

# SANRC Inventory of Support toward First-Year Students at South Africa's Universities: Preliminary Findings



Liile Lerato Lekena (Senior Researcher)

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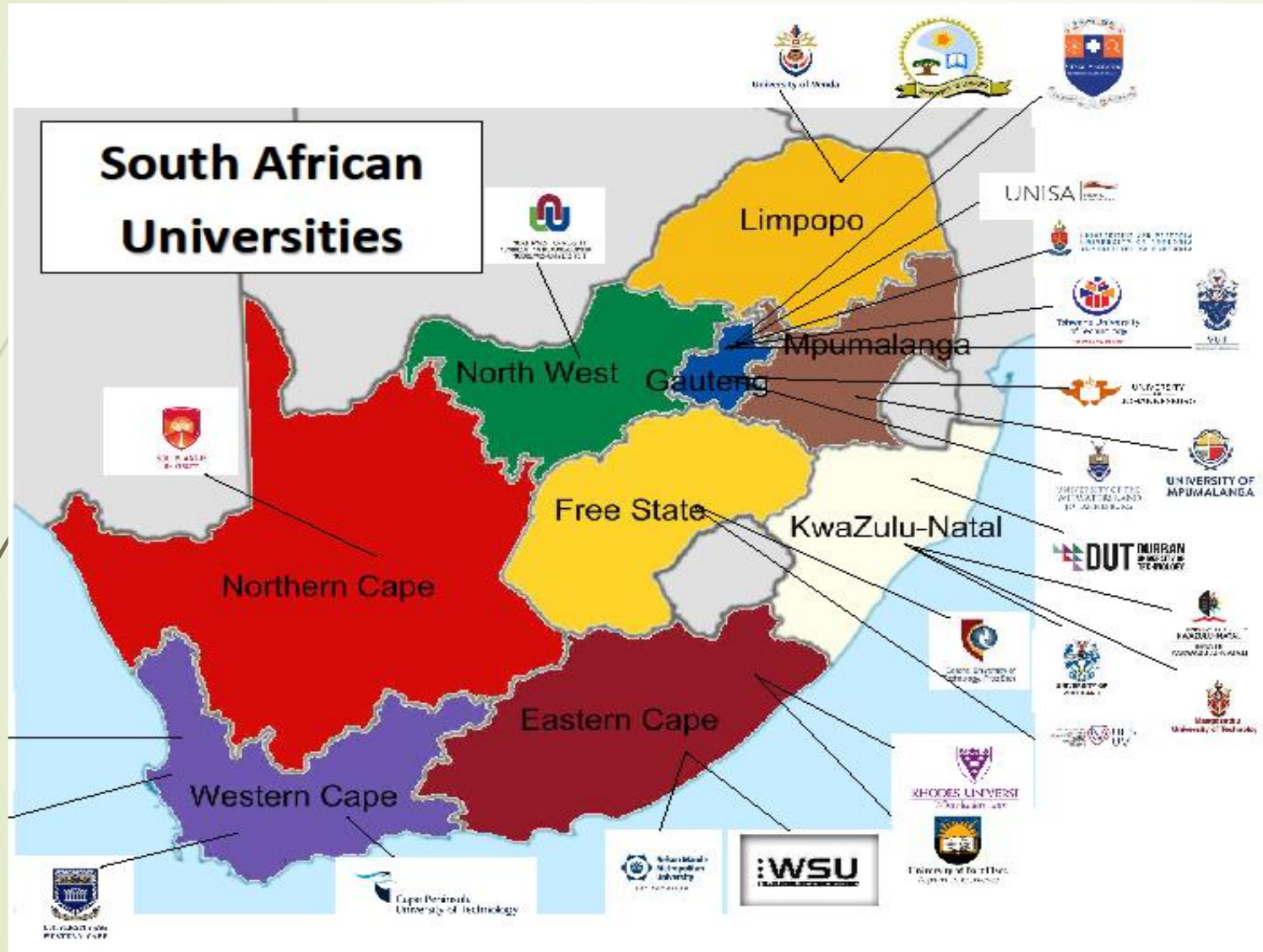
25-27 May 2016

# Overview of the Presentation

- Background
- Operational terms
- Rationale
- Methodology
- Key questions
- Findings
- Way forward

# Background

- Complex institutional make-up



## Campuses

- CPUT = 7
- CUT = 3
- DUT = 7
- MUT = 1
- UM = 2
- NMMU = 7
- RU = 1
- SMU = 1
- SPU = 1
- SUN = 5
- TUT = 7
- NWU = 3
- UJ = 4
- UCT = 4
- UFH = 3
- UKZN = 5
- UL = 2
- UNISA = distance
- UFS = 3
- UP = 6
- UNIVEN = 1
- UWC = 1
- WITS =
- UniZULU = 2
- VUT = 4
- WSU = 4

# Operational Terms

## Inventory

- A complete list of things in a place
- A supply of goods that are stored in a place
- The act or process of making a complete list of the things in a place

(Merriam-Webster's Learner's Dictionary 20.05.16)

## First-Year Experience (FYE)

- “The first-year experience is not a single program or initiative, but rather an intentional combination of academic and co-curricular efforts within and across postsecondary institutions.” (Koch & Gardner, 2006)
- “The FYE is defined as the programming and interactions that form the student experience from the first point of contact to the end of the first academic year. Modifying the FYE has been identified as one way to address issues related to transition to and through the first year.” (Renn & Reason, 2013)
- “FYE support refers to any **dedicated** activities aimed at assisting first year students adapt to and succeed at university.” (SANRC, 2016)

# Rationale for the Study

SANRC FYE Brainstorm (16 November 2015) was a key moment for the refining of the methodological design for the FYE Inventory

## The intention behind the Inventory is as follows:

- To fill a knowledge gap about the range and scope of programmes, projects and activities servicing South Africa's first-year students;
- Baseline information to inform the work of FYE scholars and practitioners towards student success in the first year of university study; and
- To support SA's universities to define and develop their own understandings of FYE as they work towards the development of programmes to support their students.

# Methodology

- Extensive consultation with SA's universities
- Survey
- Data analysis
- Follow-up in-depth interviews
- Report write-up

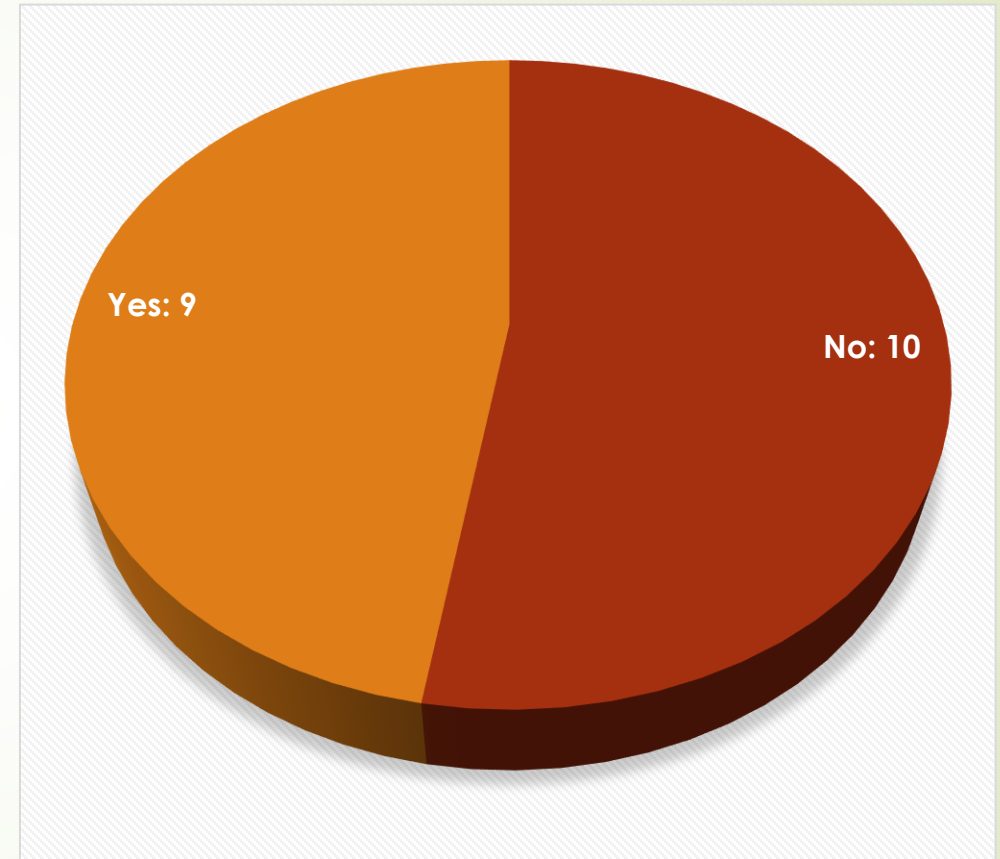


# Key Methodological Questions from the FYE Brainstorm

- What are the characteristic components of an FYE initiative or programme at institutions?
- What is the location of the FYE within the institution?
- How is the FYE defined by institutions?
- Is the FYE a stand alone initiative or is it part of an integrated approach by the institution toward retention?
- How much of the FYE is discipline specific versus generalist?
- How is the FYE staffed?
- How is the FYE funded?
- Is the FYE compulsory or by choice for students to take up?
- How is FYE evaluated? Is the FYE informed by data and research, and if so what are they?
- Is there intentionality to the FYE and a sense of measurable, specific outcomes for the FYE?

# Survey Response Rate

- ▶  $19/26 = 73\%$
- ▶ Multi-campus nature of SA's universities and their geographical spread
- ▶ Complexity of accessing data within institutions





# Key Areas of Analysis

## Institutions with a dedicated first-year support office

- FYE Personnel
- Mandate and Location
- Staffing
- Funding
- Support to students

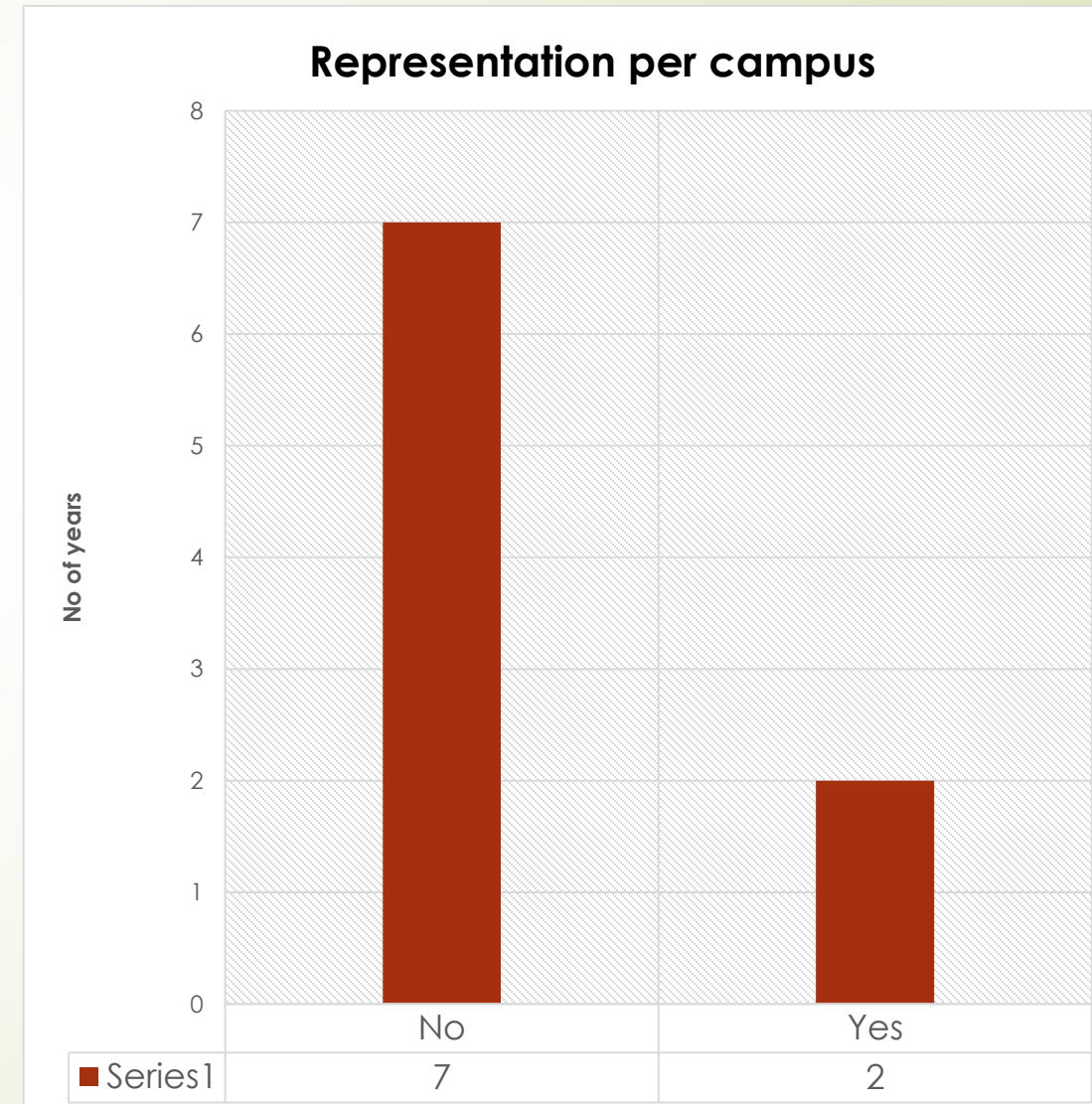
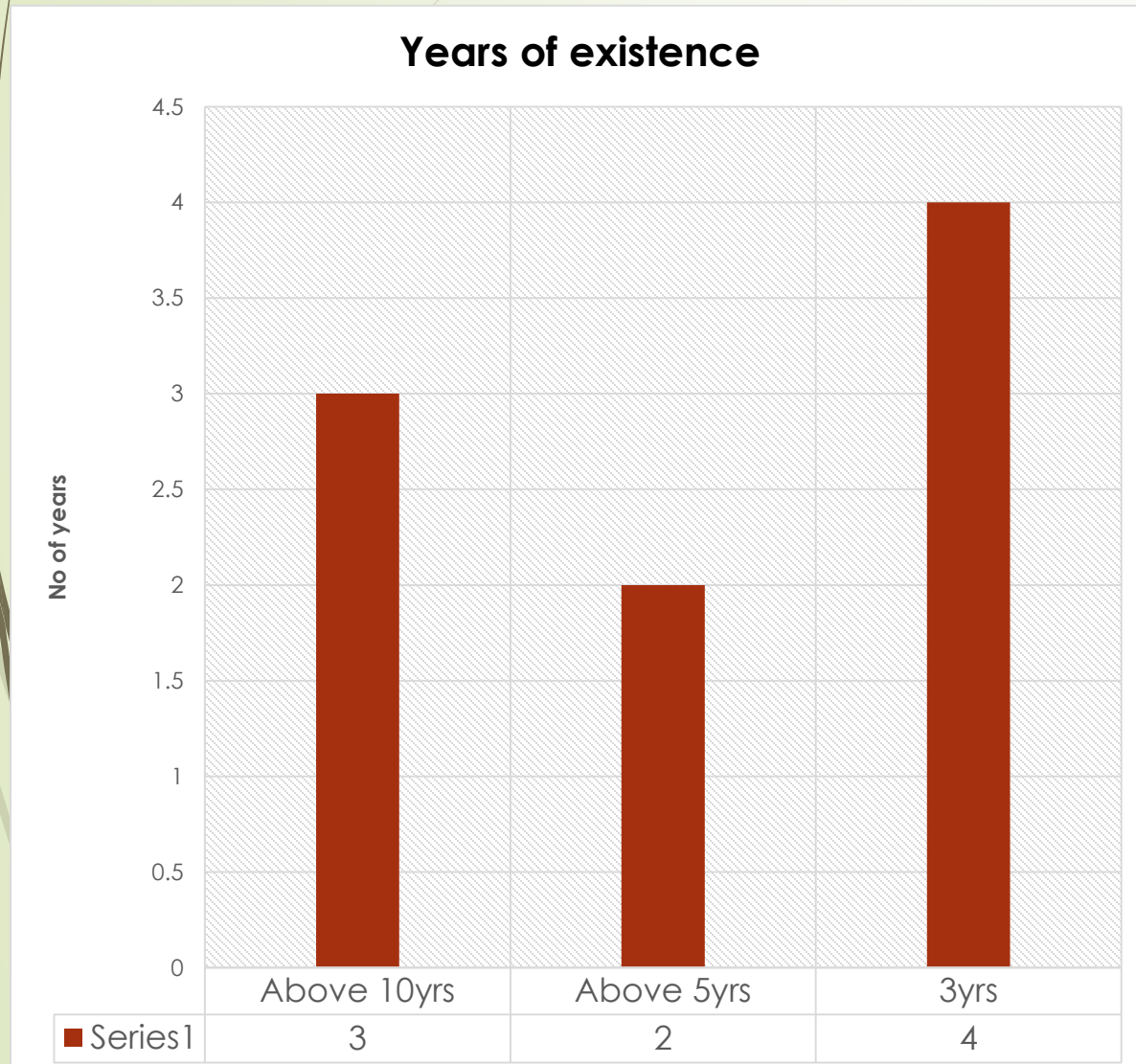
## Institutions without a dedicated first-year support office

- Key components of first-year support initiatives
- How first-year support is offered
- Intention to set up a dedicated FYE office

# Institutions with a Dedicated First-Year Support Office (N=9)



# Years of Existence and Representation Per Campus



# How First-Year Students in Different Campuses are Supported

- Within one institution, the types of support offered differ per campus- not equitable generally speaking:

*“There are designated staff members who are tasked to also look after certain functions pertaining to first-year students (e.g. orientation, wellness, and cultural activities). However, these campuses are not equitably resourced. Support from main campus is also given to the satellite campuses when requested.”*

*(Respondent Institution 17)*

- Evenness of support across campuses is required.
- Other campuses tend to be under-resourced and they generally service the needs of historically disadvantaged students. It is possible that this state of affairs may perpetuate the injustices of the past.

# Naming of Offices which offer Support toward First-Year Students

- First-Year Experience = 4
- First-Year Success = 1
- First Year Student Experience Programme Office = 1
- Learning and Teaching Development = 1
- Centre for Teaching and Learning = 1
- Centre for Student Structures and Communities = 1

# Mandate (some of the key phrases used by respondent institutions)

- Provision of support/student development
- Specialised professional expertise
- First year orientation/university experience
- Expectations of higher education
- Student retention, persistence and success
- Broad spectrum of co-curricular activities
- Campus-wide initiatives and ethos
- Central strategic direction for the FYE
- Conduct research pertaining to first-year students
- Create awareness of the needs of first-year students
- Scholarship driven advancement
- Excellence in teaching and learning
- Partnerships with academic staff
- Workshops for first-year students' lecturers
- Digital literacy

# Location of the Office

- DVC: Teaching and Learning = 1
- Academic Development and Support = 1
- Centre for Teaching and Learning = 1
- Academic Affairs and Research = 3
- Centre for Higher Education and Development = 2
- N/A = 1

# Staffing

## Designation of office heads

- Director = 3
- Coordinator = 3
- HoD = 1
- Programme Leader = 1
- Manager = 1

## Reporting Lines

- Mainly report to Senior Directors, Directors or DVC: Academic Affairs

## Number of staff members

- Total of 58.5 jobs across the 9 institutions
- Least = 1
- Highest = 23 (permanent)

## Permanency of posts

- 42 permanent
- 16.5 contract
- 104 associated posts e.g. Teaching assistants (Temporary)



# Staffing cont.

## Sufficiency of posts

No = 6

Yes = 2

Yes and No = 1

## Appropriateness of qualifications

➤ Yes = 8

➤ No = 1

➤ To seek clarity in follow-up interviews

*“No. The office should have at least three people. One administrative assistant and two permanent staff for all the work that has to be done.”*

*(Respondent institution no 13)*

*“No. We need at least one FYSE coordinator per campus across the seven campuses.”*

*(Respondent institution 19)*

*“No. Contract Staff”*

*(Respondent institution 18)*

# Funding Sources

- ▶ 1 = funded from the normal institutional budget (specifically allocated for first-year student support)
  - ▶ 1 = funds included in the supervising unit's budget (not specifically allocated for first-year support)
  - ▶ 5 = external funding grant
  - ▶ 1 = did not select any option
  - ▶ A, b and d = 1
- 
- First-year student support depends on external funding. Hence sustainability is not guaranteed.
  - More innovative ways of funding are needed.

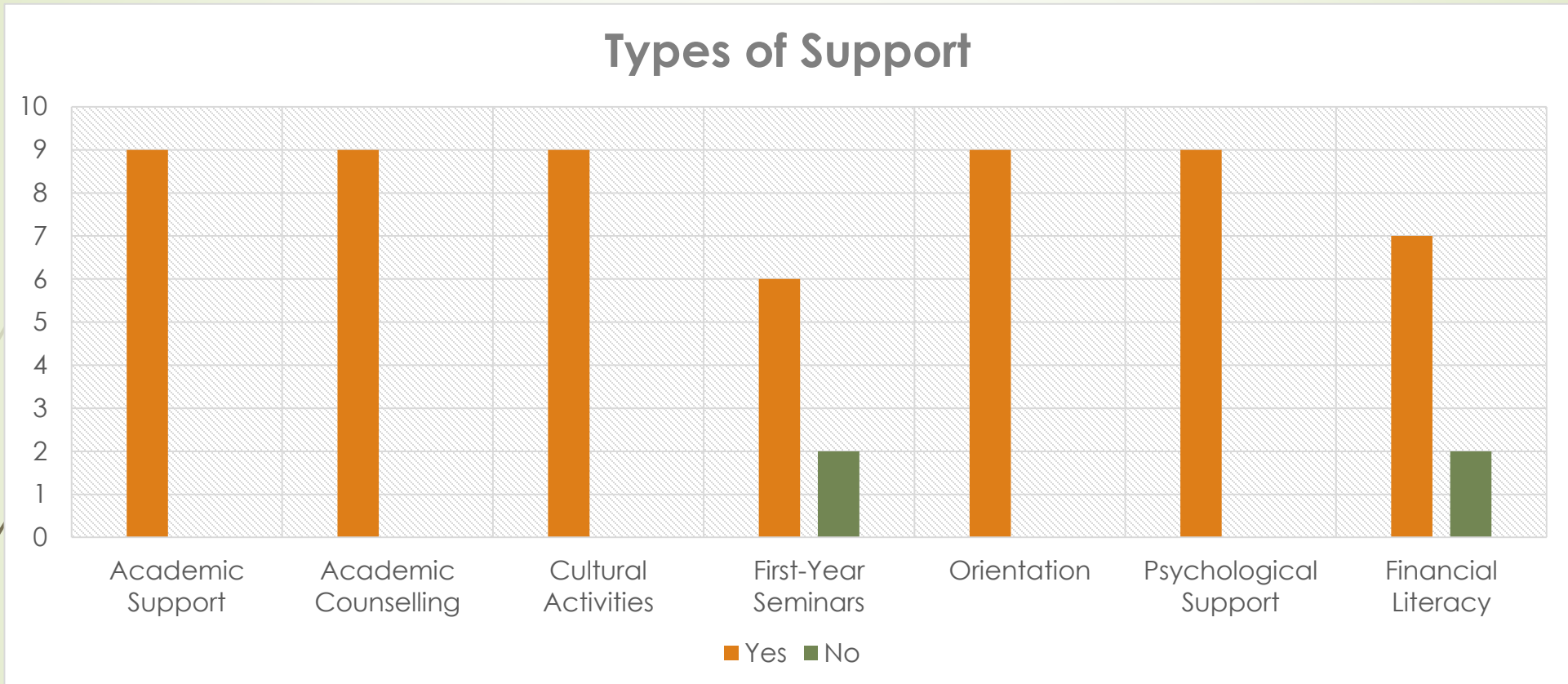
*"It is in the main budget but we are worried with the #feesmustfall"*

*(Respondent institution no 5)*

# Ways in which Offices are Supported at Institutional Level

- FYE compulsory for uptake
- Learning and teaching development founding documents
- Part of the teaching development policy
- Ear-marked funding/FYE budget/TDG grant
- Proposal approved by Senate
- FYE is a key performance area for the VC
- FYE action plans per faculty
- Deans to report on outcomes
- FYE strategic committee/advisory board
- FYE standing agenda in SCTL
- It is in the main budget but we are worried with the #feesmustfall

# Types of Support Offered by the Offices



- Majority of institutions were not able to give percentage estimates of uptake of support programmes by first-year students



# **Institutions without Dedicated First-Year Support Offices (N=10)**

# Key Components of First-Year Support Initiatives (N=3)

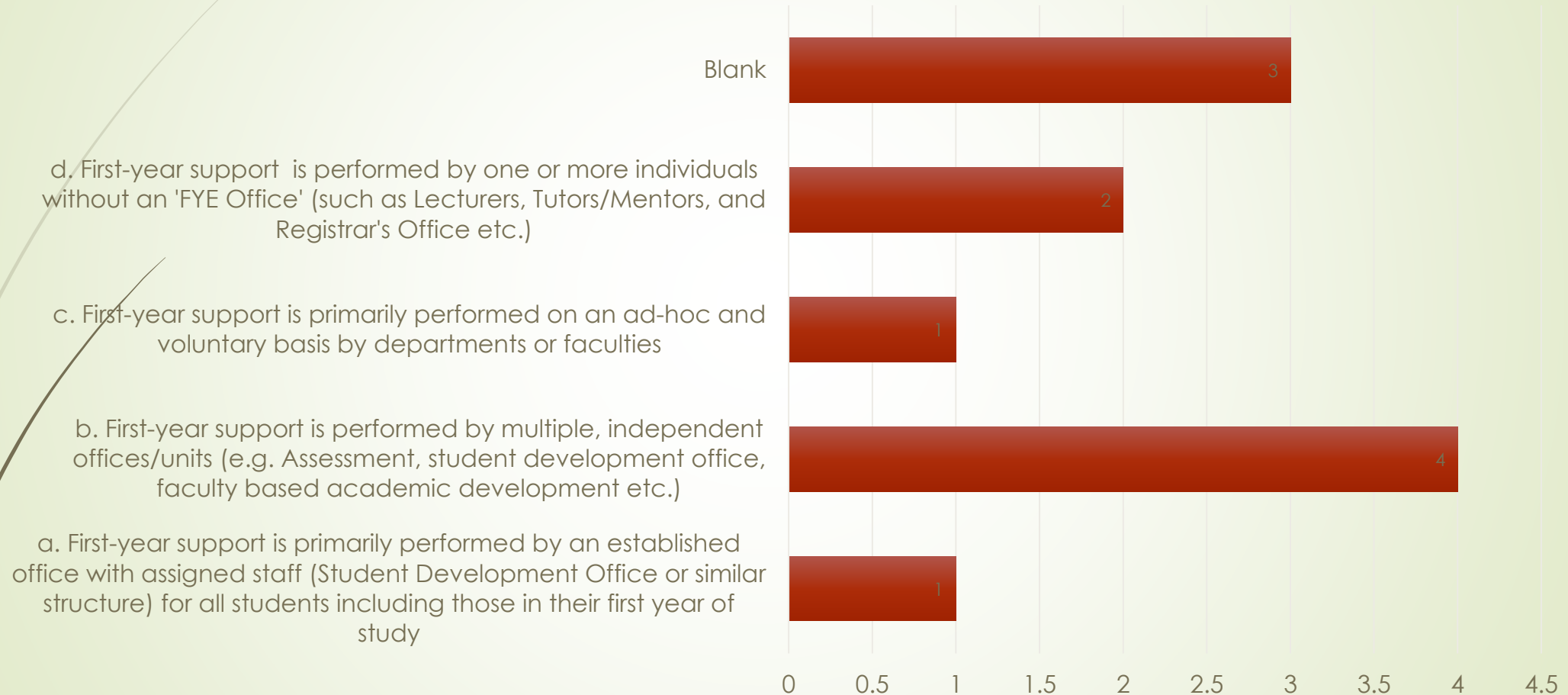
- *“To orientate students to the campus and make them feel at home, feel less intimidated with tertiary studies, and help them to participate in lectures and feel confident about their abilities.” (respondent institution 2)*
- *Orientation of first-year students (respondent institution 9)*
- *“Mentoring; Orientation; Tutoring; workshops” (Respondent institution 20)*

## **Are first-year support initiatives compulsory or by choice?**

- Compulsory = 2
- Only 1 component of the programme (orientation) is compulsory = 1

# How First-Year Support is Offered

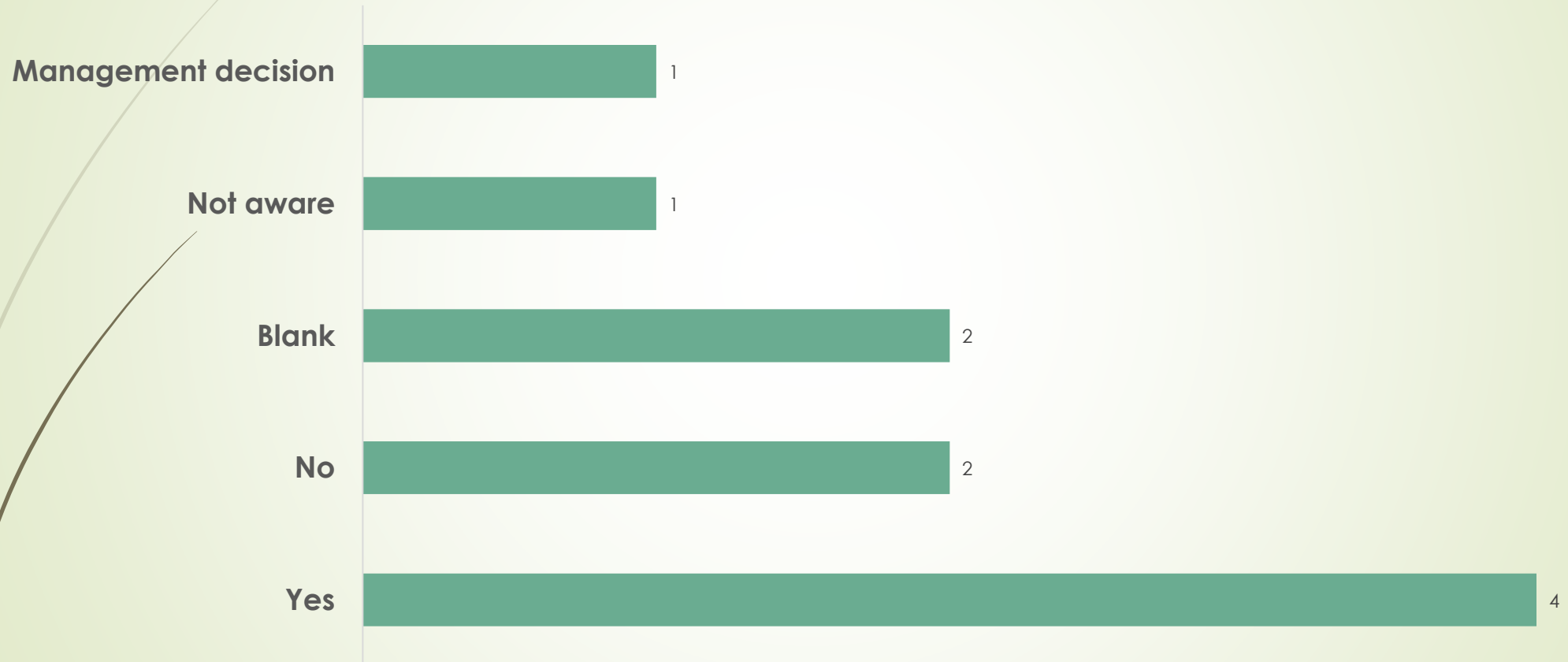
Scenario that best describes the support offered by the institution to first-year students



**\*\*1 institution uses both scenario b and d**

# Future Plans

Are there any plans in the near future to set up an office for first-year support?



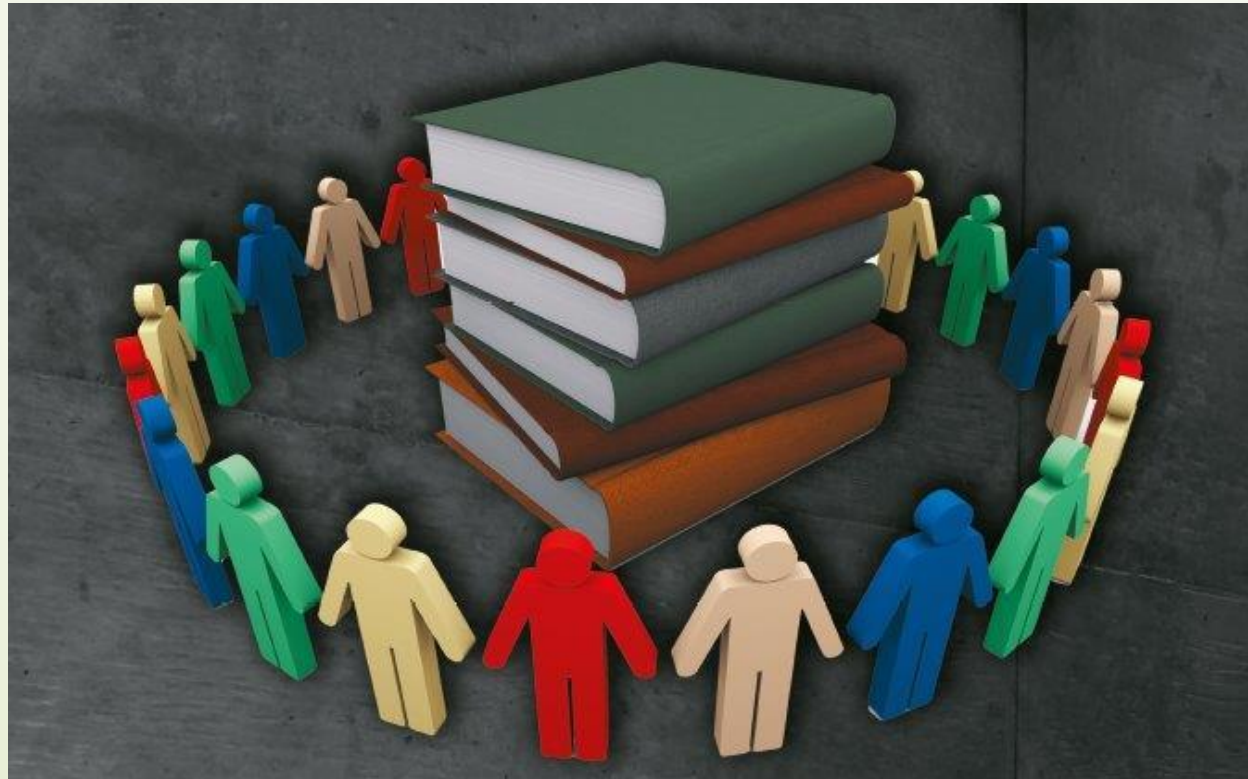


# Way Forward

- Phase 1 : Follow-up in-depth interviews
- HELTASA/ICED Conference 2016
- SANRC FYE Conference 2017
- Phase 1 report: First quarter of 2017
- Launch of Phase 2 in 2018
- Reiteration of the Inventory every 5 years

# Concluding Remarks

- The Inventory is for the benefit of all in SA's FYE knowledge community
- The Inventory requires national cooperation and collaboration





# Thank you!