

DEIDRE JOUBERT

VAAL UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY

INTRODUCTION OF INDUSTRY SHADOWING BY LECTURERS WITHOUT EXPERIENCE

INDIVIDUAL PROJECT REPORT

AIM OF THE PROJECT

The aim of my project is to address an issue that has been of concern to me for a long time, keeping in mind the following aspects in the Department of Higher Education and Training's Framework for Enhancing Academics as Teachers:

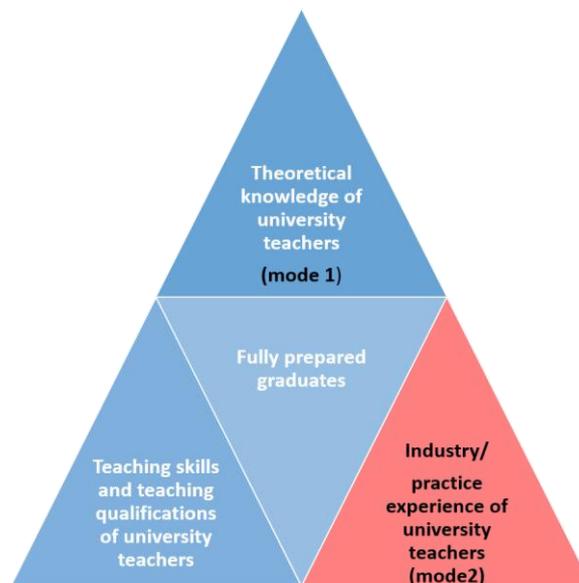
- It articulates the wish to ensure a holistic enhancement of academics' experience to the benefit of university students.
- Identifies Teaching and Learning as the core business of any university and a professional obligation of all universities to implement measures to improve student success by improving the skills and knowledge of their academics.
- Teaching does not enjoy the same status as research at universities – teaching and learning tend to be positioned in competition with each other for resources and recognition, rather than being equally valued as core.
- Recognition of competence as a researcher is much more portable across the university system than is the case for teaching.

If the development of academics as university teachers has not received the appropriate level of attention, the situation is likely to be worse for people in roles that include leading teaching and providing professional support for teaching.

The most important aspects mentioned in the said Framework relevant to my project are:

- a) Teaching can be advanced when the discipline and individuals within it take responsibility for identifying and addressing their own teaching development needs.
- b) Discipline-based or subject-based communities of practice have an important role to play in strengthening university teachers and teaching.

With the mentioned aspects addressed in the framework I had the opportunity to address the issue of the lack of mode 2 knowledge (actual experience in industry/practice) by being appointed as a lecturer without any practical experience. Additionally, I have found that students demonstrate a preference for lecturers who have had the benefit of industry experience. I illustrate the "gap" in knowledge experienced by such lecturers in the graphic below:



With this identified gap in mind, the aim of my project is to implement industry/practice shadowing for lecturers at Vaal University of Technology in order to respond to the framework, remain a change agent and minimise the situation of students requesting to attend classes by certain lecturers as they are able to immediately detect when a lecturer does not have industry or practice experience.

DESIGN OF INTERVENTION

I sent a number of lecturers from our Law Faculty to industry to observe and shadow practitioners as part of a trial. I received positive feedback from all the participating industries. They indicated that they would welcome lecturers in future to observe and the value of such observance for both the academic and workplace.

From the lecturers' feedback, it seemed that all of them have learnt a lot from the industry placement, but some of them suggested one- or two-day visits to industry totalling two weeks per year. Some lecturers were able to identify shortcomings in the curriculum which can now be addressed.

I then proceeded to make presentations to all Faculty Board meetings across the university with the support of the DVC Academic. The positive feedback was phenomenal and I continued with implementing the shadowing across disciplines.

I received funding from the Centre for Academic Development (CAD) in order to assist lecturers who could not find an industry near the university - to enable them to venture further in the county to gain the best experience possible. This intervention will be handed to CAD for further necessary administration, maintenance and monitoring.

OUTCOMES

VUT is possibly the first university implementing this "filling the gap between mode 1 and mode 2 knowledge transfer". It proactively responds to and addresses the vision for professional development articulated in the National Framework, and potentially changes the teaching and learning landscape at universities of technology.

THE WAY FORWARD

1. Firstly, guidelines will be published on the eTAU website to assist other universities with similar implementation, which is part of a project started by 6 of the current TAU participants.
2. The next step for me will be to draft amendments to the existing policy on teaching and learning, to include compulsory completion of a tertiary qualification in higher education by all lecturers appointed and the compulsory total of two weeks' over a two-year period by lecturers without any industry/practice experience.
3. The last outcome is that I was a change agent throughout my careers, but I needed the push which TAU gave me to carry on being a change agent.

CONCLUDING COMMENTS

Being a TAU Fellow has given me the space, confidence and necessary tools to be a change agent. I achieved a significant policy victory at VUT, and this has the potential to influence the terrain of work experience at other institutions.