Grant available to nGAP scholars in their first and second years. This grant aims to help young academics develop competitive funding applications and support approved research projects. It can be applied to proposal development (e.g., mobility for research, instrument development, technical support, literature reviews, and supervisor or collaborator engagements) as well as to research expenses related to university-approved projects, including travel, materials, supplies, small research equipment, and science engagement activities.

The annual grant allocation is structured according to career stage, with PhD-track scholars eligible for R30,000 per year and post-PhD scholars eligible for R50,000 per year.

The NRF team stressed the importance of keeping NRF Connect profiles updated to monitor grant applications and eligibility status. They also acknowledged challenges faced by nGAP scholars in accessing the grant, including delays in profile updates, incomplete submission of required documents, budget misalignment, and limited promotion of the grant, which sometimes led to missed application opportunities. In closing, the NRF representatives highlighted the value of NRF funding as a resource for emerging researchers and encouraged scholars to engage actively with mentors and supervisors to make the most of the grant opportunities available.

5.1 Key discussions and comments on the NRF

During the workshop, attendees engaged in discussions with the NRF team on various operational and procedural matters. The session allowed attendees to gain clarity on practical issues such as technical system updates, ethical clearance requirements, programme eligibility, and the importance of communication.

- One common concern involved the recent error messages encountered on NRF profiles. In response, the NRF team acknowledged that the system had undergone recent updates, which might account for these glitches. They encouraged participants to refer to their award letters for official confirmation, as recipients' names are also published on the NRF website following award approvals. For additional assistance, participants were reminded to use the contact information provided for each specific call, ensuring they had access to immediate help when needed.
- Another important topic raised concerned ethical clearance requirements. Attendees questioned whether additional ethical clearance certificates were necessary for certain programmes. The NRF team clarified that they accepted the initial ethical clearance certificate from the respective institution as sufficient. Secondary ethical requirements, they explained, are generally managed by the universities themselves, allowing candidates to submit any additional documentation at a later stage if necessary.
- The conversation then shifted to eligibility criteria for the Black Academics Advancement Programme (BAAP), with participants seeking clarification on whether self-nomination was allowed or if a formal university endorsement was required. The NRF team confirmed that BAAP does not permit self-nominations due to its collaborative nature with industry partners, such as the First Rand Foundation. Candidates for BAAP must therefore be nominated by their universities to ensure alignment with the programme's strategic goals.
- Finally, the NRF team emphasised a proactive approach in communication. Attendees were advised to address any queries with the NRF well in advance, avoiding last minute submissions. This proactive engagement, they noted, allows for troubleshooting and resolution. Should technical issues arise,

attendees were reminded that these are forwarded to the IT team, where they are logged with a unique ticket number to facilitate follow-up and timely assistance. The NRF's engagement highlighted valuable funding mechanisms that can amplify the impact of nGAP. The session reinforced the importance of proactive communication and collaboration between stakeholders to maximise these opportunities.

6. GROUP DISCUSSIONS ON CHALLENGES AND EXPECTATIONS

Emanating from the discussions from the presentations of the nGAP and NRF, the workshop made allowance for discussions intended to uncover insights into the challenges within the current nGAP system, as well as to highlight expectations for improvement. The attendees were divided into eight working groups that discussed and presented their key challenges and expectations.

Using a thematic analysis approach, the discussions are categorised to identify recurring themes. These themes reflect the diverse experiences and perspectives of attendees, ranging from workload concerns and mentorship limitations to the structural complexities of the programme. This thematic approach allowed for a comprehensive view of both systemic challenges and participant expectations, ensuring a clear understanding of areas for future development.

“It feels like you are an orphan [nGAP] who had rich parents [DHET]. The guardian [University] pretends to take care of you while they finish the money.”

Workload and Clarification of Roles and Responsibilities	
Workload specifications and adjustments	Several comments indicated a need for clearer workload specifications within the nGAP programme. Challenges included undefined expectations around the 20% workload, how workloads could be adjusted if the PhD is completed ahead of schedule, and a comprehensive breakdown of all responsibilities (e.g., consultations, assessments, curriculum development, and administration).
Mentor and HOD involvement	Attendees questioned whether mentors have permission to approach the Head of Department (HOD) if mentees struggle with workload. This suggests a lack of clarity regarding the mentorship role and highlights the need for well-defined channels of support for managing workload issues.
Programme duration vs. compensation	Concerns were raised about the duration of the nGAP programme relative to its 'competitiveness' in terms of salary. Participants noted that despite the programme's demanding expectations, the salary does not adequately reflect the role, affecting job satisfaction and motivation.

Mentorship and Support Structures	
Mentor preparedness	Participants expressed that mentors are often not sufficiently equipped to guide nGAP lecturers effectively. This suggests a gap in the mentor induction process and highlights the need for additional training and resources for mentors to support nGAP lecturers fully.
Communication and information sharing	Participants indicated that better information sharing is essential. Suggestions included holding inductions twice yearly and improving overall communication among programme stakeholders, particularly for funding usage and access. Many mentors and mentees felt that essential information is often delayed or not readily available.
Isolation and lack of community	The feedback also revealed that the nGAP journey can feel isolating, emphasising the importance of creating a stronger support network and sense of community among participants.
Administrative and Procedural Challenges	
Induction and onboarding process	Delays in induction timing were highlighted, with feedback noting that inductions sometimes occur too late into the programme. Participants recommended that inductions commence promptly after appointments to ensure new lecturers are well-oriented.
Complex internal processes	The nGAP's internal processes, such as the lengthy timeframe between interview, appointment, and induction were also noted as a barrier. These delays complicate the transition into the programme and can create early frustration for new nGAP members.
Alignment of SOP and contract	Participants pointed out discrepancies between the SOP and the employment contract, creating confusion about programme expectations and requirements. Aligning these documents was seen as essential to prevent misunderstandings about roles and responsibilities.
Funding and Financial Management	
Fund utilisation and budget misalignment	A recurring theme was the lack of clarity on how to use allocated funds and the complex budget categories. Misalignment of expenses led to delays in releasing funds, with participants requesting clearer guidelines on fund usage to support effective financial planning.
Perceived funding inequality	Participants shared that the allowances associated with nGAP created the impression that nGAP lecturers are well-funded, ultimately excluding them from additional institutional funding. This perception led to unintended funding gaps, which need addressing to ensure equitable access to resources.
Remuneration and limited promotion opportunities	The non-negotiable salary package was identified as a barrier, with many feeling that the program's compensation does not match the expectations of the role. Additionally, limited opportunities for promotion and career progression within the programme created a sense of stagnation among participants.
Reporting and Evaluation	
Reporting template challenges	Participants found the reporting template difficult to complete, with certain challenges especially those involving authority figures not easily addressed in formal reports. This suggests a need for more adaptable reporting mechanisms that allow for open and candid feedback.

Performance appraisal	It was noted that the performance appraisal process should not be standardised for nGAP lecturers, given the varied nature of their roles and responsibilities. A flexible approach was suggested to better assess individual performance without rigid criteria.
Academic and Institutional Culture	
Bullying and negative interactions with researchers	Reports of bullying from other researchers surfaced, highlighting issues within academic culture that can hinder nGAP participants' progress. This theme underscores the need for a supportive and collaborative environment.
Prioritising core academic roles	Feedback indicated that the focus on learning, teaching, and research is often sidelined by administrative and procedural tasks. Participants felt that the programme should more effectively prioritise academic development, allowing lecturers to concentrate on their primary roles without excessive administrative burdens.

Due to the time constraints, the response to the challenges was not discussed in depth and reliance was on the outcomes of the workshop report. Notwithstanding, the DHET noted that many of the challenges, especially the workload requirements are purely operational matters where the DHET cannot infiltrate. It was further noted that the nGAP mentors, and nGAP managers were invited to also hear the cries of the beneficiaries of the nGAP. The intention was to create an enabling environment for the success and development of the nGAP lecturer.

7. BEING AN nGAP LECTURER: EXPERIENCES, CHALLENGES, AND LESSONS

Ms Gail Motlhaudi from Sol Plaatje University (SPU) presented her experiences, challenges and lessons of being an nGAP lecturer since 2016. She drew anchoring principles metaphorically from her recent achievement of summiting and conquering Mount Kilimanjaro.

“You have to build your endurance.”

The PhD journey as a climb, five lessons learnt from Mount Kilimanjaro:

- i. **Preparation:** the PhD journey, much like a climb up Kilimanjaro, requires preparation and endurance. It is a marathon, not a sprint, and pacing oneself is essential to maintain performance and avoid burnout. During this preparation phase, it is crucial to gather information and do the necessary research to fully understand what one has committed to. This process includes identifying a personal ‘why’, the core motivation that not only aligns you with the programme and its duration but also serves as an anchor through challenges and setbacks.

- ii. **Pole, pole (slowly, slowly):** the phrase “pole, pole,” meaning “slowly, slowly” in Swahili, highlights the importance of a steady and consistent approach to the nGAP journey. This journey goes beyond completing a PhD; it includes comprehensive training and development. Taking small, deliberate steps may seem slow, but each step moves you forward. Progress does not need to be rapid; “slow” does not mean stagnant.
- iii. **Acclimatisation:** in high-altitude climbing, acclimatisation is essential as the body adjusts to reduced oxygen levels. Climbers often follow routes with significant dips, which help them adapt to the ascent. Similarly, in the PhD journey, when life seems to pull you down or back, it may be preparing you to reach even greater heights. Embracing this retreat and flow can help you adapt to the demands of the journey.
- iv. **Base camp:** on Kilimanjaro, base camps are established to allow climbers to rest and acclimate, reducing the risk of altitude sickness. In the context of a PhD, it is equally important to create a “base camp”—a personal space for rest and recuperation. This base can take the form of a place, a trusted person, or an activity that keeps you grounded and allows you to recharge.
- v. **Support structure:** Just as climbers rely on their teams, the nGAP community provides an essential support structure. If a strong support network is lacking, it is vital to proactively build one with fellow future academics and colleagues. A reliable support structure can make a significant difference in navigating the ups and downs of the PhD journey.

These lessons serve as a reminder that perseverance, preparation, and community are key components in reaching academic and personal milestones. The speaker’s comparison to climbing Mount Kilimanjaro offered a meaningful perspective on the challenges and rewards of the PhD journey.

8. MANAGING THE MENTOR-MENTEE RELATIONSHIP: LOOKING BACK ON OUR nGAP JOURNEY

This section outlines the multifaceted responsibilities of the nGAP Manager, emphasising their critical role in ensuring the effective implementation of the programme at institutional levels. The presentation provided highlights both official duties and practical considerations unique to each institution’s context.

“Know the policy framework of your institution in terms of minimising your workload. If the institution policy says at least three assessments, meet that requirement and the rest will be a bonus to those students who require those assessments. Understanding the institution’s assessment policy helps you manage your workload.”

- Professor Kabelo Chuene -

In a reflective session, Professor Kabelo Chuene from the University of Limpopo shared valuable insights from her experiences in her mentor-mentee relationships. Her presentation highlighted key lessons that shape her approach to building effective and supportive mentor-mentee relationships, offering guidance on how mentors can best support their mentees' academic journeys.

i. Understanding the mentee's work

The first lesson emphasised the importance of mentors developing a solid understanding of the work pursued by their mentees. Prof Chuene clarified that this does not mean the mentor must be a specialist in the mentee's specific area, as mentorship is distinct from supervision. Instead, understanding involves genuine engagement with the mentee's interests and objectives. This engagement builds a foundation of comprehension and support, fostering a more meaningful connection and understanding.

ii. Recognising the researcher as human

She stressed that mentees are people first, researchers second. Recognising the personal and human experiences of mentees is essential for balancing the relationship and providing appropriate support. Unlike a traditional supervisory role, the mentor-mentee relationship is not based on assessments; rather, it serves as a buffering system, offering quality assurance and guidance. Context and personal experiences, she noted, are critical components in nurturing a productive relationship.

iii. Listening is learning

Observation and attentive listening are essential skills for mentors. By actively engaging with mentees, for example, observing classes and conducting debriefing sessions, mentors can gain insights into the mentee's thought processes and identify areas for growth. This practice reveals the importance of intentional assessments, which should be purposeful rather than done solely for compliance, reducing frustration and enhancing learning outcomes.

iv. Teaching materials and knowledge management

The final lesson focused on the value of managing teaching materials and developing a personal teaching philosophy. Mentors can guide mentees to explore available departmental resources that may assist in lecture preparation. Additionally, a clear teaching philosophy enables mentees to engage in reflective teaching and continuous self-improvement.

**“Mentorship is not a structure, it is not a strict place,
but a safe space for growth.”**

- Professor Kabelo Chuene -

The nGAP Manager serves as a vital link between institutional stakeholders and the DHET, balancing operational responsibilities with developmental support for lecturers. Their role is essential for fostering programme sustainability and aligning institutional goals with nGAP's overarching objectives.

9. ROLE OF AN nGAP MANAGER

The nGAP Manager plays a pivotal role in coordinating and overseeing the programme at institutional levels. This includes acting as a liaison with the DHET, ensuring compliance with programme guidelines, and supporting lecturers in their professional journey. Dr Mandy Hlengwa from Rhodes University presented the role of the nGAP Manager as outlined in the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), integrating both official responsibilities and practical considerations. She highlighted that the SOP concludes with Clause 52, which defines the role of the nGAP Manager as essential for coordinating and overseeing the effective implementation of the program at the university.

According to Clause 52, the Manager's responsibilities include:

- Representing and coordinating the application process for the posts advertised by the DHET
- Managing and approving the changes made during the implementation of the nGAP
- Acting as the liaison between the university and the DHET
- Coordinate the submission of all the required narrative and financial reports
- Overseeing the nGAP activities in the university

It was noted that Clause 52 specifies these responsibilities as “not limited to” those listed, acknowledging the varying contexts in which the nGAP programme operates. The placement of the nGAP Manager in the institution is often within human resources/ research offices/teaching and learning centres reflects each institution's interpretation of how the programme functions within the respective institution.

In daily operations, the nGAP Manager serves as a primary connector, linking all internal stakeholders associated with the programme. This involves managing relationships with human resources, finance, and academic faculties to ensure effective collaboration and programme support. Additionally, the Manager acts as the custodian and protector of the programme, functioning as the accounting officer and holding recipients accountable for meeting their deliverables, such as PhD completion.

Given that nGAP is often the first formal employment experience for many recipients, the Manager's role includes offering guidance in professional and personal development. While not as intensive as the mentorship role, this support helps nGAP lecturers understand their employment contracts and navigate their responsibilities.

The SOP is a launching pad/fundamental framework, but each nGAP Manager is empowered to shape the programme's experience at their institution. For instance, Managers may choose to organise writing retreats or additional development activities to enhance the programme's impact. Ultimately, the design and implementation of nGAP rely on the unique institutional context, with flexibility to adapt according to specific needs and objectives.

The nGAP Manager is essential in bridging institutional practices with nGAP objectives, offering operational oversight and tailored developmental support. Their adaptability in addressing institutional contexts ensures the programme's alignment with broader academic goals and fosters a nurturing environment for nGAP lecturers to thrive.

10. MENTOR COMMITTEE

The workshop included a session on mentorship, introduced by Ms Cakwe, who provided context on the ongoing efforts to establish a Mentor Committee. She noted that although attempts had been made to formalise this committee, the effective implementation of the mentorship programme faced setbacks due to the challenges brought on by COVID-19. Ms Cakwe acknowledged that mentorship challenges are not unique to the nGAP, similar issues are also present in the NESP and the USDP. To address this shared concern, she proposed that representatives from NESP and USDP be included in the Mentor Committee, promoting a collaborative approach to mentorship across these programmes.

Dr Maréve Biljohn (University of the Free State), the Chairperson of the Mentor Committee presented the progress that the committee has made since its inception, but to understand the approach, one has to understand the specific functions and responsibilities of the committee:

- Assisting DHET in formulating a formal mentoring programme for UCDP lecturers.
- Recommending a comprehensive mentoring support programme tailored for UCDP lecturers.
- Developing a project plan that includes a list of activities aimed at supporting UCDP lecturers in their mentorship journey.
- Contributing to the creation of documents and guidelines that will guide the mentoring process.
- Engaging in the implementation and monitoring of mentoring guidelines across participating universities to ensure consistency.

The committee would review its remit on an annual basis, and any considerations would be tabled with DHET. The composition of the committee consists of the following members:

UCDP Mentor Committee		
Committee Member	Institution	Role/Function
Dr Maréve Biljohn	University of the Free State	Chairperson
Prof Mathildah Mokgatle	University of South Africa	Deputy Chairperson
Prof Germarie Viljoen	North-West University	Mentor
Prof Matthew Adigun	University of Zululand	Mentor
Prof Cina Mosito	Nelson Mandela University	Mentor
Prof Caroline Khoathane	Tshwane University of Technology	Mentor
Prof Learnmore Kambizi	Cape Peninsula University of Technology	Mentor
Dr Mona Matiwane	University of Mpumalanga	nGAP Manager
Ms Janine Seneka	University of the Western Cape	Academic Coordinator
Mrs Tshoghatso Chifokoyo	Sol Plaatje University	nGAP Manager
Advisory/Ex-Officio		
Dr Harrie Esterhyse	Nelson Mandela University	UCDP Manager
Ms Silindile Shabalala	DHET	Deputy Director – UCDP
Mr Calvin Pennels	DHET	Assistant Director – UCDP

The progress update indicated that the committee met on numerous occasions and has since commissioned three research reports: mentor needs report, a promotions criteria report, and a wellness report. The scope of the research reports:

- The mentor needs report aims to determine the needs analysis, identify gaps, and make recommendations.
- The wellness report aims to examine existing wellness services, analyse current mentee wellness needs, and identify gaps. The scope included highlighting best practices and providing recommendations.
- The promotions criteria report seeks to analyse existing institutional promotions criteria across South Africa's 26 public universities, conduct a trend and gap analysis, and develop a standard development plan

The calls for the research reports have been finalised, and contracting is done with the implementation partner, NMU.

Before the discussions and feedback commenced, Ms Cakwe appreciated the efforts of the mentorship committee, especially considering the pace and outputs that have been achieved thus far. Special appreciation and acknowledgement to Ms Shabalala for her coordination efforts for establishing one of its kind mentorship committees.

“I did not have to wait six years to be promoted. By my third year, I had completed my PhD, and in my fourth year, I was promoted to Senior Lecturer. Before the six-year nGAP journey ended, I achieved a second promotion to Associate Professor. Today, I mentor two nGAP lecturers, which reflects the success and impact of the programme on my academic trajectory.”

- Prof. Nomfundo Moroe, WITS -

10.1 Feedback and discussion on the mentorship committee

This section captures the insights, concerns, and recommendations raised during the discussion on the mentorship committee. The feedback centred on enhancing mentorship structures, addressing gaps in support, and exploring strategies to align the committee’s objectives with the broader goals of the nGAP and other related programmes.

Ms Cakwe facilitated the discussion session and the following permeated from the session and the following comments, considerations and suggestions were noted:

Comments

- Concerns were raised about whether the Mentor Committee primarily addresses the needs of mentees, with some participants highlighting the importance of also considering supervisors as key stakeholders. While the focus is on mentees, it was noted that mentors need to be capacitated to provide adequate support. Supervisors also need to be sensitised to the needs of nGAP lecturers, although specific strategies for this have not yet been determined.
- A participant highlighted that mentorship in NESP is formally permitted in the third year of the agreement but is practically available in the first year. This reflects an inconsistency that the committee should consider, especially where agreements may influence research outputs.
- Another comment pointed out that the presentation lacked emphasis on academic leadership and research capability for mentees. It was noted that the promotions criteria address these areas, and further guidance is expected from best practice research.
- A comment highlighted that mentees meet regularly, but mentors do not have similar opportunities to share best practices at institutional or regional levels and such opportunities should be explored.
- Concerns were raised about the growing number of retiring lecturers in higher education, which contradicts claims that universities cannot place nGAP lecturers. It was suggested that universities improve their positioning of nGAP within institutions to address this challenge.
- It was clarified that the Mentor Committee cannot currently provide support for mentor workshops at institutions.

Considerations

- Questions were raised about ensuring mentee participation in planned research projects and whether DHET could extend similar support to non-nGAP academics. DHET noted that this posed a challenge, reiterating the importance of universities institutionalising lessons from programmes such as nGAP and NESP.
- Communication gaps were acknowledged, particularly regarding research dissemination and updates to universities. DHET plans to send letters to Vice Chancellors outlining participants required for research projects, with notifications to follow. While UCDP will relay information from the committee, improving communication remains a priority.
- The launch of the nGAP website was noted as a resource for accessing programme-related information, offering an opportunity to address existing communication barriers.

Suggestions

- A request was made to share the presentation with other nGAP Managers to ensure broader access to the information presented.
- A suggestion was made for the Mentor Committee to enhance visibility and advocate for nGAP across universities, potentially increasing mentor participation and engagement.
- Participants suggested that marketing teams and grant offices position nGAP better within institutions to address placement challenges create institutional opportunities.
- Establishing clear boundaries for what mentorship entails and does not entail was recommended to streamline expectations for mentors and mentees alike.
- Wellness was recommended as a priority area within the mentorship programme, ensuring that mentees have access to adequate support services.
- The Mentor Committee was encouraged to actively engage mentors in sharing best practices, both at institutional and regional levels, to promote knowledge sharing and collaboration.

Dr Biljohn acknowledged that many of the questions and recommendations raised during the workshop would be addressed through the three research projects currently underway. She highlighted that while comprehensive answers were not immediately available, these projects would provide valuable insights grounded in evidence rather than assumptions. On behalf of the mentor committee, she encouraged active participation in the research to ensure that the issues and comments raised were adequately considered.

The discussions highlighted the importance of strengthening mentorship capacity and formalising structures to better support both mentees and mentors. Key recommendations included improving communication, promoting collaboration across programmes, and fostering wellness initiatives. The feedback will inform ongoing

research and guide the committee's efforts to create a sustainable and impactful mentorship framework.

11. PRESENTATION ON CHANGES AND UPDATES

The Centre for Research on Evaluation, Science and Technology (CREST) joined the workshop virtually to present the management information system for nGAP in an effort to build a national database. CREST presented the progress on the development of the information system, and participants were encouraged to make suggestions in order to enhance the system.

The main considerations are:

- Integrating the financial reporting system with the university's financial system would be ideal, but integrating financial systems poses significant risks.
- Reminders and announcement flags and nudge were recommended to be added into the system.
- The narrative report component was a contentious matter that was not entirely resolved. A balanced approach was recommended as transparency should be balanced with providing a safe space for reporting, as secrecy could undermine the integrity of the programme.
- CREST confirmed that they would conduct online training sessions once the system was ready.

Dr Kota-Nyati's recommendation provided a way forward for all those who would be impacted by the system. She suggested that the thinking, purpose, principles, roles, and responsibilities behind the system's design should be shared. This would ensure that the product was well-informed, aligned with stakeholders' needs, and designed to serve everyone effectively.

12. ENCOURAGEMENT FOR nGAP MANAGERS

Ms Cakwe introduced Ms Vuyo Rorwana from Tshwane University of Technology (TUT), who shared her testimonial about the use of funding instruments available through DHET's directorate for international scholarships and mobility. Ms Rorwana highlighted the effective use of these opportunities, despite the challenges associated with the mobility component of the nGAP funds. She referenced the DHET's international scholarship email, sent every Friday, as a valuable resource for identifying and accessing available opportunities.

As part of her testimony, Ms Rorwana recounted a successful example from the previous year, where a call for the Fulbright Scholarship was shared via the DHET International Scholarships Directorate. She forwarded this opportunity to all nGAP lecturers at TUT, but only one responded. The candidate was successful, securing a scholarship that covered all travel and accommodation expenses, a monthly stipend, and the opportunity to collaborate with international researchers. No costs were incurred by TUT's budget.

The process did face challenges due to internal policies restricting opportunities for second-year candidates, but a motivation submitted to the Vice Chancellor resulted in approval. She emphasised that Vice Chancellors are committed to the programme through the Memorandum of Agreement and encouraged others not to hesitate in motivating for such opportunities.

In conclusion, Ms Rorwana urged nGAP Managers not to limit themselves to the programme's budget, as nGAP lecturers are employed as permanent staff and eligible for broader institutional opportunities.

She shared her personal achievement of securing the Humphrey Scholarship within the Fulbright programme and noted that two NESP scholars from TUT were funded to present in Portugal. Ms. Cakwe commended TUT for overcoming early challenges in implementing nGAP, highlighting the remarkable progress and growth achieved since its inception.

13. CLOSING REMARKS

The NESP, nGAP, and UCDP Send-Off Colloquium was combined this year due to declining participant numbers, a concern highlighted by DHET. One of the core objectives of the programme is to fast-track the attainment of PhDs for incoming lecturers, enabling them to access opportunities within their institutions and the broader academic space. The session provided an opportunity for feedback and reflection on progress toward this objective.

It was noted that 95% of nGAP lecturers in the system had achieved an average of 70% or higher in their master's degrees, underlining their status as high achievers. Despite this, questions were raised about why many lecturers struggled to complete their PhDs. Comments from participants identified supervision capacity as a significant barrier, with overloaded supervisors unable to provide the necessary support. This issue was compounded by the fact that many lecturers in the system were still completing their own PhDs, therefore they are students themselves.

Participants also stressed the importance of tracking nGAP lecturers after completing the programme. It was noted that many lecturers were completing their PhDs before the six-year mark, reflecting cohort-based trends. While this was not unusual, concerns were raised about the potential for the system to lose lecturers once their capacity had been built. This prompted discussions about the phrasing of the "Send-Off Colloquium," which some felt could imply a disconnect between the lecturers and the system that supported them. Instead, the focus should be on encouraging lecturers to give back to the system through mentorship, reinforcing a cycle of capacity building and retention. A significant challenge discussed was the lengthy timeframe between the submission of posts and the approval by DHET. These delays often resulted in universities independently filling posts to avoid missing opportunities, leading to lost talent as candidates sought opportunities elsewhere. This slow turnaround time was noted to undermine the credibility of the programme within institutions.

Workload expectations for nGAP lecturers were also addressed, particularly the time required for completing a PhD. It was suggested that a student should dedicate at least 3 hours per day, or 15 hours per week, to their PhD. Concerns were raised about some lecturers' lack of commitment to this standard, which impacted their ability to meet promotional requirements, including service, community engagement, and teaching and learning.

In terms of addressing these challenges, a recommendation was made to include an FAQ section on the nGAP website. Additional suggestions included hosting webinars or YouTube videos once or twice a year to provide information and address common questions, ensuring better communication and support for programme participants. The closing remarks reinforced the collective commitment to advancing nGAP's transformative impact in higher education. Institutions were urged to take ownership of embedding the programme into their systems, with a focus on fostering independence and sustainable practices. Participants were challenged to innovate, collaborate, and move beyond recurring barriers to fully realise nGAP's potential in creating a diverse and capable academic workforce.

14. CONCLUSION

Ms Cakwe urged the universities represented at the workshop to take actionable steps in implementing some of the key recommendations that emerged from the sessions. She emphasised that the first step toward meaningful progress involved the effective institutionalisation of the programme. Additionally, she stressed the need for certain universities to improve the quality of their applications to DHET. Mentors and Managers were encouraged to actively share opportunities available to nGAP lecturers within their respective institutions, fostering greater participation and support.

Dr Kota-Nyati reflected on DHET's unwavering commitment to transforming the higher education sector, accenting that this dedication should not be underestimated. However, she noted with concern that the same issues are raised year after year and challenged participants to reflect on how these recurring challenges and conversations could evolve. She cautioned that over-support often diminishes the agency of individuals and institutions, while excessive protection limits empowerment. Dr Kota-Nyati posed an important question: how would lecturers perform and thrive outside the structured and protected environment of nGAP? She advocated for fostering sustainable independence as a priority.

Moreover, Dr Kota-Nyati commended DUT for successfully adapting the SOPs to meet their institutional needs, illustrating a positive example of contextual implementation. She noted that communication remained a persistent challenge, including for the workshop itself, and encouraged Managers and Coordinators to ensure the effective sharing of contact details to improve information flow. As her final remark, she expressed sincere gratitude to DHET for their ongoing support and contributions to the programme's success. The key undertaking was recognising that though we may refer to the beneficiaries of the programme as "nGAP lecturers", their journey reminds us that they are "lecturers in the nGAP".

- Key takeaways from the workshop include the continued need for strong mentorship, clear communication, and better workload management. Participants shared that while the programme has made great strides, challenges around mentorship capacity, funding gaps, and the integration of the programme into institutional structures persist. These concerns highlighted the ongoing need for a more holistic approach to support, ensuring that both lecturers and mentors are adequately equipped to navigate their roles.
- Decisions were made to shift the responsibility for future inductions to universities, empowering them to take ownership of embedding the programme within their structures. This move aims to reduce reliance on DHET, allowing institutions to tailor the induction process to their specific needs. It was also agreed that mentorship should be expanded across other programmes like NESP and USDP to ensure consistency and broaden the support network for all early-career academics.
- Looking ahead, the focus will be on creating a sustainable framework, where universities, mentors, and lecturers work collaboratively. Follow-up items include addressing the feedback on mentor preparedness, developing clearer funding usage guidelines, and improving communication channels to ensure that everyone involved has timely access to information. The creation of an FAQ section on the nGAP website, and regular webinars, were also suggested as practical steps to facilitate ongoing support.

Commendably, the nGAP Lecturers Induction Workshop is inclusive as it represents all key stakeholders involved in the development of the nGAP lecturers, including mentors, managers and grant management officials. The opportunity ensures that everyone understands their role and supports the successful implementation of the workshop.

The closing remarks were a poignant reminder that the individuals we call “nGAP lecturers” are, at their core, individuals within a structured programme, nGAP. Their journeys transcend the title and embody the transformative intent of the programme. Their development reflects a journey of resilience, learning, and growth, supported by a framework designed to uplift and empower them within the higher education system. This workshop emphasised not just the programme’s mechanics but its heart, fostering a community that values mentorship, diversity, and excellence. From navigating challenges like unclear workloads to building robust mentorship structures, the focus remained on nurturing lecturers who are not just participants but contributors to academia’s evolving landscape.

The programme’s ultimate success lies in creating a foundation where these lecturers can thrive independently, ready to mentor others and shape a more equitable and dynamic academic environment. As they continue their ascent, their stories remind us that the programme is not just about building academics but about shaping leaders who will inspire generations to come.



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