South African University Teachers (SAUT)

Recognizing and Rewarding Teaching Excellence
in South African Higher Education

Presenter: Prof Clever Ndebele | NCC Chair

Development of the National Framework

The Sector-Wide Consultation Process

THE PROCESSES

2017 ➢ Ministerial Committee established in 2017 to draft the Framework

May 2017 ➢ National Workshop, Port Elizabeth, May 24-26, 2017 — convened by CHE and DHET, supported by the EU-SA Dialogue Facility

Ongoing ➢ Consultations with national role players: CHE, USAf, HELTASA, NRF and Regional Structures

THE OUTCOMES

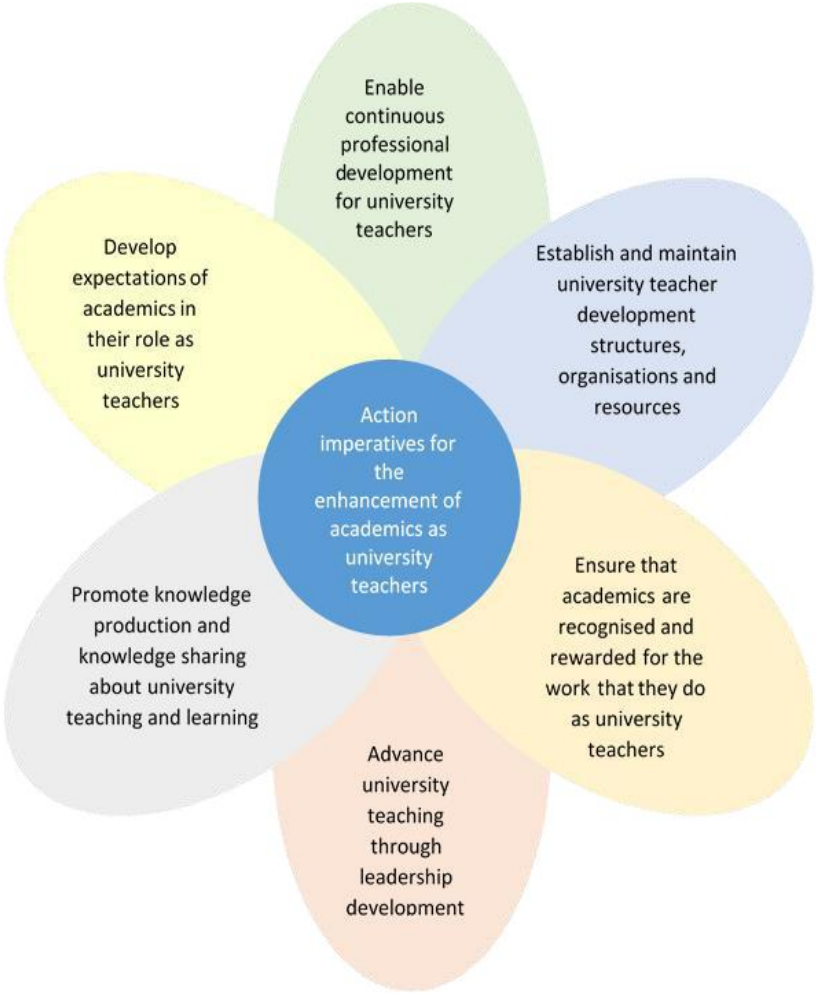
1. Ministerial Statement (NFfEAUT) approved in November 2018 — with the Minister of Higher Education as patron
2. NFfEAUT integrated into the University Capacity Development Programme (UCDP) with core funding
3. Key implementation imperatives: University-led collaborative projects; National University Teaching Awards (NUTA) — launched 2024.

About SAUT

SAUT: South African University Teachers

- **Formerly NCC A national body** with representatives from all 26 public higher education institutions, including USAf, DHET, CHE & HELTASA.
- **Framework Foundation:** Aligned to the National Framework for Enhancing Academics as University Teachers (NFfEAUT) – effective late 2018 – to promote academics' abilities and recognition as teachers.

The National Framework (NFfEAUT) 6 Action Imperatives



National University Teaching Awards (NUTA)

- Provide **formal recognition** for academics and organizations' achievements in teaching excellence
- Establish **role models** for what is held to be exemplary teaching practice
- Ascribe **status** to teaching excellence and innovation in higher education
- Increase **awareness** of innovative teaching activities and their value
- Spur the **aspirations** of other university teachers engaged in similar activities
  Portfolios of those who have received the award are available on SAUT website
- Provide an occasion for **celebration** of teaching excellence in higher education





The Need for Change

Lessons from the CHE/HELTASA Awards (2015–2019)

Five key challenges identified through sector analysis:

Gender & racial disparities

Most awards went to White females, reflecting systemic access inequities

Narrow institutional reach

Only 14 of South Africa's 26 public universities were represented

Inadequate applicant support

Institutions seem to have provided little guidance or assistance to nominees

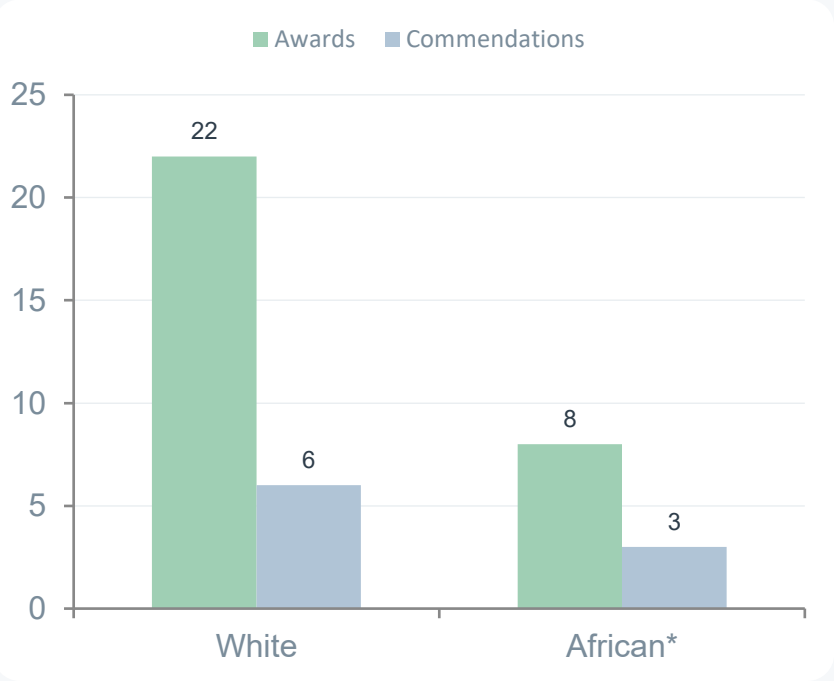
Ambiguous evaluation criteria

Submission guidelines lacked clarity and consistency across the sector

Generic, impersonal feedback

Unsuccessful applicants received non-individualised feedback that hindered growth

CHE/HELTASA Awards Distribution (2015–2019)



Source: HELTASA website data analysis

Redefining Teaching 'Excellence'



The Complexity of 'Excellence'

The term 'excellence' is elusive and difficult to define clearly in teaching contexts. Multiple perspectives exist on what constitutes 'teaching excellence' or 'excellent teaching'.



South African Context

Within South Africa's higher education landscape, with its historically disadvantaged institutions, rural/urban divide, 'teaching excellence' has different interpretations based on context.



NUTA's Approach

NUTA intentionally promotes SoTL, striving to be more inclusive, focussing on innovation, as a more contextually appropriate descriptor of teaching excellence.

The Innovative Teacher

Attributes recognised and valued by NUTA

NUTA recognises and rewards professionals who demonstrate these key attributes in their praxis.



Creativity
Devises novel, imaginative approaches to persistent teaching challenges



Student-Centred
Keeps student growth, wellbeing and success at the heart of practice



Research-Informed
Grounds teaching in SoTL evidence, inquiry and scholarly reflection



Reflective Practice
Continuously interrogates and refines practice through critical reflection



Contextual Awareness
Adapts teaching to specific institutional, social and cultural contexts



Technology Integration
Deploys appropriate technologies to deepen and extend student learning



Collaboration
Partners with colleagues to co-develop and improve teaching quality



Demonstrable Impact
Produces evidence of meaningful, measurable student learning outcomes

NUTA's Key Initiatives

Building Sector Capacity and Sustained Support

Workshop Series

Targeted workshops on portfolio development build applicant confidence and capacity — particularly for academics at under-resourced institutions

Mentorship System

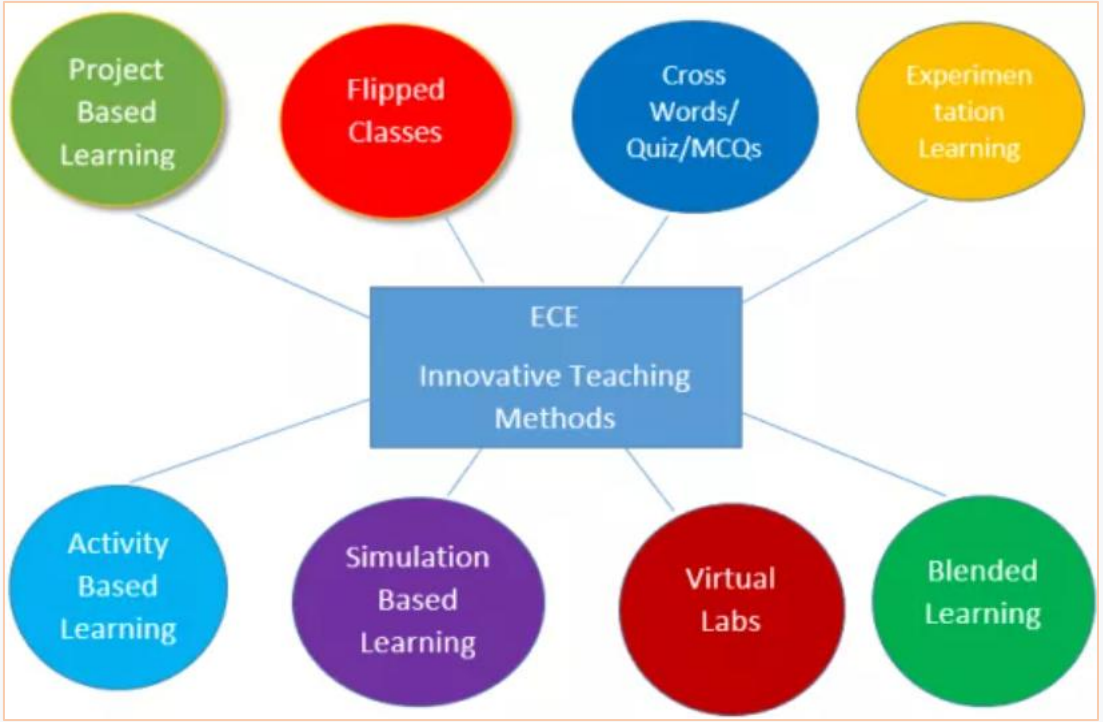
Past awardees and TAU fellows guide first-time applicants, with specific focus on nominees from underrepresented universities

Recognition Ceremonies

Winners and commendees celebrated at high-profile ceremonies with media coverage — elevating the public status of teaching excellence

Hall of Fame

Discussions have commenced on the need for awardees to be inducted into a permanent national Hall of Fame — providing an enduring tribute and inspiring future generations of teachers



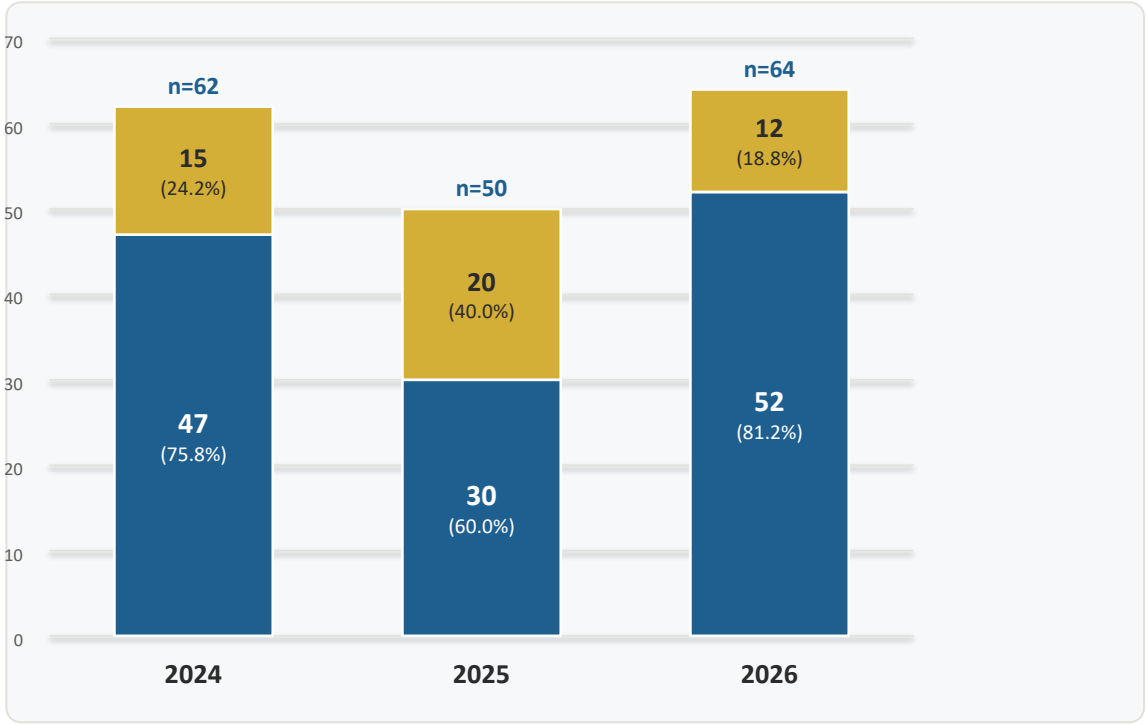
Transformative education through innovative teaching

Summary of NUTA 2024-26 Participation Trends

	2024	2025	2026 (to date)
Total Applications	**62**	**50**	**64**
Universities	24	20	25
Experienced teachers	43	30	38
Beginner teachers	15	11	19
T&L specialist teams	3	9	5
T&L specialist (individual)	–	–	2

NUTA Mentorship Impact: Equity Focus

HAI vs HDI Participation Trends, 2024–2026



The Equity Story: HDI Recovery

HDI applications grew from 30 in 2025 to 52 in 2026 – an increase of 22 applications (+73.3%) – following the mentorship programme launch. This demonstrates that targeted institutional support disproportionately benefits historically disadvantaged institutions.

Institutional Participation

Number of universities submitting NUTA applications

Year	HAI	HDI	Total
2024	6	18	24
2025	6	14	20
2026	**7**	**18**	**25**

2026 saw the broadest institutional reach yet: 25 universities, with HDI participation rebounding to 18.

NUTA 2026: Interview Outcomes

6 Awards + 4 Commendations | 16 Winners

■ Historically Advantaged: **HAI** ■ Historically Disadvantaged: **HDI**

No. of Awards / Commendations	Outcome	Actual No. of Winners	Category	Institution Type
1	Award	1	Beginner	HAI
2	Award	2	Experienced	HAI
3	Commendation	3	Experienced	HAI
4	Commendation	4	Experienced	HDI
5	Award	5	Experienced	HAI
6	Award	6	Experienced	HAI
7	Commendation	7	T & L Specialist	HDI
8	Commendation	8	Experienced	HDI
9	Team Award	9	Collaboration Team	HDI
		10		HDI
10	Team Award	11	Collaboration Team	HDI
		12		HAI
		13		HAI
		14		HAI
		15		HAI
		16		HAI
TOTAL	**6 Awards + 4 Commendations**	**16**		

Persistent Flaws that Disqualify Portfolios

1. Nomination form is not endorsed and signed by the relevant DVC or designated senior institutional executive
2. Curriculum vitae exceeds 2 pages, and is not focused on teaching and professional growth
3. Reflective narrative exceeds 10,000 words
4. Appendices exceed 10 pages
5. Claims and assertions are not supported by evidence
6. Portfolios lack philosophical and theoretical depth
7. Appendices not tested for off-campus accessibility and functionality
8. Evidence of teaching excellence does not go beyond mandatory expectations: exemplary and innovative practice is not evident
9. Absence of student data and learning analytics to offer insights into student learning and achievement
10. Fails to demonstrate, with evidence, engagement with SoTL

SAUT Collaborative Projects Sub-Programme

Resources on SAUT website Continuous Professional Learning (CPL) **Project Lead:** Dr Rosaline Govender, Durban University of Technology	• Maintained a national database of CPL programmes accessible to all 26 public universities • Developed and sustained cross-institutional professional learning communities
Blended and Online Learning Project Lead: Dr Esmarie Strydom, North West University (Discontinued in the 2026 to 2028 cycle due to funding constraints)	• Curated blended and online resources for sector-wide use • Built institutional capacity for teaching in blended and online environments • Promoted sharing of Open Educational Resources (OERs)
Academic Development as a Profession **Project Lead:** Prof Jo-Anne Vorster, Rhodes University	• Strengthened the academic foundation of the academic development field • Elevated the status of academic development as a recognised profession and career path
University Teaching Leadership Development **Project Lead:** Prof Kasturi Behari-Leak, University of Cape Town	• Built a national and institutional cohort of senior and middle-level teaching leadership • Enhanced capability for driving teaching and learning leadership at all levels
National University Teaching Awards (NUTA) **Project Lead**: Prof Clever Ndebele, Walter Sisulu	• Implementation of high status, high profile awards • Recognition of meritorious university teachers • Raising the profile of university teaching

NUTA's Vision for Excellence with Inclusivity

Towards a More Equitable and Representative Framework

Increased Reach

Broaden stakeholder ownership across all 26 HEIs, DHET, CHE, HELTASA and USAf

Equity & Representativity

Actively minimise practices that advantage better-resourced institutions

Structured Support System

Create enabling conditions for academics from underrepresented institutions

Mentorship Pathway

Draw on past awardees and TAU fellows to guide first-time applicants

Diversified Categories

Accommodate individuals and teams at different stages of their academic careers

Student Voice

Embed student input meaningfully in both award design and evaluation (South African Union of Students (SAUS) is represented in current adjudication panel)



The Future of NUTA

Vision and Strategic Direction



Parity with Research Recognition

Elevate NUTA to match the national prominence and prestige of NRF awards — positioning teaching as equal to research



Showcasing Awardees

Promote winners' work through dedicated media exposure, workshops and professional development activities



Sector Capacity Building

Actively involve awardees in national and institutional capacity-building programmes for emerging teachers



Integrated Sector Collaboration

Strengthen partnerships with CHE and DHET through the Teaching Advancement at University (TAU) programme

LOOKING AHEAD…

- ✓ The National University Teaching Awards (NUTA) advances a renewed, inclusive national framework — positioning teaching as a scholarly and celebrated profession across all 26 public HEIs.

- ✓ By foregrounding innovation, contextual sensitivity and equity, NUTA cultivates a recognition system where excellence is defined broadly — and where every teacher, in every context, can aspire to be recognised.

Join us as we embed a culture of teaching innovation and inclusivity in South African higher education.



Thank You

Supporting Excellence in Teaching Across South African Universities

Secretariat hosted at iYunivesithi Walter Sisulu

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info@sauniversityteachers.org.za

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