

## AKU NETWORKS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT

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Allow me to conclude by mentioning one other word that I trust will permeate everything we undertake at this School - and that is the word "quality." Above all else, when people think in years to come about the Aga Khan University...I would like them to think of its dedication to uncompromising quality.

- HH Aga Khan, Chancellor AKU, Nairobi, Kenya, July 2011

### 1.0 BACKGROUND

In line with AKU's strategic imperatives of promoting quality over quantity of student intake and excellence in teaching and learning, and in order to strengthen the student experience, in January 2013 the Provost announced the establishment of four networks: Teaching and Learning (TL\_net) including Blended and Digital Learning (BDL\_net), Quality Assurance and Improvement (QAI\_net), and Student Experience (SE\_net). The networks of TL and QAI both focus on the improvement of the learning environment and hence are presented together in this paper. There are obvious overlaps between the networks but at heart are the students as the ultimate beneficiaries, already recognised in AKU's quality assurance framework, *The Student Journey*.

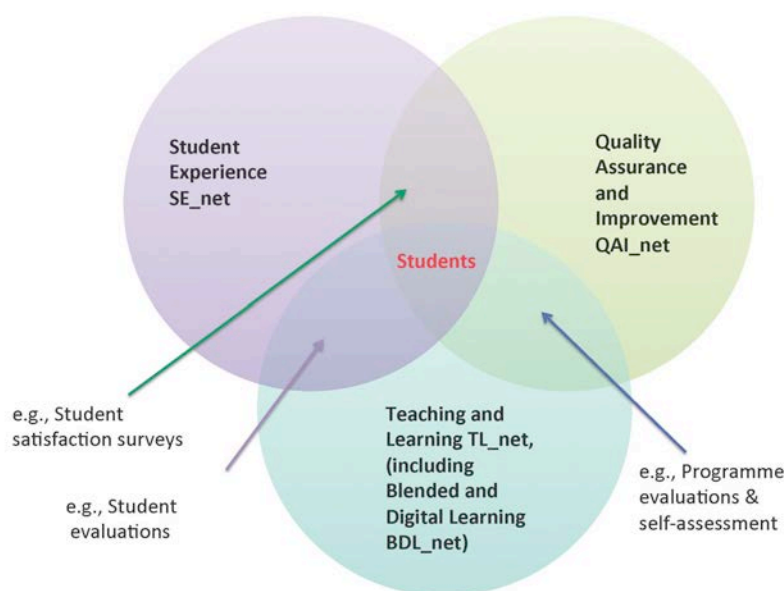


Figure 1. AKU Networks

### 2.0 CONSULTATIONS AND ACTION REQUESTED

This discussion paper is based on consultation meetings held for entity heads and programme directors in the UK at ISMC in March, in Karachi in April and in East Africa in May 2013.

The consultation introduced the concept of the networks and also allowed input on how the participants felt that the networks could best serve and support their work. Each entity head identified resource people to attend participatory workshops in Pakistan and East Africa on April 26 and May 31 respectively. Resource persons for the TL\_net are faculty members with a passion for teaching and who have shown excellence in teaching or the scholarship of teaching; whilst resource persons for the QAI\_net are faculty members or staff who will serve as coordinators for quality improvement activities in their entities. These resource people will facilitate the sharing of resources across AKU while, at the same time, be supported to expand their own capacities and expertise to better support their entities. The workshops raised awareness of best practices with respect to quality assurance and quality improvement and began a dialogue to create a common language of quality teaching and learning at AKU. Fifty resource people attended the workshops. Over the coming months, they will be involved in conducting a needs assessment of the professional educational development of teaching of faculty and education development opportunities within entities to further inform the networks' activities. This discussion paper is presented to you for your feedback on the directions proposed in order to ensure a "fit for purpose" in serving the faculty and programme needs of your entity. It is recognized that as faculty come on board for FAS programmes education development activities that meet specific needs for this cross cultural initiative will also need to be taken into account.

### **3.0 INTRODUCTION: PURPOSES OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMMES FOR ACADEMICS**

University teaching around the world is performed by faculty with discipline expertise and some research experience through their PhDs but typically with limited formal teaching experience or qualification (Scott and Scott, 2013). This is against a backdrop of students and employers being ever more discerning of a quality learning experience that allows for graduates who are change agents, leaders and innovators with enquiring critical minds. Literature on effective university teaching to promote deep learning unequivocally provides evidence in support of pedagogies that advance student engagement - something that the traditional lecture does not cater to and, indeed, is how faculty "lecturers" largely communicate to students (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Ramsden, 2003). University teachers therefore need support to promote student engagement and enhance teaching quality. AKU already has experience of how the blended learning faculty development initiative has done just this.

Recent reviews of campus-based educational development and professional learning (Randall et al, 2013; Feixas & Euler, 2013) indicate that, despite a dearth of research on the impact of faculty educational development on learning outcomes, the way teachers teach makes a difference to students. The evidence also shows that if professional educational development meets the needs of faculty in the different phases of their teaching careers, then transformative change of teaching approaches occur, as long as faculty are provided with ongoing support over time, within an enabling environment. That includes embedding professional support for university teachers within both an institutional quality and a teaching and learning framework. These frameworks must align with quality assurance and improvement processes, teachers' professional evaluation (including students' feedback) and reward and recognition of good teaching.

Extensive research in Canada on the evolution of faculty support for teaching points to an emergence of consolidated comprehensive educational development units such as educational technology centres, student success one-stop shops and quality assurance directorates in order to provide unified, complementary and coordinated programming and reduce competition and

duplication of efforts. In a university like AKU, with its inefficiencies of scale and its spread across 11 teaching sites and 8 countries, the setting up of these four networks under the Office of the Provost promotes our model of one integrated university and the efficient use of resources - technical, human and financial - in order to benefit programmes, faculty and students. Thus, this discussion paper addresses the possible mandate and complementary functions of both the QAI\_net and the TL\_net and is offered as a "white paper" to ensure extensive and inclusive consultation across AKU as we set up and develop the networks.

#### **4.0 MANDATES OF THE NETWORKS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT**

**The related but distinct mandates of the QAI\_net and TL\_net are to strengthen the student learning experience at AKU.** By supporting faculty to teach students in engaging ways, the learning outcomes of AKU graduates will be realized; that is, students who can think critically, problem solve, work in teams and be leaders, lifelong learners and catalysts for change. Such learner-centred learning ensures quality programmes. **Thus, the focus of the TL\_net is on supporting professional educational development of faculty whilst that of the QAI\_net is to continually monitor and improve upon the academic programmes.**

Academics have been shown to have a tendency to disengage from professional teaching programmes when faced with negative student feedback. Research on effective professional development, however, indicates that creating safe spaces where faculty can reflect critically on their teaching with peers and feel empowered to try different pedagogies leads to greater student satisfaction (Scott and Scott 2013). Thus, the networks, established within the Office of the Provost, in no way intend to centralize the functions of professional education development and quality of programmes in an intrusive manner. Indeed, attempts by others to fully centralize professional development have been shown to be “unsuccessful in supporting widespread, discipline embedded continuous improvement in teaching and learning” (Scott and Scott 2013). While providing safe spaces for faculty where they feel they "belong," the networks respect the autonomy and responsibilities of members of faculty and academic units to develop professionally through interdisciplinary communities of practice promoting joint scholarship in the area of higher education quality. In addition, the networks will aim to provide effective coordination and support to entities in the areas of programme enhancement and quality teaching and learning, to ensure agreed-upon common standards, and equity to all students wherever they are located.

#### **5.0 DISTINCT GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE TWO INTEGRATED NETWORKS OF TEACHING AND LEARNING AND QUALITY ASSURANCE AND IMPROVEMENT**

<b>TL_net</b>	<b>QAI_net</b>
<p><b>Goal:</b> To promote excellence in teaching at AKU through professional educational development of faculty in order to engage students and enhance their learning experience.</p> <p><b>Metrics:</b> By 2015 all (100%) new full time faculty will participate in an introductory course on “Engaged Teaching at AKU.” By 2018 all</p>	<p><b>Goal:</b> To promote the highest quality academic programmes at AKU through structured periodic self, peer and external reviews and evaluations.</p> <p><b>Metrics:</b> By 2015 QAI policies and procedures will be in place at AKU. By 2018 all (100%) AKU academic units will undertake self-</p>

<p>existing faculty will be able to access TL_net professional development with at least 30% of existing full time faculty participating; all faculty identified in annual evaluations as needing to improve their teaching will be engaged in appropriate professional development.</p>	<p>assessment and peer reviews of every academic undergraduate degree (100%) programme and 50% of postgraduate programmes, generating quality improvement reports with actions and timelines to be followed.</p>
<p><b>Objectives (over the next 5 years):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conduct a needs assessment of faculty on professional educational development</li> <li>• Identify expertise in education development across AKU and develop a network to share these resources beyond the entity level</li> <li>• Develop a teaching and learning framework for AKU that provides guiding principles for entities of engaged teaching at AKU</li> <li>• Ensure that assessment of faculty teaching practices occurs at the time of hiring</li> <li>• Introduce induction for new and part-time faculty on student-centred, engaged, active teaching practices, including concept-based rather than content-heavy curricula</li> <li>• Introduce a short-course on graduate supervision to be compulsory for all faculty wishing to act as primary supervisors of masters or PhD students</li> <li>• Provide opportunities for continuing education and mentoring to support faculty to enhance their teaching and course design and promote student engagement in learning</li> <li>• Recognize and reward excellent teaching</li> <li>• Promote research on teaching and learning and disseminate evidence-based information regarding exemplary practices in pedagogy, curriculum and assessment</li> <li>• Facilitate faculty learning communities such as teaching squares, reading circles, etc.</li> <li>• Develop signature pedagogical expertise in blended and digital learning and case based learning and build faculty expertise in these areas</li> <li>• Internationalize the curriculum and pedagogy to ensure that all students across AKU benefit from the richness of the experience of learning in a truly international context</li> <li>• Review our assessment practices to encourage appropriate and timely feedback to students to assure a sound foundation for improvement</li> <li>• Ensure regular monitoring and evaluation of the progress made in fulfilment of our aims</li> </ul>	<p><b>Objectives (over the next 5 years):</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Identify and catalogue current quality assurance processes employed at AKU for academic programme improvement</li> <li>• Standardize quality assurance procedures and develop an AKU-wide policy and procedures for periodic reviews of existing programmes and the consideration of proposals for new programmes</li> <li>• Develop awareness amongst all AKU faculty of their personal responsibility for ensuring that programmes are of the highest quality, and provide appropriate staff development to help them achieve this</li> <li>• Take collective responsibility for ensuring that adequate systems for quality assurance and enhancement have been developed and are in place</li> <li>• Support and enhance quality processes and procedures through regular and periodic self, peer and external assessment of programmes</li> <li>• Create a network of quality assurance resource persons to support the self-assessment of programmes</li> <li>• Standardize student evaluation of courses and instructors to improve academic provision</li> <li>• Pursue recognized and respected international accreditation of all AKU programmes</li> </ul> <p><b>N.B.:</b> The maintenance of the quality of learning, teaching and student support on a day-to-day basis is and will continue to be the responsibility of the deans and entity directors/heads.</p>

for excellence in learning and teaching across AKU	
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**6.0 STRUCTURE AND FUNCTIONS OF THE NETWORKS**

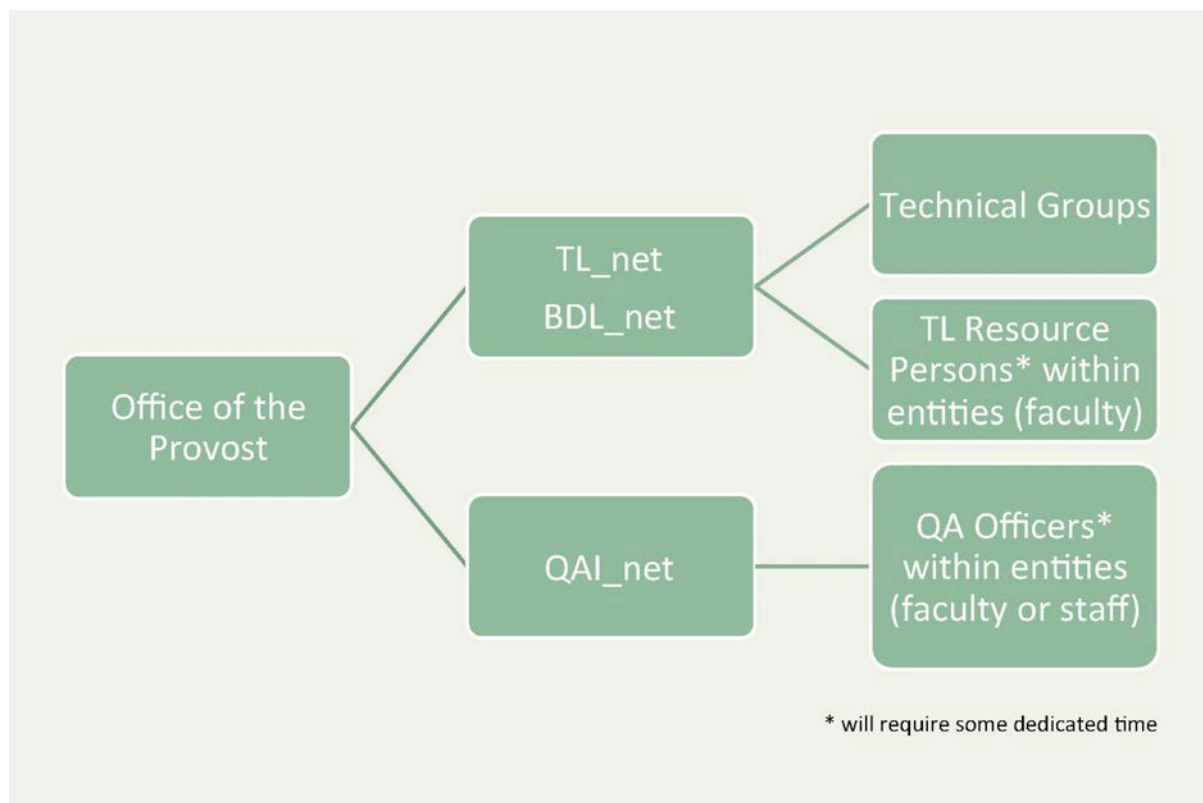


Figure 2. Network Structures

Expertise in educational development already exists across AKU. This expertise has evolved either to support the faculty needs of entities, such as in the case of the separate Departments of Educational Development in in both Medical Colleges in Pakistan and East Africa, or as an essential element of AKU’s core business, as in teacher education and school improvement in the Institutes for Educational Development and in educational assessment in the Examination Board. Whilst the Network of Teaching and Learning may develop some signature pedagogical expertise to support entities, such as in the area of blended and digital learning (BDL) or case based learning, the idea of "networking" is to share and capitalize on resources and expertise beyond one’s entity. Resource persons within entities will be vital members of the network in coordinating efforts to promote quality programmes and sharing resources in teaching and learning across AKU. Whilst resource persons may have entity-specific pedagogical expertise (e.g., problem-based learning), it is our intention that the TL\_net will assist them to further develop their skills to broadly promote an AKU-wide student-centred culture of learning that includes engaged enquiry.

**The two Networks of Quality Assurance and Improvement and Teaching and Learning are complementary in promoting excellent academic programmes.** As shown in figure 3, the QAI\_net’s main function will be to promote, support and coordinate regular periodic standardized programme reviews through self, peer and external assessment. The TL\_net (figure 4) will respond to needs identified in improvement plans resulting from quality

assurance programme reviews and from students' feedback of courses on strengthening curriculum, pedagogy and assessment – at both the level of the individual member of faculty and the programme. Recognizing the different needs ranging from young and new incoming faculty to midcareer and existing faculty will provide opportunities for ongoing faculty development and the enhancement of professional practice through induction programmes, certified practical courses (including through BDL modes), mentoring programmes and peer coaching. Academic staff will be engaged and encouraged to actively pursue their own personal learning through the scholarship of teaching, reflective action research and learning communities of practice.

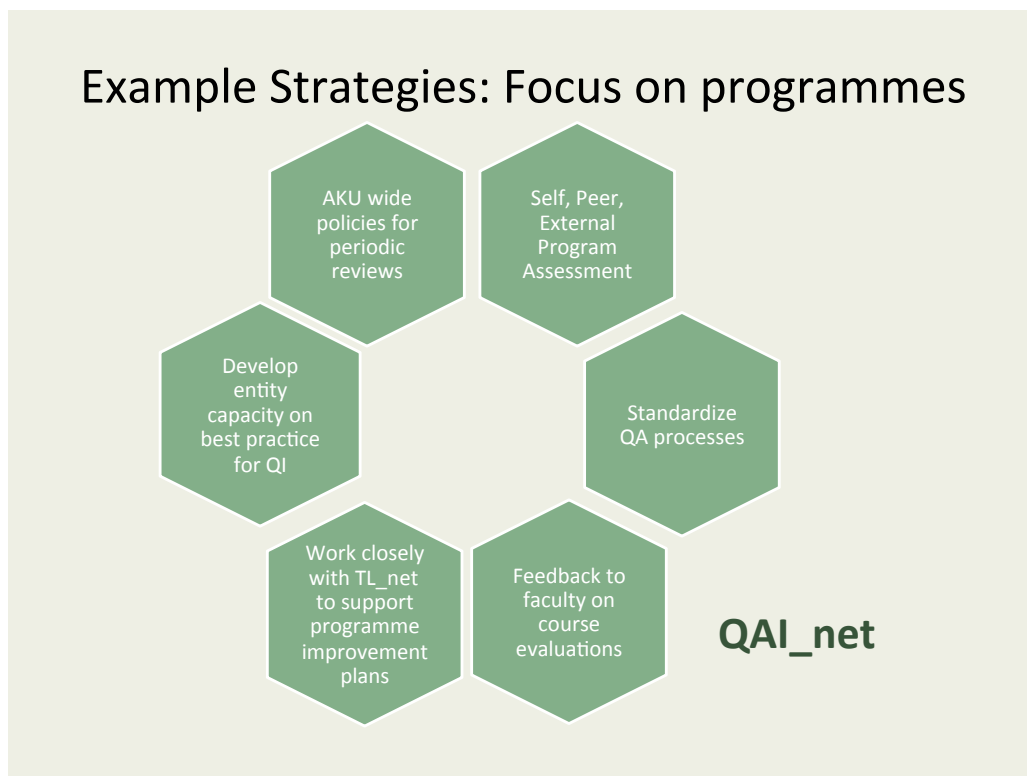


Figure 3. Functions of the QAI\_net

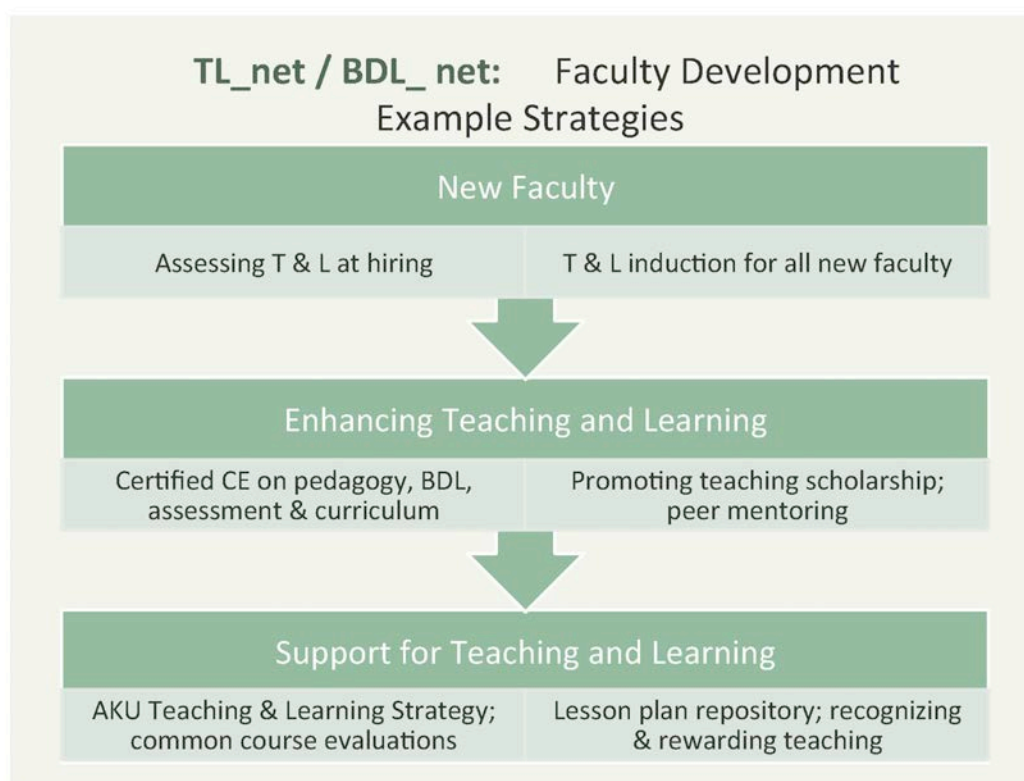


Figure 4. Functions of the TL\_net

Research contends that professional development within higher education needs to be "flexible, multi-modal, needs based, overtly focused on enhancing teaching, learning and assessment, discipline-relevant yet collaborative across disciplines, realistic and accessible" (Scott & Scott 2013, Randall 2013). Effective practice suggests the promotion of a multi-dimensional complimentary approach of promoting **quality** through academic programme reviews and use of student feedback data with both formal and informal learning through professional development **teaching** workshops and engaging in the **scholarship of teaching and learning**. The TL\_net and QAI\_net will promote this learner focused **integrated approach** to professional development for quality teaching and learning.

## 7.0 CONCLUSIONS

Based on effective practice, the TL\_net and QAI\_net, working closely with the Network of Student Experience, need to support the strategic imperative of excellence in quality teaching of programmes and a strengthened student experience – both academic and extra-curricular. This will ensure that graduates meet the desired generic AKU learning outcomes of leadership, critical thinking, lifelong learning, team work, evidence based professional practice, effective communication, socially-aware responsible citizenship. The TL\_net and QAI\_net could support the AKU community in defining more explicitly what these outcomes are and how they might be measured to ensure they have been achieved. The networks will need to be backed by a communication strategy and website portal within the Office of the Provost to both promote the support available to, and uptake by, faculty and build ownership through the resource persons appointed by entities. Over time, linking the TL\_net to the library as a learning resource and a safe place owned by faculty will be paramount in ensuring the networks serve the faculty in order to enhance the student experience.

The networks will need to model best practice, creating programmes that are evidence based. Initially, the professional learning needs of faculty will be investigated to inform the response of the networks regarding educational development. In addition, it will be important to gain the confidence of faculty by providing professional learning that is relevant and addresses the needs identified from quality assurance programme reviews. Documenting and evaluating the evolution of the networks will both ensure assessment of the impact of professional education learning initiatives and the building of the capacity of resource persons in teaching scholarship. This will create a cadre of teaching fellows who will role model and mentor effective practice in teaching and learning and who will be acknowledged for doing so whilst creating communities of practice across the rich cultures and geographies of AKU.

## **8.0 REFERENCES**

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## **9.0 CONSULTATION PROCESS**

### **How can you provide feedback on the Networks discussion papers?**

The discussion papers on QAI\_net and TL\_net, SE\_net, and BDL\_net will be distributed to academic entity heads and other members of the Academic Council at its November meeting.

Deans, academic directors and programme heads will be asked to distribute these papers widely within their units to faculty, staff and students and to table the documents at their respective faculty council or similar meetings for discussion in December 2013 and the first two weeks of January 2014. Group discussions should provide an opportunity for interested students and staff as well as faculty to contribute responses.

Entity heads will be asked to summarize the comments, suggestions and questions that arise from these group discussions and submit them to Vice Provost Kweku Bentil.

Although we do not wish to limit the range of issues addressed in feedback, consideration of the following questions would be useful:

- Do the networks meet the needs of students, faculty and academic programmes?
- Are there areas not mentioned in the discussion papers that should be emphasized?
- What specific expertise already exists in AKU's academic entities and among members of faculty that could contribute to the work of any of the networks?



- Are there areas of ambiguity that require clarification?

We also encourage individual members of faculty, staff and students to submit their own feedback for consideration by the network leaders and authors of the papers.

Please submit all feedback to Vice Provost Kweku Bentil ([kweku.bentil@aku.edu](mailto:kweku.bentil@aku.edu)) by the end of the day on Friday, January 31, 2014.

Once these responses have been reviewed we will consider the possibility of creating a discussion forum for community members and the network directors to engage in a dialogue regarding issues raised in the discussion papers. In addition, should the response warrant it, we will also explore the possibility of holding one or more virtual town hall meetings.

The feedback received from the university community will shape the final versions of these papers, set the directions for the networks and shape the priorities for the network leadership and their advisory committees. As a result of this process, QAI\_net, TL\_net, BDL\_net and SE\_net will be better able to serve the needs of our programmes, faculty and students in our collective efforts to establish the very best learning and teaching environment at Aga Khan University.