

**External quality assurance in Higher Education as a tool towards
continuous improvement: A case study of two faculties of
education in South Africa**

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By

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ABSTRACT

This study explored external quality assurance in South African Higher Education as a tool towards continuous improvement. The Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) undertook external reviews of Teacher Education qualifications in faculties of education in South African universities. The process involved HEQC as an external body, through a consultative process with stakeholders, generated criteria and minimum standards to be used in the evaluation process. These criteria and minimum standards were used by faculties of education to carry out self-evaluation of their programmes. This process aimed at fulfilling accountability imperatives of accreditation as well as the developmental aspect entailed in the self-evaluation process and use of criteria and minimum standards. The aim of the study was to understand how the HEQC intervention promoted internal quality assurance practices towards continuous improvement.

This was a case study of two faculties of education at two universities. In-depth interviews were undertaken with selected academics who had participated in the national review process.

There were four main findings. Firstly, HEQC national review process promoted the construction of a culture of continuous improvement and self-regulation. Secondly, there was evidence that faculty policies, procedures and practices became standards driven. Thirdly, on the other hand, the national review process encouraged compliance at the expense of quality improvement. Fourthly, systems that drive the process of self-improvement were either developed or revived.

Given these findings, it can be concluded that the external review process generated the potential for continuous improvement. However, gains made on quality consciousness and practices in the absence of systems and structures are not sustainable.

The study recommends that, for practice, systems, structures and activities need strengthening at institutional and faculty level in order to sustain a culture of continuous improvement and a move towards self-regulation. External quality standards as provided by HEQC must be used as a basis for generating institutional and faculty quality standards, not adopted as they are. For further research, a study of what mechanisms lead to the development of enlightenment and self-regulation in an institution of higher education, and another study focusing on whether self-regulation is possible within the context of a bureaucratic society.

KEY WORDS: External Quality Assurance; Internal Quality Assurance; Standards; Systems; Structures; Culture.

DECLARATION

I declare that **External Quality Assurance in Higher Education as a tool towards continuous improvement: a case study of two Faculties of Education in South Africa** is my own work and that all the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete references.

.....

Signature

.....

Date

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Aan U al die lof, die eer en die heerlijkheid

O Grote God!

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ACRONYMS & ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Advanced Certificate in Education
AUQA	Australian University Quality Agency
B Ed (GET)	Bachelor of Education (General Education and Training Band)
CHE	Council on Higher Education
CNE	Comité National d'Evaluation
Etc	Etcetera
EFQM	European Foundation for Quality Management
ENQA	European Network for Quality Assessment in Higher Education
EQA	External Quality Assurance
EUA	European University Association
EU	European Union
Fig	Figure
HEI	Higher Education Institution
HEQC	Higher Education Quality Committee
i.e.	that is
JUAA	Japanese University Council
M Ed	Master of Education
MERCOSUR	Common Market of South America
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council
PGCE	Post graduate Certificate in Education
Post grad	Post Graduate
Ph D	Doctor of Philosophy
QA	Quality Assurance

QAA	Quality Assurance Agency
SAQA	South African Quality Authority
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats
TQM	Total Quality Management
USA	United States of America

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an overview of the study. It is divided into Quality Assurance in Higher Education: globally and nationally. The first section contextualises the study. This is followed by the statement of the research problem. The purpose and significance are also outlined. This is followed by delimitations, definitions of terms, methodology, limitations and an outline of the chapters.

1.1 Quality Assurance in Higher Education: A Global Concern

Over the past few decades a global demand for higher education has grown steadily. Financially, this has had a huge impact on countries where financial resources are often stretched to the limit. With the developing higher education sector, quality assurance has become more difficult and complex to administer and manage. Higher education systems are also increasingly affected by globalization, and transnational higher education (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006). Transnational education refers to students who come from another country other than that in which the awarding university is situated. Higher education has thus

become a global market, with very few regulatory forces and severe financial constraints.

In order to bring some control and value for money to stakeholders in national and international higher education, the European region established the Bologna Process in 1999, with the principal aim to improve education and life-long learning in order to improve the economic development of the region (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006). In 2003, members of the Bologna Process specifically asked the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) to develop a set of standards, procedures and guidelines on quality assurance for the entire region. This indicated the members' commitment to quality assurance in the European region and was the first concerted attempt by countries to unify their efforts regarding quality assurance. Their immediate aim was to encourage quality compliance among member states, with the intermediate aim of value for money, and the long term aim of, development of the economy for the benefit all.

Quality assurance received similar attention in South America, with countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay being full members of the Common Market of South America (MERCOSUR). The acronym MERCOSUR embraces member states, as well as associate member states, e.g. Peru, concerned with making degrees comparable among them, without interfering with national autonomy. The work focused on the design of a common experimental accreditation mechanism (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006). The main aim was to develop quality assurance practices acceptable by all member states, and aimed at ensuring the acceptance of accreditation of all degrees by all members

within the MERCOSUR area. This would allow transferability for students, as well as a trans border work force qualified to work in all the member states.

External quality assurance is the method of quality assurance applicable in the USA. Accreditation is carried out by private non-profit organizations. They ascertain if higher education institutions maintain minimum standards regarding academic, administrative and related services output. Five key issues comprise the accreditation process: self-study, peer-review, site visits by peers, accreditation conferred or not conferred, and an on-going cycle of external reviews (Mishra, 2007).

By contrast, in England external quality assurance is handled by the Quality Assurance Agency (QAA). The main purpose of this body is to assure the public that quality and standards within higher education in England are upheld. The foci for external quality assurance processes in the UK are on institutional audits and subject reviews. These are scheduled to take place every six years (Mishra, 2007).

External quality assurance processes vary from private organizations assuring quality output by institutions, as in the USA, to a governmental body controlling institutional and programmatic reviews in the UK, to Australia, where universities are self-accrediting. In Australia, all institutions of higher education are self-accrediting, which means they have in place a system of cyclical reviews involving external assessors. An umbrella organization was established by the government in Australia, called the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA). This is a non-profit, independent agency to promote, audit and report on quality assurance issues in Australian higher education. Criteria for auditing of quality assurance processes are

decided on by the universities themselves. The process comprises a self-review by the university, followed by submission of a portfolio to AUQA. A site visit by an AUQA team is arranged to perform external reviews. The outcome of the review will be based on 'commendable practices' and 'areas of improvement' (Mishra, 2007).

The emphasis on quality assurance, nationally and internationally, stems, according to Sutherland (Sutherland, 2007), from concerns regarding the decline in academic standards, as seen in the context of massification of higher education, the loss of financial stakeholder confidence in traditional academic quality management capabilities, and the financial crises in many countries. Moore (Moore, 2003) alludes to the fact that the changing role of universities in globalizing economies also poses a concern regarding quality output. In South Africa, a concern regarding differing standards across previously disadvantaged and advantaged institutions necessitated the emergence of a national quality assurance standards-based system.

1.2 Quality Assurance in South African Higher Education

This section covers two main themes, which are the Higher Education Quality Committee Perspective and the National Reviews of Teacher Education.

1.2.1 The Higher Education Quality Committee Perspective

Measures to determine the degree of quality output by higher education institutions have been implemented on a global scale, including South Africa. In South Africa the

Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) undertook national reviews of public sector higher education institutions, in accordance with the global trend. These reviews constituted visits to the institutions, and evaluation of self-assessment reports. The review process focused on programme accreditation and self-improvement. This study examined whether this improvement continued after the National Reviews. Finally, a report was made public on the state of Teacher Education in South Africa.

Quality assurance in institutions of higher education in South Africa came under scrutiny with the Higher Education Act of 1997, which made provision for the establishment of the Council on Higher Education (CHE). CHE established a permanent sub-committee called the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) with the responsibility of monitoring quality in the higher education sector (Sutherland, 2007). As in Europe, quality became a key factor in higher education in South Africa, with the focus on external accountability procedures (Van Damme, 2000). Singh and Lange posit that quality assurance is becoming an over-determining part of the policy and operational landscape in higher education across the globe (Singh & Lange, 2007).

The HEQC has established itself within an international higher education context, where quality assurance is linked to expectations of performance accountability (Singh, 2006). The HEQC is an independent agency, formulating its own policy frameworks in consultation with its stakeholders. The main focus of the HEQC's audits are to affirm the core values of academic excellence at institutions, rather than imposing external quality assurance values on them (HEQC, 2005).

External quality assurance reviews are undertaken by the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC). The HEQC focuses on three main areas of review as their understanding of quality: fitness for purpose, value for money, and transformation, as encompassed within a framework of fitness of purpose. These terms and concepts are discussed in Chapter 2. Included in the quality assurance system are self-evaluation, external evaluation and continuous improvement.

Fitness for purpose, as applied by the HEQC, speaks to the ability of institutions to disperse their responsibilities in relation to their stated missions (Council on Higher Education, 2011). It means that the combination of an institution's specialisations, approach and focus relative to core functions, available resources, location, all relationships, student and staff profiles and their place in the institutional mission will all be taken into account regarding quality assurance practices (Council on Higher Education, 2011).

Value for money conceptualisation emphasises the rate of return on investment. The idea of investment in education addresses the expectation that Higher Education will produce human capital whose knowledge and skills will benefit society in terms of knowledge and skills relevant for development. Quality assurance practices become important to ensure that Higher Education Institutions are accountable. Institutions need to be accountable to stakeholders; including the investment students are making (Harvey, 2007).

The over-arching fitness of purpose perspective includes all three of the above-mentioned. It deals with a close fit between the needs of society, as reflected in

national goals. The HEQC aims to determine if the institutions in South Africa are engaging with national goals through their teaching and learning practices (Council on Higher Education, 2011). The HEQC quality assurance evaluation process had an in-built opportunity for institutions to carry out self-evaluation. It is through this process of self-evaluation that the institutions were expected to develop a culture of continuous improvement.

HEQC as an external assurance partner in Higher Education works on the basis of three principles. These are: a commitment to support restructuring and transformation in the South Africa higher education sphere; a deliberative and procedural process that should lead to accountable higher education in South Africa, and guiding institutions towards improvement through the review process. HEQC is essentially setting up goals for quality, quality assurance, quality development, and quality improvement (HEQC, 2005). This study is only concerned only with the last.

1.2.2 National Reviews of Teacher Education

National reviews of teacher education focused on the accreditation of existing programmes in a specific discipline or qualification. The HEQC embarked on reviews of the M Ed, B Ed (GET), PGCE and ACE programmes in its first cycle of national reviews. It focused on the improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in specific areas, as well as compliance with norms and standards (Council on Higher Education, 2011). In concentrating on fitness for purpose and fitness of purpose (see

Chapter 2), the HEQC attempted to harmonise and standardise teacher education programmes in South Africa.

1.3 MOTIVATION FOR THE STUDY

During the first cycle of HEQC national reviews of Teacher Education Reviews, I participated in the review process as an academic, and leader of a unit, within the Faculty of Education that was being evaluated. During the process, it was evident to me that the interaction between external and internal evaluation processes seemed to create a culture of quality consciousness. Part of the exercise was to come up with a self-improvement plan. I wondered whether this was done for the purposes of the review or whether it could be sustained beyond the review.

1.4 RESEARCH PROBLEM

Jonathan (Jonathan, 2000) asserts that quality is the most important and treasured aspect of all higher education institutions, and is supported by the institution's ability to fulfil its mission, vision and delivery of quality programmes. During the time of the national reviews, the external evaluation by HEQC is assumed to have planted seeds for the continuous improvement through self-evaluation practices as well as self-improvement plans that were developed by faculties. The accreditation of the programmes within faculties was an outcome that signified that the unit being evaluated had met minimum standards. As part of the process, faculties were further required to produce self-improvement plans, which implied an expectation of

continuous improvement beyond minimum standards. This gave rise to the following questions:

Main Question

- How do external quality assurance processes promote continuous improvement?

Subsequent questions

- In what ways did the first cycle of HEQC national reviews of Teacher Education construct a culture of continuous improvement in quality?
- What practices and systems are in place to drive the process of continuous improvement?
- What quality assurance framework promotes continuous improvement?

1.5 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to understand how external quality assurance processes promote continuous improvement in two Faculties of Education in South Africa.

1.6 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study sought to understand what is happening in Faculties of Education beyond their achievement of minimum standards that could lead to their accreditation. It generated data that can be used to analyse the place that external evaluation has in promoting continuous improvement.

1.7 DELIMITATIONS

This study focused on internal and external quality assurance processes, and their potential to promote continuous improvement as reported by selected lecturers who had participated in the HEQC National Reviews of Teacher Education in South Africa. What this study did not do was to investigate self-regulation.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

For the purpose of this study the following terms were used, and understood to mean:

Quality: The term quality as used in the study, is intended to be in line with the HEQC understanding of quality (CHE, 2010). Quality was seen as fitness for purpose, fitness of purpose, value for money, and transformation. 'Fitness of purpose' encompasses quality within the context of national goals. 'Fitness for purpose' encompasses quality in relation to the institution's mission, within a national

framework to include diversity and differentiation. 'Value for money' indicates the programmatic offerings of the institution in relation to national benchmarks. Lastly, 'transformation' focuses on the development of the capabilities of individual students, especially including employment growth.

Standards: 'Standards' as a term used in the study, was seen to pertain to specific areas of attainment. The first area, academic standards, was applied to a specified level of academic achievement. The second area competence was applied to the levels of competencies being achieved, such as structural competence. Thirdly, it was applied to the service delivered by institutions to stakeholders, such as student tracking, and fourthly, to the standard of organisational practices and systems.

Accreditation: Accreditation was used in this study as proposed by Vlăsceanu, Grúnberg, and Pârlea. They explain accreditation as a process which includes a self-evaluation step, a visit by a review team, and lastly a final judgment based on the examination of the evidence provided by the self-evaluation report plus the team visit. Accreditation is the evaluation of the quality of an institution or faculty by an external agency (Vlăsceanu, Grúnberg, & Pârlea, 2004).

Quality Assurance refers to the systemic internal and external procedures used by an institution to give its stakeholders assurance of its output quality, and the ability to manage the quality. It also refers to the process of maintaining standards reliably and consistently by applying national and international benchmarking to all its programmes. Quality assurance is seen as a continuous process evaluating the

quality of systems inherent in an institution. It is based on the existence of institutional systems and practices, supported by a culture of quality.

1.9 METHODOLOGY

This study was a qualitative study. Qualitative research is described by Denzin & Lincoln (Denzin, & Lincoln, (eds), 2000) as a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. The research was located within a qualitative interpretive paradigm, as I was interested in assessing and interpreting the essence of the continuous improvement of quality assurance processes at two South African universities. I was also interested in the experiences and perceptions of the academics who have gone through the HEQC review processes as staff members of the selected faculties.

Having formulated the research questions, I identified the faculties of education as units of analysis for the study. Data collected from the faculties were collected via semi-structured interviews. Academics were selected as participants, on the basis of their involvement in the reviews of Teacher Education. This was followed by an inductive approach to data analysis, moving from specific to general data. Having analysed the data, concepts were developed, meanings derived and interpretations discussed. In Chapter 3 of the study an in-depth presentation of the methodology applied to the study is given.

1.10 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study took place five years after the conclusion of the first cycle of the HEQC national reviews. This meant that the participants who were key informants had to recall what had transpired during the reviews. However, this turned out to be an advantage because the study focused on what was happening beyond the reviews.

1.11 ORGANISATION AND STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

The research study consists of the following interrelated research report chapters:

Chapter One: Introduction and Background

This chapter has set the scene for the research report. It offers a brief overview of what is to follow in the next chapters. It starts with a perspective on quality assurance internationally and nationally, including Teacher Education reviews. This is followed by different sections including the problem statement of the study, and significance of the study, rounding off with the limitations of the study and the organisation of the research report.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

Quality and quality assurance receive particular attention in this chapter. Linked to the notion of quality assurance are the two processes of quality assurance, namely, internal quality assurance and external quality assurance. Moving on from these two sections I presented different models of quality assurance with the aim of leading to

continuous improvement. The models presented end with an overview of the model adopted for South African Higher Education. I round off the chapter by presenting the conceptual framework for the study, followed by a brief summary.

Chapter Three: Methodology

This study was anchored in the interpretivist paradigm. It was a case study of two Faculties of Education and data were collected through in-depth interviews. Details of the data collection procedures and ethical considerations are outlined in chapter 3.

Chapter Four: Data Presentation and Analysis

Chapter Four offers the ways in which the first cycle of national reviews constructed a culture of continuous improvement in faculties. (The 'ways' can be divided into ways of thinking and ways of doing things). It then moves to practices and systems in place in faculties that drive the process of continuous improvement. Lastly, it looks at possible threats to the process of continuous improvement as perceived by participants.

Chapter Five: Discussion of Findings

From the presentation of data and analysis, we move to the discussion of the findings. The importance of the HEQC process is discussed, linked to the theoretical framework of the study. A shift in the power relations, driving quality assurance in

faculties was indicated by the findings, therefore Barnett's evaluation framework had to be adapted to be in line with the study's findings. Systems and structures in quality assurance are then discussed, followed by a discussion on the possible generation of a framework for standards by institutions. This chapter ends with a proposed model for quality assurance.

Chapter Six: Summary, Conclusions and Recommendations

A short summary of each chapter gives an overview of the research report following the introduction to this chapter. Accreditation as driver of HEQC external reviews of teacher education is singled out as a motivator for compliance, which in turn promotes bureaucracy and technicism. Based on the findings of the study, a possible conclusion is that external reviews can lead to continuous improvements in the quality of faculties. Another possibility is that power, as yielded by the HEQC, can also be mediated by internal evaluation processes. The chapter concludes with recommendations for practice and further study, such as the adoption of the HEQC criteria by faculties, for faculties, and possible study of the development of enlightenment and self-regulation in institutions.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2. INTRODUCTION

The contextual framework of this study was presented in Chapter One ending in an overview of the different chapters of the research report. In this chapter, the concepts of quality and quality assurance are addressed through different perspectives. First, the meaning of quality and quality assurance in higher education is explored. It is followed by a look into two applications of quality assurance external and internal quality assurance. The application of quality assurance in higher education institutions is governed by models of quality assurance. These models are discussed, ending with the adopted South African model of quality assurance. The chapter concludes with a presentation and discussion of the theoretical framework of the study.

2.1 QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

In higher education, quality assurance plays a specific role. It is the overseer of evaluation, thus maintaining, improving, guaranteeing, monitoring and assessing quality in institutions and faculties. Quality assurance has become a key area of functionality in higher education. Harvey (Harvey, 2007) states that quality assurance in higher education is about convincing others of the adequacy of the processes of learning.

Quality assurance in higher education is multi-faceted with facets building on each other. Together they form a system of quality assurance. It fulfils different functions in higher education. These functions relate to the accreditation of programmes, the supervision of aspects of institutional life such as the development of new programmes, administration and finance. It also provides information on the recognition and accreditation status of institutions and programmes.

Quality assurance serves a regulatory function as well. It focuses on accountability and improvement, providing judgments through agreed processes informed by established criteria. Two variations of quality assurance are normally present in higher education; these are internal quality assurance and external quality assurance (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006). These variations will both be discussed in detail later in this chapter. Quality assurance has gained prominence in Europe as well as in South Africa in the face of concerns regarding potential decline of standards due to the massification of education. The loss of business confidence in traditional quality management, and financial constraints, also served as an impetus for the establishment of internal and external quality assurance processes in institutions (Sutherland, 2007).

In South Africa, quality assurance is used by HEQC to steer institutions towards transformation and social responsibility. Quality assurance has thus become a mechanism towards establishing social justice, and levelling the inequalities of the past education system (Lockett, 2007). Singh and Lange (Singh & Lange, 2007)) caution that quality assurance is becoming an over-determining part of the policy and

of operational landscape in higher education throughout the world. It is legitimised in such a role since accountability to stakeholders has become the all prevailing idea in higher education. This ties in with the accountability mandate of HEQC in their first round of reviews of Teacher Education programmes.

Harvey (Harvey, 2007), cautions against the use of quality and quality assurance as a similar concept therefore we now turn to a discussion on the concept of 'quality'.

2.1.1 The Different Conceptions of Quality

Senge (Senge, 1995, p. 18) reminds us of the roots of the quality movement in a very apt way:

The roots of the quality movement lie in assumptions about people, organizations, and management that have one unifying theme: to make continual learning a way of life, especially improving the performance of the organization as a total system.

Linked to Senge's view on the roots of quality, is the view of Harvey and Green. They point out that stakeholders will determine the quality in an organization. Harvey and Green (Harvey & Green, 1993) see the concept of quality as relative since stakeholders determine the quality of what, and for whom. Also, quality is not an absolute concept, it is not only relative; it is also compromising. It compromises the processes and contexts as presented in attaining the outcomes. Therefore the perspective of the stakeholders will determine what they deem 'quality' to be. The

contextual nature of quality can be further described by alluding to the working definition of the European University Association (EUA) (European University Association, 2007) which states that diversity in higher education includes diversity of institutional profiles, missions of different universities, and the different legal regulatory frameworks governing universities in different countries in Europe. All of this speaks of quality being a relative contextual phenomenon linked to the contexts of individual higher education institutions (European University Association, 2007)

Blackmur (Blackmur, 2007) points to the fact that the discussion around the notion of quality should rather centre on the 'qualities' of higher education, instead of being focused on the 'quality' of higher education. Based on this interpretation, Blackmur suggests that quality can have two perspectives; these are quality for purpose, and quality of purpose. Harvey and Green (Harvey & Green, 1993) listed four main categories of definitions of quality in higher education, namely, quality as excellence, quality as conformity to standards, quality as fitness for purpose, and quality as value for money. These are the more general qualities. Harvey (Harvey, 2007) has added a fifth category, quality as transformation, meaning a qualitative change in the form of enhancement and empowerment.

'Fitness for purpose' seems to be the definition understood by most people to describe quality, and this term opens up the view that quality is geared towards the stakeholders, but is always relative to its purpose. Recently a more subjective understanding of quality has been gaining ground, with multi-actor involvement, leading to multi-dimensional understandings (Westerheijden, 1999) The term 'fitness for purpose' seems to be too simplistic in its understanding of quality: it needs

'fitness of purpose' to be added to contain the entire concept of quality. If fitness of purpose is not added, quality assurance will become a mere fitness for purpose technical exercise. (Westerheijden, 1999). However Harvey (Harvey, 2007) points out that the notion of 'fitness of purpose' does not define quality as such, but rather pertains to evaluate whether the quality-related intensions of an institution are adequate. Fitness of purpose, according to Harvey, engages with the purpose as opposed to the concept of quality. Fitness for purpose offers two alternative priorities for specifying purpose. First, the purpose is to meet customer specifications. Higher education tends not to adhere to this purpose, but rather focuses on fulfilling their mission statements. Second, fitness for purpose is judged by quality assessment and accreditation (Harvey, 2007).

Sursock (Sursock, 2001) alludes to contrasting definitions regarding quality. Fitness for purpose according to Sursock, might indicate that quality is assessed against a specific purpose at higher education institutions. This in turn points to all quality assessed activities having specific purposes aligned to individual universities mission and vision statements. If we add 'fitness of purpose', it means that the relevance of purposes as well as the attainment of these purposes is assessed. In contrast with this, Sursock also mentions quality as a threshold. This means quality assessments will be linked to minimal norms and standards. In contrast with the single institution outlook of the 'fitness for purpose' view, the 'quality as threshold' definition speaks to an entire system of higher education institutions. The norms and standards are generic, not specific to single universities, but are used in all universities in the system. However, setting norms and standards do not foster change or

diversification, which is very important in the world of international competition of higher education (Sursock, 2001).

Referring to standards, Harvey and Green (Harvey & Green, 1993) classify standards in terms of high standards, thus excellence in performance, which is only possible on a limited scale. In terms of student performance, it can be linked to the best students being admitted to a university, assuring quality output. It implies that quality is improved if standards are raised. Quality assurance in higher education should be linked to the maintenance and improvement of standards. However, Harvey and Green (Harvey & Green, 1993) warn against the prevailing focus on standards in higher education, since standards are not easily measurable or quantifiable. Measurement and quantification point to quality control, instead of continuous quality assurance, which will ensure consistency in higher education processes and practices.

Quality has many meanings for many people. As Harvey and Green (Harvey & Green, 1993) mentioned, quality means different things to different people, based on its relativity to outcomes and processes. We now turn to the concept of quality assurance as applied in higher education.

2.1.2 Quality Assurance

Salter (Salter & Tapper, 2000, p 66) describes quality assurance as follows:

As part of the continuing struggle for control over the regulation of high status knowledge, quality assurance combines technical, bureaucratic and value elements in ways which give power to some and remove it from others. As an ideological form, it is comprehensive in scope, flexible in its presentational form, and capable of legitimizing an ambitious alliance of both existing and emerging groups in the politics of higher education.

Various researchers have attempted to define the concept of quality assurance. The HEQC (Venter & Bezuidenhout, 2008) describes quality assurance as having a bearing on the policies, systems and processes directed at ensuring the quality of education provided in an institution. According to Venter and Bezuidenhout (Venter & Bezuidenhout, 2008, p. 1114) quality assurance pertains to:

...the integration of methods, thinking and approach, that triangulates in a synergistic manner and informs the complexities and nuances of all core activities related to programme management and implementation, as well as quality management, namely quality control, evaluation, reflection, growth, development and enhancement, and planning.

Barnett (Barnett, 1994) states that quality assurance in the European countries implies multiple purposes and is being driven by different interest groups. According to him, academics, government and market forces are the drivers of quality assurance in Europe. The forms of quality assurance to which he is alluding to

should serve a summative function, that is quality, and a formative function, that is quality improvement.

Evaluation of the quality assurance practice can be guided by the following focus areas as stated by Barnett (Barnett, 1994): fitness for purposes, meaning benchmarking against an institution's own standards or a universal set of standards, and summative or formative evaluation. This means evaluating past performances or promoting future performances. The third focus area is accountability or self-learning. This speaks to accountability and self-learning that will lead to self-knowledge. Another focus area is quality control which entails the employment of interventions to solve problems in the institution. Next is norm-referencing which refers to benchmarking, at national and international level. The last focus area according to Barnett, aims at stakeholder satisfaction. This means that the voice of the stakeholders needs to be acknowledged.

Wong (Wong, 2012) provides three issues inherent in quality assurance, namely, the 'who', referring to the people engaged in teaching and learning, the 'what', referring to the resources and infrastructure supporting the act of teaching and learning, and, the 'how', pointing to three aspects, namely, implementation details, operational approaches and the decision-making process. Operational approaches, according to Harvey (Harvey, 2007) include accreditation, audit, assessment and checking of standards.

Systems of external quality assurance may be composed of different components, i.e. an institutional review, quality audit, and the most widely used method,

accreditation. **Accreditation** makes an explicit judgment as to whether a programme or higher education institution meets pre-defined quality standards. A set of existing criteria is always involved, as in a set of minimum standards, standards of best performance or standards based on the mission of the institution. Accreditation makes an explicit judgment regarding the degree to which standards are met by the programme or institution accredited. (Martin, 2010). Accreditation usually involves extensive documentation developed by an institution. This will be a result of the peer-review conducted before the actual accreditation process takes place. Goals, resources, facilities and internal evaluation processes will be described, as well as an assessment of achievements in relation to goals (Harman, 1998).

Accreditation has changed over the last few years, especially in the United States of America (USA). This is due to public criticism. Currently, there is more focus on quality management systems within institutions, as well as informing the public of accreditation outcomes. Generally the accreditation process in the USA focuses on organisational and administrative matters. It also focuses on resources. These will be financial resources, staffing, space - especially teaching venues and equipment available to the unit being accredited. Two important foci for the accreditation are the curriculum, especially compliance with national programme directives, and the performance statistics for graduates. This last focus covers up to the employability of graduates, as well work performance and applicability of their degree to the market. This model has been followed in many Latin-American and Asian countries (Ei-Khawas, 1993)

Given the above, Kohler (Kohler, 2003, p 315) defines accreditation as:

a procedure of quality assessment aiming at formal approval of a study programme or an institution, by a non-government body of experts and, possibly and preferably by stakeholders

Chernay (Chernay, 2007) sees accreditation as a different process to establish if institutions have clearly defined and educationally-appropriate objectives, if they maintain conditions under which achievement can be expected, if they are accomplishing set objectives in a substantial way, they be expected to do so in the future.

In South Africa, the HEQC has accredited Teacher Education programmes in their first round of external teacher programme reviews. The HEQC has formulated accreditation as: granting recognition to programmes satisfying the HEQC's minimum standards; protecting students from poor quality delivery by institutions, and encouraging and supporting institutions to exceed minimum standards. They also deemed accreditation as facilitating a cooperative approach to accreditation that maximizes the capacity of quality assurance (Pretorius, 2003).

The view on accreditation as an instrument to determine quality by the HEQC, is summed up by Young et al (Young, Chambers, & Kells, 1983), when they allude to education quality as defined and interpreted within the institution's/programme's mission statement as compared to similar institutions and programmes; as well as to institutional integrity, that the institution is what it says it is, and does what it says it does.

In higher education, accreditation is a process of external quality assurance used to determine quality and to encourage quality improvement. Van Vught (Van Vught, 1994, p. 42) calls accreditation- '*...the most fully developed institutionalization of the idea of accountability in higher education.*'

The accreditation process involves an institution evaluating itself, or a specific programme, and the accrediting body verifying what the institution has said about itself or its programmes. The accreditation process will involve a two-pronged approach; firstly a self-study conducted internally by the institution to benchmark its standards against its own objectives, and secondly, an external process, namely, a peer-review by peers from outside the institution. (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006)

A similar process of accreditation is followed in South Africa and Denmark. (DEI, 2003) Self-analysis, or self-study, is generally conducted as the eventual basis on which the external review will be based. It offers the opportunity for academics and stakeholders to claim ownership of the process, setting the scene for a very effective form of evaluation. If the aim of the review is self-improvement, then the self-evaluation by academics is a crucial step in the process (Van Damme, 2000). Billing (Billing, 2004) points out that, although quality assurance agencies normally provide guidelines or guiding questions for a self-analysis exercise, different aims can be aspired to. Self-critical analysis, analytical analysis or an information-generating exercise can be the aim.

Once the internal evaluation has been concluded, an external peer review follows. A panel of experts is appointed by the accrediting agency. The panel will study the self-evaluation report, conduct a site visit, and based on its findings, validates the self-evaluation report (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006) and (DEI, 2003).

The process of accreditation is summarized by Vlăsceanu, Grünberg, and Pârlea. They mention three steps in the accreditation process. The first step is a self-evaluation process conducted by faculty, staff and administrators resulting in a report that takes as its reference the set of criteria and standards of the accrediting body. Secondly, a study visit is conducted by a team of peers selected by the accrediting organization. The team will review the evidence, visit the site, and interview the academic and administrative staff, resulting in an assessment report, including a recommendation for the commission of the accrediting body. Thirdly, an examination is conducted by the commission of the evidence and recommendations on the basis of the given set of criteria concerning quality, and resulting in a final judgment and the communication of the formal decision to the institution and other constituencies, as appropriate (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006).

Accreditation thus means quality assurance at internal and external levels. For improvement and accountability purposes, the external process leans heavily on the internal process.

The aims mentioned, accountability and improvement, have been identified by researchers, such as Vroeijenstijn. He mentions that improvement especially, is

aimed at, when external quality assurance is the process. Other aims then become subordinate (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). An attempt is made by institutions to strive for the best, to improve, and to ensure certain goals are reached. The dual goal of accreditation is to provide guidelines for institutions to maintain and to improve in order to achieve reasonable standards.

In developing a quality assurance apparatus, Van der Westhuizen, Strydom and Fourie (Fourie, Strydom, & Stetar, 1999) mention that the South African Government had two options, either to develop a quality assurance apparatus, i.e. HEQC, that would accept operational responsibility for quality assurance at national level by developing a framework of standards, or, to develop a model of quality assurance that would devolve quality assurance downwards to the institutions themselves. The first option was chosen by the state, and HEQC was developed as a standing structure of Council on Higher Education (CHE). The rationale behind this decision was that a central agency, taking responsibility for quality assurance would add to a national identity in an otherwise politically-fragmented system (Soudien, 2007).

Two kinds of activities have been prioritized by the HEQC in South Africa, namely, institutional audits and programme accreditation. In the case of programme accreditation, the HEQC has developed a strong framework of reference to enable them to assess the capacity of institutions to design, deliver and ensure quality in the programmes they are offering. (Soudien, 2007) Lange (Lange, 2006) mentions that the HEQC, in its quest to accredit programmes, has moved from arbitrary features of individual institutions to a narrow focus on accountability. Institutions have to declare their mission and programme mix. Fitness for purpose is the driving force used for

accreditation of programmes. However, as Soudien (Soudien, 2007) asserts, the term 'fitness' is problematic, in the sense that it seems as if institutions and the education system in which the institutions find themselves differ regarding the meaning of the term. The HEQC has based its quality assurance model on developments in other countries. Liston (Liston, 1999) summarizes the common elements present globally in the accreditation processes as starting with a mission and a philosophy. The next element focuses on the content; these are substantive knowledge, intellectual skills and professional skills. The next elements, antecedents comprised students whose prior knowledge, entry requirements, pastoral care and general guidance are scrutinized during accreditation. Faculty qualifications and experience of academics are also considered and benchmarked. Transactional issues such as teaching, learning, research and operational issues are looked at. Immediate and intermediate outcomes are attended to. The immediate outcomes speak to graduation criteria and the intermediate outcomes speak to competence in practice. The last two elements mentioned by Liston pertain to assessment and physical aspects. Assessment is concerned with internal and external assessment of programmes and the methods and criteria used to assess students. Physical aspects under scrutiny during accreditation are resources, as in finances, facilities, equipment, supplies, and library, as well as staff resources.

The aim of programme accreditation done by the HEQC, shares the goal of evaluating social transformation at programmatic level with institutional audits. The accreditation framework also focuses on quality-related goals of increased access, success and equity for previously disadvantaged groups (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006). Two phases of accreditation for new programmes have

been introduced by the HEQC, with each phase having its own set of criteria. The first phase, the candidacy phase, is focused on support of staff and students as well as student retention. The second phase is aimed at teaching and learning considerations. The accreditation of existing programmes is dealt with through national reviews. Criteria include the general criteria as determined by the HEQC, and also those related to specific disciplinary practices and standards. Outcomes for programmes accredited as part of a national review, include full accreditation, accreditation with conditions and no accreditation. The outcomes allow for accountability and improvement, especially in the case of former historically-disadvantaged institutions. An opportunity for development and improvement is created (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006).

Currently the HEQC is preparing itself for a second cycle of quality assurance in higher education. The main aim will be to improve the quality of teaching and learning at undergraduate level, at institutions of higher education. It will include institutional reviews, instead of the 'audits' carried out by the HEQC in the first round of quality assurance. This is not in line with international views, since globally the process of quality assurance by external agencies is still called 'audits'. However, the South African Higher Education sector intimated that there was a need for change in the forensic approach of an 'audit', hence 'reviews' at institutional level will be carried out. Programme accreditation will focus on the quality of teaching and learning, and most importantly, ascertain the degree of alignment of programmes offered with the new Higher Education Qualifications Framework (Council on Higher Education, 2011).

The HEQC in South Africa has committed itself to a quality-driven higher education sector that contributes to socio-economic development, social justice and innovative scholarship in South Africa. By planning and developing the second cycle of quality assurance, it continues to live up to its vision and mission. (Higher Education Quality Committee, 2001).

Quality audits have different labels, e.g. institutional audit, quality audit, evaluation of quality assurance systems, or enhancement-led institutional reviews. The quality assurance system referred to means the environments and quality assurance systems at national and international levels, and the environment and quality assurance system of an individual higher education institution. The quality audits should include an evaluation of how institutions take care of these matters in their strategic planning, management process and internal processes. Another aim of quality audits is to support higher education institutions in their quality management and performance enhancement (Kettunen, 2008).

Assessment, or quality assessment, means the assessment of every structured activity which leads to a judgment of the quality of teaching, learning and/or research. According to Vroeijenstijn (Vroeijenstijn, 1995), assessment, review and evaluation are interchangeable terms. Standards checking, according to Harvey (Harvey, 2007) alludes to external examination of the institution's academic achievement, the professional competence of its academics and performance indicators or student evaluation of services provided to them.

The larger system of quality assurance is described by Wong (Wong, 2012) as having three themes, namely integration, responsiveness and innovativeness. Integration means the interrelatedness and interdependence of sub-systems. These are academics/practitioners, infrastructure, and policies and practice. The last system, policies and practice, comprises the biggest system of quality assurance. External factors are not the only influences impacting on the system. It is also impacting on the sub-systems. Adaptation, change, and innovation are inherent in the entire system. The ecology concept emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the various members of the system, the fact that an understanding regarding the processes must be reached, and the importance of certain inalienable conditions to ensure the survival of particular traits in the system.

Responsiveness speaks to timeliness and effectiveness. It refers to the timeliness of responses from the environment, to challenges. Responsiveness needs to be seen in the context of the institution, and the specific stakeholder population of that institution.

Innovativeness speaks to uniqueness and functionality of the process, as well as to the products/services delivered. Practitioners might be innovative in their practice, implementation might be innovative, infrastructure support might be innovative, and/or innovation might be involved in the solving of problems (Wong, 2012).

Wong's ecology of quality assurance can help to position quality assurance in its proper context. This framework by Wong helps bring home the essence of quality as a process, not as a product. It requires constant refinement and redefinition of

performance measurements, alignment of new practices and standards, and facilitation of the process to enhance efficiency and effectiveness (Wong, 2012).

Table 2.1

A framework for quality assurance developed by Wong:

Attributes	Dimensions of environment – practitioners, infrastructure, policies and practices	Quality expected	Major considerations
Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Human and material resources • Policy, practice and performance standards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coherence • Efficiency 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional efforts
Responsive ness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expectations and requirements • Needs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Timeliness • Effectiveness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional efforts • Clients’ perception
Innovativeness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Product • Process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uniqueness • Functionally 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Institutional efforts • Clients’

			perception <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Authority's assessment
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(Wong, 2012, p. 42)

This framework of quality assurance highlights the notion that quality assurance is an awareness and commitment by all the role players, thus developing a culture of quality, enhanced by processes, procedures and tools.

Harman (Harman, 1998) defines quality assurance as systematic management and assessment procedures adopted to ensure the achievement of specified quality or improved quality, and to enable key stakeholders to have confidence in the management of quality and outcomes achieved.

Quality needs standards. **Standards** were defined by the American Society for Quality (American Society for Quality, 2007, p. 4) as

'The metric, specification, gauge, statement, category, segment, grouping, behavior, event or physical product sample against which the outputs of a process are compared and declared acceptable or unacceptable.'

According to Harvey (Harvey,2007), quality is about a process, whilst standards are about grading of outcomes. Thus he cautions against the use of the term 'quality

standards'. Quality is to be norm-referenced as 'process', whilst 'standards' will be graded as 'outcomes'. He refers to five different standards, namely, quality standards, academic standards, standards of competence, service standards and organizational standards. The quality standards Harvey refers to are norms such as exceptional, perfection or consistency, fitness for purpose, value for money and transformation (Harvey, 2007).

In education, standards relate to three areas of competence, academic standards, standards of competence and service standards. Academic standards measure the attainment of a specified level. The requirements of the programme cover the teaching and learning standards. To show attainment of the required standards, students have to demonstrate their knowledge and understanding. Quality assurance of academic standards will include standards monitoring, research assessment, and accreditation (Harvey, 2007). Standards of competence refer to the measurement of specified levels of abilities in a range of competencies. Competencies might mean skills such as transferable skills, skills required for induction into the profession, etc. (Harvey, 2002). Quality assurance of competencies includes standards-monitoring and professional accreditation (Harvey, 2007). Service standards relate to the measurement of identified elements of service or facilities provided. These standards are parallel to customer standards, e.g. quantifiable items such as turnaround times for assessing students' work, etc. (Harvey, 2002). Service standards are the quality assured through the process of accreditation, using performance indicators (Harvey, 2007). From standards we now move to external quality assurance.

2.1.2.1 EXTERNAL QUALITY ASSURANCE

Accountability, control, compliance and improvement have been identified as the four purposes of external quality assurance in higher education.

Institutions of higher education are funded with public money. Therefore they are accountable to the general public for the way they spend this money, and the quality of service they deliver. Since public resources are being spent, accountability addresses to a value-for-money definition of quality. **Accountability** also speaks to the experience students will have at an institution of higher learning. Is the institution delivering what it promised? Funding is also based on the information being generated by institutions to guide them in the allocation of funds. Thus, accountability encompasses the generation of this information.

Control as a purpose of quality assurance, is about ensuring the integrity of the higher education institution. It is a safeguard against institutions offering poor quality programmes, and squandering public funds (Harvey, 2007). Jouslyn de Noray, (Jouslyn de Noray, 2004) mentions that control is about rules, procedures and standards, and that control will not result in quality improvement, but in quality standardization. Rosa and Amaral, (Rosa & Amaral, 2005) mention that in many countries, the unrestrained growth of institutions, especially in the private sector, is of great concern to government. Through quality monitoring and accreditations, such growth can be restricted. External reviews also ensure that standards are adhered to, thereby upholding the intrinsic quality of teaching, learning and research at universities. When a quality evaluation is done, student achievement data are made

available, to be compared with national, and possibly international benchmarks (Harvey, 2007).

The adoption of procedures, practices and policies in line with accepted norms and standards of the sector should ensure quality. This infers **compliance**. Public-funded institutions must meet certain outcomes stated by funders, e.g. policy objectives, to be compliant. Professional bodies also seek compliance through quality-monitoring. Quality-monitoring has enforced compliance in the production of information data (Harvey, 2007).

Improvement, or enhancement, is concerned with change and adjustment. Although external reviews claim these as part of their outcomes improvement, it is seldom the case. They foster reflection by institutions regarding their own practices, enabling a process of continuous improvement in the learning process and range of outcomes (Harvey, 2007). Continuous improvement is about results and success. In the education sector this could address the question if the learning results expected by students and other stakeholders are exceeded (Van Kemenade, Pupius, & Hardjono, 2008).

Currently the changes in the higher education sector are occurring globally. The massification of higher education, globally, renewal in teaching and learning practices, and changing needs of society, are challenging higher education for accountability (Kistan, 1999). The external monitoring of academic programmes has become the norm in higher education, in many countries. Generally, external quality assurance has many features. It is based on self-analysis and external assessment

by peers. The external assessment is organized by an independent agency. It includes internal functions, as in benchmarking and improvement, and external functions as in accountability. Usually a public report is generated by the external assessment. The focus is on 'quality' that is, input quality, output quality, and process quality (Vroeijenstein, 2001)

Different reasons are given as rationale for external quality assessment. Institutions might require external quality assessment to benchmark a programme against a threshold quality, before it can be accredited. Funders, e.g. government, might require external quality assessment to determine the comparative quality of different programmes. A third rationale might be to determine what programme spectrum of quality is offered by higher education, e.g. from very poor to excellent. (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). Harman mentions that quality assurance has become a very important tool to address community concerns about the quality being sacrificed in the search for profits. A more systematic approach is now followed to assure the quality of programmes, including systems with review, assessment, renewal and improvement approaches in place. In the past, less focus was placed on external scrutiny, but now it has changed to greater emphasis on seeking the views of employers and graduates, and making the results of external assessments more easily accessible to the public (Harman, 1998).

Finally, Harvey (Harvey, 2002) alludes to the fact that quality monitoring may or may not be aiding improvement. He points out that institutions must ensure that the results of external monitoring processes must not result only in temporary adjustments, but also in lasting improvement. Considerable evidence currently points

to the initial impact fading very fast and real improvement not taking place. This is especially true if the external and internal processes are not closely linked. If the external process is seen as an 'event' and not a process, then real benefit will not be long-lasting, since no 'dialogue', resulting in improvement, will take place between external and internal processes. (Harvey, 2002).

What is happening **globally** regarding quality assurance? Following increased concern about academic standards, the European Union (EU) Ministers of Education called for more visibility, transparency and comparability of quality in higher education (DEI, 2003). EU members were encouraged to establish external quality assurance systems aimed at establishing mutual exchange of information on quality assurance at EU and global levels, using quality assurance as a means to improve teaching and learning and training in research. They were also encouraged to safeguard the quality of education within their countries, whilst being mindful of their European connection as well as the global trends in education (DEI, 2003).

The most important reasons for external evaluation or quality assurance are the improvement of quality, the making available of information on quality and standards to the public, the accreditation of programmes, public accountability for standards achieved and the way money has been used by the institution, and lastly, to contribute to the planning process of the higher education sector (Billing, 2004).

According to Billing, (Billing, 2004) the elusiveness of quality is noticeable in the quality frameworks of France, Belgium and the Netherlands. All external quality assurance is carried out by an independent agency in the Netherlands, accrediting

degree courses, benchmarked against basic quality standards. Finnish institutions of higher education are autonomous and therefore assume responsibility for their own internal quality assurance with the Finnish Higher Evaluation Council which is responsible for external evaluation. The external evaluation of quality is based on the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (Kettunen, 2008). Wahlen (Wahlen, 1998) surveyed four Scandinavian countries, and found Sweden and Finland concentrating on improvement in their quality assurance practices, with Denmark and Norway focusing on purposes set by external agencies, not by the higher education institutions themselves. The aim of external quality assurance was described in Sweden as an instrument for the promotion of on-going improvement (Wahlen, 2004) In Canada external quality assurance was driven by government objectives and standards (L' Ecuyer, 1998).

In Chile, external quality assurance is aimed at voluntary accreditation. It is a fairly new process in Chile, with higher education institutions being given an option to apply for accreditation of their programmes. As a result of external quality assurance being implemented, higher education institutions are now in the position to improve their programmes, and plan for continuing improvement (Lemaitre, 2004).

The Portuguese accreditation system is aimed at giving the public the assurance that teacher education is driven by changing school education needs (Campos, 2004). This framework for external quality assurance applied in Portugal is based on a balance between higher education autonomy, and public quality assurance. An independent and socially-participating accreditation agency is responsible for externally quality-assuring teacher education in Portugal.

The National Assessment and Accreditation Council (NAAC) in India, stated upfront that its main aim is to foster improvement and not accountability. Accountability is dealt with as an incidental outcome. Stella (Stella, 2004) mentions that the NAAC felt that a system of checks and balances was built into higher education in India, and that it would take care of accountability issues, thus the NAAC's focus on improvement.

In the United States, according to Jones (Jones, 2002), pressure for external quality assurance came from academe itself, not from external audiences. The legitimacy of higher institutions to offer qualifications was therefore accredited, labelling institutions as legitimate institutions of higher education. This process ensured transportability of qualifications from one institution to another. The standards for accreditation provided institutions with clear aims to strive for, which in turn served as motivation for improvement.

Coming closer home, **nationally**, the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) has the responsibility to promote quality assurance in higher education. This was determined by the Higher Education Act (1997). This responsibility comprises the accreditation of higher education programmes and the audit of quality assurance mechanisms of all higher education institutions (Singh & Lange, 2005). In the Founding Document (HEQC, 2001) the HEQC's understanding of 'quality' is as described. The terms 'fitness for purpose' and 'fitness of purpose' have been mentioned previously mentioned in this chapter with Blackmur (Blackmur, 2007) referring to these terms as perspectives of quality. HEQC states that fitness of

purpose means quality of purpose within the context of national goals for the higher education system, including equity, access, effectiveness, and efficiency. Fitness for purpose means quality specified in relation to a specific institutional mission within a national framework that encompasses differentiation and diversity. Value for money pertains to quality judged in relation to the full range of higher education purposes, as set out in the 1997 White Paper on education transformation. Transformation is seen by HEQC as quality higher education that develops the capabilities of individual learners for personal enrichment, as well as the requirements of social development and economic and employment growth (Singh & Lange, 2005).

The rationale driving external quality assurance in South Africa, as seen by the HEQC, includes the transformation of higher education. The drive for transformation is based on the challenge to address the ills of the past, i.e. fragmentation, uneven provision, and racial segregation. Transformation needs to address the demand for social and economic justice, since this is the core of the much-needed democratic change in South African (Singh & Lange, 2005). Since the HEQC has aligned itself with the international higher education context, its main aim is to assure performance accountability. Fiscal and societal pressures are coming into play, necessitating the focus on money constraints and goals, as set out by society. (Singh, 2006)

A lack of clarity regarding the aims of external quality assurance seems to be the norm, according to Harvey and Newton (Harvey & Newton, 2004). They maintain that there is rarely transparency regarding the rationale; instead it is often stated in relevant documents that the external evaluation is part of an on-going process of improvement. However, according to Harvey and Newton, all processes point to

accountability and compliance. This speaks to the expressed HEQC's aims in South Africa, namely, performance accountability. Performance accountability is embodied in the general objectives for programme accreditation as set out in the objectives of the HEQC as the identification and granting of recognition status to programmes that can satisfy the HEQC's minimum standards for provision, or demonstrate their potential to do so in a stipulated period of time. Also, to protect students from poor quality programmes through accreditation and re-accreditation arrangements, it builds on reports from self-evaluation and external evaluation activities, including HEQC audits, and other relevant sources of information. It also encourages and supports providers to institutionalize a culture of self-managed evaluation that builds on and surpasses minimum standards. Another objective is to utilize all the quality assurance capacity and experience available, in a co-operative approach to accreditation. HEQC also strives to cultivate a culture of innovation and continues improvement in higher education. This implies the implementation of innovative measures by institutions, to move beyond the minimum requirements set by the HEQC (HEQC, 2003).

The HEQC's founding document (Singh & Lange, 2005) mentions that the HEQC has distinct quality assurance functions, including foci on compliance and improvement in quality and quality assurance, as well as self-evaluation, peer review and external quality assessment.

However, Harvey and Newton (Harvey & Newton, 2004) are adamant that the real rationale for external quality assurance is seldom openly mentioned in documentary evidence. To them, the main purposes of EQA are accountability due to

massification, financial accountability, meeting student expectations of 'quality' tuition, and the provision of information to the public regarding the quality of institutions and their programmes. In addition to these, the main purpose include: control of unrestrained growth, ensuring legitimacy of higher education, and comparability of standards regarding internationalization. It also includes, globally, compliance as in government pressure for responsiveness to value-for-money concerns, relevancy to social and economic needs, offering of widening access, generation of information, and lastly improvement in order to become reflective institutions.

Based on the above-mentioned, a rationale for quality assurance in the higher education sector in various countries has been stated and is being used as the driving force for an overall external quality management strategy to be applied. The rationale might be improvement, transformation, transportability of qualifications, or similar reasons.

Applications of quality assurance should fit the nature of the higher education system. The procedures should fit the outcomes intended by the process. Kells (Kells, 1992) describes four basic models of quality assurance as applied in their higher education context. These are the models applied in the Americas which focus on improvement at institution and programme level, peer- and self-assessment, and goals and their achievements. The Continental European Model focuses on public assurance. Less emphasis is placed on improvement. The focus is on programme reviews rather than on institutions, peer review and exclusive reliance on guild standards. The British Model focuses on assuring consistency of quality

performance, norms and graded standards. External examiners are appointed for course content and validation of students' results, as well as meta-evaluations of their quality control systems, the Continental European Model forms the basis for the Scandinavian Model. It focuses on institutional self-assessment, institution-based quality control systems, and annual reports to external agencies.

Referring to the above-mentioned purposes of external quality assurance, as mentioned by Harvey and Newton, (Harvey & Newton, 2004) it appears that EQA is mainly focused on accreditation, audit, assessment and external examination. Accreditation refers to a decision that guarantees the quality of a programme or institution; audit refers to the internal quality assurance processes in place in institutions; assessment judges teaching/research at an institution; and external examination verifies standards, e.g. academic, competence, service or organizational (Harvey & Newton, 2004).

Different countries use **different applications of External Quality Assurance** (EQA). A general model of EQA does not exist, but Billing (Billing, 2004) mentions that elements are repeated in the EQA applications in different countries. In the United Kingdom, the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) favours an institution-wide approach (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). The quality of teaching and learning, as well as the quality assurance procedures as applied against the institutions stated objectives, are the main aims. Basically it is a check on the quality procedures of the institution. This is directly linked to funding. The French Comité National d'Evaluation (CNE) differs from the UK model of assessment. It is a two-pronged approach, first institution-wide evaluations and sometimes 'horizontal' disciplinary reviews. This

process does not evaluate down to an individual level, or do course evaluations. In contrast with the UK, quality assurance is checked, as well as the quality of the institute and its components (Vroeijenstijn, 1995). Since the approach is institutional, very little involvement at the individual level, no feedback at discipline level and virtually no improvements regarding programmes would be recommended.

In Denmark, external evaluation is compulsory and is carried out by the Danish Centre for Quality Assurance and Evaluation in Higher Education, which acts as quality assurance agency in higher education. The process starts with the planning stage, during which committee members are recruited by the quality assurance agency. The task of the evaluation committee can be to focus on a specific study programme of a specific discipline; it can evaluate and compare practice at different institutions, etc. The next stage is the self-assessment stage. Institutions/programmes will be assessed by the committee on the basis of answers given to a set of questions provided by the committee, to the institution. Self-assessment then becomes the benchmark against which institutions will be measured. This is followed by the survey stage. Evaluation of the views of the students, recent graduates and employers of alumni are evaluated. A committee will then visit the institution, and lastly write a report on their evaluation (Rasmussen, 1997).

EQA applied in Poland emphasizes accreditation, by making use of voluntary agencies (Billing, 2004), whilst in India, accreditation is the major EQA process (Stella, 2004). Chile subscribes to a voluntary accreditation of programmes and institutions; coupled with a compulsory licensing process (Lemaitre, 2004) The

Netherlands opted for an independent organization to accredit all degree courses and to benchmark them against certain basic quality standards (Faber & Huisman, 2003). The outcomes of the accreditation will have an influence in the long-term on funding in the Netherlands. Hungary has a specific framework within which accreditation takes place, called 'programme accreditation performed within the framework of institutional accreditation' (Szanto, 2004). The United States makes use of specially designated private non-profit organizations to carry out accreditations. This non-governmental undertaking is the national application of quality control (Glidden, 1998). In Denmark, Portugal and the Netherlands, one committee will accredit the same programme nationwide, thus implementing a system of nationwide accreditation. This way of evaluation is done as a comparative and horizontal evaluation (Vroeijenstijn, 1995).

In the Ukraine, accreditation and licensing are carried out by the state. This process has been necessitated by the fall of the governments of previous communist countries, and the establishment of a number of smaller independent states. Higher education which was under communist rule, was managed by the state, but since the fall of communism, many private higher education institutions have seen the light, albeit unlicensed and unaccredited. It now falls on the government of these fledgling countries to license and accredit the institutions. Unfortunately, they are using an input-oriented model, stressing conformity, but neglecting organizational growth and instructional innovation (Stetar, 1996).

Based on reflections on the implementation of external quality assurance processes in different countries, (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006),

insights were gained. These new contextual factors, such as diversification and globalization in the higher education sphere, increased the importance of quality assurance. Secondly, EQA systems must be accommodated in the pre-existing quality assurance mechanisms. A combination of quality issues can be covered by EQA, like quality assessment, quality audit, or accreditation, or a single focus can be established. In order to develop a model for EQA, a desirable quality should be the aim. Standards can be quantitative and qualitative. Programmatic and institutional EQA are interlinked. EQA is carried out at programmatic level, with the institution to follow, and vice versa (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006). Having dealt with external quality assurance, we now turn to internal quality assurance.

2.1.2.2 Internal Quality Assurance

The management of quality has long been a problematic issue for higher education institutions, since quality pertains to academic discourses that occur in teaching and learning. The management of quality cannot be forced since at teaching level in institutions, academics are in control, and determine the application of academic freedom. The academic in the class has autonomy to perform his/her duties according to his/her own standards. This makes the internal management of quality problematic. Evaluation mechanisms, such student evaluations and peer reviews, are not always reliable. The academic discourse in institutions can thus be seen as the backbone of quality, albeit in the hands of the academics themselves, in conjunction with the student body of an institution. Academics as such, with students, have become the drivers of continuous quality improvement in higher education (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006).

Internal quality assurance is guided by standards and guidelines. Policy and procedures for quality assurance should guide the quality output and standards of an institution's programmes. All students and stakeholders should be included in these policies and guidelines. Such policies and guidelines should guide an institution to the development of a culture of continuous improvement and enhancement of quality. In order to continuously improve on quality, formal internal review processes must be in place. These tie in with the assessment of students, based on published criteria, and done in a consistent manner. Academics should have appropriate qualifications and experience to ensure quality deliverance in teaching and learning. Coupled with the afore-mentioned are applicable resources, information systems suitable for the enhancement of teaching and learning, as well as open and transparent public accountability processes (International Institute for Educational Planning, 2006).

Continuous self-improvement requires changes at institutional management level, as well as changes in values, attitudes and work methods (Pretorius, 2003). Distinct characteristics of a culture of continuous self-improvement are internal and external stakeholder focus, and a scientific approach to decision-making and problem-solving. As far as staff is concerned, teamwork, staff involvement and empowerment, and long-term commitment to change from staff and management must be in place. A continual process of improvement must be followed in the institution (Goetch & Davis, 1995).

Luckett, (Luckett, 2007) mentions that internal quality assurance needs to be operationalised. It needs to focus on the testing of learning and management theories which in turn will focus on the reasoning of academic practitioners. It also speaks to a system that is working bottom-up, and/or middle-out. The 'top-down' system will be replaced. This approach of bottom-up/middle-out will use the criteria of the HEQC as external agency as support, rather than compliance standards. Self-review will evaluate all levels of teaching and learning, with reporting from level to level. A clear divide is indicated by Luckett between academics, regarding internal quality assurance and management. Academics must focus on educational effectiveness, whilst management should focus on enabling conditions for educational effectiveness.

The current model of quality assurance for higher education in South Africa, implemented by the HEQC, does not nurture a culture of continuous improvement. Its main focus is on accountability. Brown (Brown, 2000) questions whether external quality evaluations, aimed at accountability, will reinforce or undermine internal evaluation aimed at improvement. He bases his question on the fact that frameworks aimed at accountability and improvement normally do not function as expected because accountability and improvement work in opposite directions. With time, the focus tends to shift towards accountability, at the expense of improvement.

The process of internal self-evaluation includes self-evaluation by internal stakeholders, for example academics, and academic support, followed by the submission of a report to the institution. Self-evaluation is regarded as embedded in a quality assurance system at an institution, and is indispensable in value.

Nicholls (Nicholls, 1999) states that the development of a system for internal quality assessment will include the primary processes of education, which are input, throughput and output of students, but should also include the educational organization. Since the organizational structure of an institution is in hierarchical form, annual reporting by management to top management can include internal departmental moderation as well as written reports on external moderation. Internal assessment of staff should take place annually, coupled with student evaluation of courses and lecturers (Nicholls, 1999).

Strydom (Strydom & Lategan, 1996) proposes that criteria for self-evaluation assessment should include the appropriateness in a specific area of the mission, goals and objectives of the institute or programme, preferably within the context of the institution. The checking of the effectiveness of procedures, to encourage good quality output addresses fitness for purpose. The next criterion is the effective worth of evaluation procedures. The efficacy of the whole improvement practice should be benchmarked.

The process of self-evaluation consists of a qualitative self-evaluation report complemented by statistical data. The report is scrutinized by an external agency. More information can be requested by the external agency and/or the team of peer-reviewers. The additional material will be made available in advance, or handed over to the site visit team during the site visit. During the site visit the team of reviewers will try and relate the self-evaluation report to what they hear and experience during the visit (Harvey, 2002).

Self-evaluation is sometimes preceded by an internal academic quality audit. The academic quality audit does not directly evaluate the quality of education. It focuses on the extent to which procedures and conditions are in place to ensure the required quality outcomes, and what efficacy in meeting the proposed purposes (Jackson, 1996).

The audit methodology suggests that it be conducted within four distinct review and evaluation frameworks which comprise the audit of organizational units, such as faculties or departments, the audit of courses/programmes, such as teacher education programmes, the audit of quality assurance policies and procedures for quality management and practices, and the audit of students' learning experiences (Jackson, 1996).

The academic quality audit will involve the gathering of information relating to a system/process/area of academic work. The investigation will include objective scrutiny, analysis, evaluation against expectations, and accepted norms of behaviour. A seven-point generic model for internal academic quality audits is described by Jackson as starting with the determination of the scope, objectives, form and outcomes of the audit. Next, the auditees are notified. The audit gets conducted according to the specified outcomes. A process of analysis of the information gathered follows. Thereafter, a draft audit report is prepared and shared with the auditees. The audit report and any accompanying commentary are considered by the committee with the responsibility of supervising the audit. The last

step in the process consists of monitoring of follow-up actions by the supervising committee (Jackson, 1996).

Emphasis is placed on follow-up action, as reported by the audit committee. It is imperative for the internal academic quality audit, that the audit has effective improvements to ensure the quality of proposed outcomes is of the desired standard.

In countries like Japan, the *modus operandi* for quality assurance, before 1990, was internal, that is, institutional self-study. External quality assurance measures were not accepted by universities. Councils of universities stressed that self-monitoring and self-evaluation were needed: no national external assessment system was applied, and by 1997, only 15% of all universities had applied for external assessments. However, in 1998, a strong directive was issued by the Japanese University Council (JUAA) that self-regulation was not enough to ensure quality; external assessment was also needed (Yonezawa, 2002).

Self-evaluation at faculty level in the Netherlands demands a written report, reporting on analysis of the goals, the curriculum, programmes, input, throughput and output of students, the organization, and the staff. Solutions are offered for problems identified at the end of each section. The entire report is finalized with a SWOT analysis. This report will be made available to the external evaluation agency, and finally made public (Westerheijden, 2008).

In some countries, according to Brennan, (Brennan, 1996), self-evaluation has merely become a checklist to be provided to the external accrediting agency. It

seems that the self-evaluation process preceding external assessment has become an exercise to influence the visiting team of external reviewers. An attitude of compliance seems to drive the exercise, since it is coupled to an external review. The opposite is also true, according to Brennan. He asserts that if no external assessment is undertaken, no motivation for self-evaluation exists. Nevertheless, he points out that strong, credible self-evaluation is one of the best ways in which academics can assert their place in the quality assurance system in an institution.

Internal and external quality assurances are two opposite processes in higher education. For the smooth functioning of these processes, models of quality assurance are needed.

2.2 MODELS OF QUALITY ASSURANCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

There are a number of models of quality assurance that are characteristic of different approaches to quality assurance. Since disagreement is the order of the day regarding an appropriate model for quality assurance in higher education, Srikanthan and Dalrymple propose that the following should be borne in mind in finding an appropriate model that is unique in quality in higher education, a deep exploration of the possible alternative approaches to quality assurance to increase the insight of the institution into quality assurance, and an examination of some behavioural issues in the environment of education, both external and internal. These behavioural issues are important to contextualize an adopted model of quality assurance for a specific institution (Srikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003).

In Europe, institutions work together to improve the quality of service delivery to stakeholders. There is no European model of quality assurance; the closest the European countries have got is the Bologna Joint Declaration (EU, 1999), which has the objective of promoting European co-operation in quality assurance, with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies (Billing, 2004). Van Vught and Westerheijden (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1993) mention that a national agency needs to co-ordinate and support QA, within institutions, which is independent of government. Self-evaluation must be the focus of the external QA process. External peer review needs to explore the self-evaluation with the HEI. This normally happens during a site visit. Reports must be made public on these evaluation activities, to inform stakeholders (Billing, 2004).

Most countries follow the 'general' model as proposed by Van Vught and Westerheijden (1993), with adjustments made to suit the context of the evaluation. In most countries, the 'general' model provides a starting point from which to map deviations, to make additions, or omissions from the model. The modifications of elements will be determined by practicalities. The 'general' model can also be developed by including other features, like institutional-led evaluations (Billing, 2004).

The 'general' model can form the basis for transferring quality assurance systems to developing countries, and for trying to get international recognition for their HEI sector, according to Billing. Through careful preparation and training, external quality assurance frameworks are transferable at the level of aims, principles, concepts,

style and approach. Internal quality assurance frameworks can foster self-regulation, innovation, responsibility and responsiveness to the market (Billing, 2004).

Since no model has been accepted by higher education as the perfect model, many different variations of the 'general' model exist. A brief overview of the models follows, with a short discussion of their applicability to faculties of education.

2.2.1 Total Quality Management

Total Quality Management is management of quality issues that has been widely applied in institutions of higher education. It has been applied in industry with success, especially in the USA. Total Quality Management (TQM) is aimed at representing interrelationships between quality dimensions. Various models of TQM exist, with the Kanji Business Excellence model being proposed by Kanji, Malek and Tambi (Kanji, Malek, & Tambi, 1999) as their model of choice, since it can be used for continuous improvement purposes, despite the problems experienced by an institution.

An institution must have very strong leadership through-out the process, to achieve success with the Kanji Business Excellence model. Its leadership must lead it through the establishment of its principles and core concepts. Changes in the external environment of the institution will have an influence on the establishment of these principles and core concepts. If an institution adheres to total quality management, changes will be accommodated without sacrificing quality.

An approach of internal and external review processes is proposed. The emphasis on the external reviewers report should be lessened in favour of the internal self-assessment reports. This can only happen once an institution has improved to the extent that self-assessments, done by internal processes, are reliable. The external process will then serve as a verification of the internal process, and confirm the validity of the self-assessments (Kanji, Malek, & Tambi, 1999).

2.2.1.1 Approach

The Kanji Business Excellence model is made up of four principles, namely: delight of the customer, management by fact, people-based management and continuous improvement. Two core concepts form the basis of each principle. To delight the customer, customer satisfaction is of paramount importance. Management of an organization or institution is done by fact, meaning that all work is process- and measurement-based. Coupled to this, is people-based management. The focus is on teamwork and the quality people bring to the organization. The last principle is continuous improvement. The model includes a cycle of continuous improvement of quality (Kanji, Malek, & Tambi, 1999).

Leadership must be fore-grounded in all the processes of this model. The prime principles and core concepts are treated as critical for success. In other words, success must be achieved in all of these, for the institution to achieve success. Improving quality must be linked to an examination of an institution's processes, in terms of process definition, process improvement and process design. Once an

institution has determined the meaning of these, steps for process innovation can begin (Kanji, Malek, & Tambi, 1999).

The Kanji Business Excellence model offers several advantages, especially overcoming shortcomings present in other models. For example, it covers all total quality management factors that influence business excellence, as well as making interpretations of outputs (Kanji, Malek, & Tambi, 1999). As a model, it alludes to the current system of quality assurance applied by the HEQC in South Africa, namely, self-assessment done by institutions, followed by external peer reviews. If strong leadership is in place in a faculty, it can be applied with adaptations to institutions in South Africa. Another model of quality assurance aimed at improvement, is the EFQM Excellence model.

2.2.2 EFQM Excellence Model

Total quality management has been introduced through self-assessment by the European Foundation for Quality Management (EFQM). The EFQM developed this EFQM Excellence model to provide a holistic way of ensuring quality and improvement. The model is a diagnostic tool for self-assessment. Through self-assessment the organization can make informed decisions regarding its priorities, allocation of resources and generation of realistic business, as well as continuous improvement of the quality of products and services delivered (Osseo-Asare & Longbottom, 2002). This is a generic model, using criteria such as leadership, policy and strategy, people management, resources, partnerships, and processes.

The criteria are critical success factors, and they tie in with generic total quality management principles with their aim of improvement. They assist organizations to achieve performance excellence. Together with the above-mentioned criteria, four results criteria are used to support the main criteria. These are customer satisfaction, people satisfaction, impact on society and key performance results (EFQM, 2000).

The methodology of the EFQM Excellence Model comprises the first five criteria mentioned above, called 'enabler' criteria. The last four results criteria complete the criteria against which self-assessment will take place. The criteria form the basis for the self-assessment questionnaires distributed to stakeholders in an institution. Once the self-assessment phase has been completed, the results are analysed. Responses by the stakeholders to the enabler criteria will indicate progression regarding leadership, policy development, people development, allocation of resources and institutional processes. Responses to the results criteria will give an indication of the customer satisfaction, people satisfaction, and impact on society by the institution, and key performance results. The results will also give a clear indication of the strengths and areas of improvement of each criterion (Osseo-Asare & Longbottom, 2002).

European higher education organizations use the EFQM Excellence Model'-criteria to assist them in determining the progress and/or problems in their performance improvement process, and to guide them in achieving business excellence (Osseo-Asare & Longbottom, 2002).

The EFQM Excellence Model is also industry-based as a model. However, with certain adaptations it can be applied to higher education. By first applying the enabler criteria, a determination can be made of the basic structure, to ensure quality delivery is in place in an institution. Thereafter, institutions can move onto the results criteria, using self-assessment questionnaires for both processes. The results can be adapted to assess stakeholder satisfaction (customer satisfaction), people satisfaction (staff satisfaction), community engagement (impact on society) and key performance results. Improvement plans are then formulated. Moving from the EFQM Excellence model, we now take a look at Deming's P-D-C-A Cycle.

2.2.3 Deming's P-D-C-A Cycle

Deming has written extensively on quality management. He sees quality as being determined by the customers' needs. The meaning of quality, according to Deming, will change depending on changing customers' needs. In higher education, this will mean the meaning of quality will change as the needs of students as determined by changes in the employment market. For this study, Deming's P-D-C-A Cycles has been selected.

This model is based on the idea of incremental improvements of the on-going process of quality assurance. It is known as Kaizen in Japan. The basis is the improvement of quality and products in an institution. The philosophy of continuous improvement negates the influences of time and use, which will lead to the deterioration of quality and product.

2.2.3.1 Approach

Self-assessment is the major underlying principle of this model, making it applicable to education. The model consists of four major steps. The first step is to plan. It means the gathering of information to identify and define the issue that needs improvement, and possible ways of tackling it. Step two involves the implementation of the plan, by trialing it. This will be followed by step three, analysing the results, and making linkages between pre-determined goals and achieved goals, and the amendment of goals if needed. The last step in the model is called the 'check step'. Once results from the check step have been analysed, the plan is implemented full scale, or started from the first step again. The P-D-C-A model can be applied to all academic activities, including classroom activities (Mishra, 2007).

The P-D-C-A model includes an indicator for the trialing of an innovation to test if it works, and if it will indeed improve quality in the institution. This is different from the other models. With the main focus on improvement of quality, this model can be applied to institutions of higher education in South Africa.

Since there is no one accepted model for quality assurance, globally, researchers such as Van Damme (Van Damme, 2000) proposed a global quality assurance model that can be adapted to suit all higher education contexts.

2.2.4 Global Quality Assurance Model

Woodhouse (Woodhouse, 1996) asserts that no agreement exists regarding one suitable model for quality in higher education. Disagreements centre on the fundamental suitability of proposed models. All these models are derived from Total Quality Management, as applied in industry, sparking a debate on its applicability in higher education. The effectiveness of a model speaks to the ultimate sustainability and improvement in capacity, of an institution. According to Westerheijden, it should provide a template for interactions to achieve the goals consistently (Westerheijden, 1999).

Van Damme (Van Damme, 2000) alludes to the variances in approaches to quality assurance among countries and institutions, and ascribes it to the differences in understanding of the notion of quality, the purposes and functions of the quality assurance systems, and the methodology used. Despite these variations, convergence is also found in international quality assurance systems. Authors such as Van Vught and Westerheijden (Van Vught & Westerheijden, 1994), have spoken about the emergence of a 'general' model for quality assessment. Ei-Khawas (Ei-Khawas, 1993) also speaks of convergence and an emerging consensus among institutions worldwide, whilst Harman (Harman, 1998) is of the opinion that current experimentation with different models will continue in answer to rapid globalization and growing international competition among institutions.

Van Damme (Van Damme, 2000) proposes multiple accreditations as quality assurance in international higher education. It is of vital importance that international accreditation procedures and control be developed by institutions themselves. The importance of self-determination, autonomy and acceptance by academe can be

safeguarded by this development. Thus, the model proposed by Van Damme includes the notion of the development of international mutual accreditation networks.

2.2.4.1 Approach

The main principle of accreditation as compared to other quality assurance models, is the participation of external partners. Stakeholders in higher education are represented by the external partners. A diversified model of multiple accreditations must include recognition procedures for high quality, suitability for exchange between institutions and credit transfers. According to Van Damme, standard accreditation methodology, as in a process of self-evaluation, a study visit by a team of peers selected by the accrediting organization, and finally the examination of the evidence, followed by a communication of the formal decision, must be followed (Vlăsceanu, Grünberg, & Pârlea, 2004). Van Damme points out that accommodations in the accreditation process will have to be made to address issues such as incomparability and distance education. Partner institutions will fulfil the role of external assessors. This creates interdependency between similar institutions, and the process will become reciprocal with a mutual process of quality assessment.

Advantages of this model are that it is essentially heterogeneous and diversified, since it is a bottom-up approach, leaving the control and initiative in the hands of the institution. It also promotes mutual accreditation with similar institutions. This is made possible by networking, which in turn supports the increasingly diversified nature of higher education institutions. Institutions will be transparent regarding their output,

since they will have an interest in effective quality assessment procedures. Diversity and competition are allowed among the various quality assurance models applied by institutions. Public authorities are absent in this model. Hence, it not only pertains to a certain geographical area, but can be applied globally (Van Damme, 2000).

A disadvantage is that it can be quite cumbersome as far as administration is concerned, and very complex. The ideal situation will be, according to Van Damme, to have simultaneous development and refinement of quality assurance methodologies with the development of the model. Another disadvantage is that the model pertains to multiple accreditations of programmes. This will be very costly. Hence, in South Africa, the HEQC embarked on single accreditation of teacher education programmes.

We now turn to a possible model for quality assurance for South African Higher Education.

2.2.5 A Quality Assurance Model for South African Higher Education

The development of a single co-ordinated higher education system in South Africa was of paramount importance post 1994. In terms of the White Paper (1997) on higher education transformation, quality assurance, planning and funding were deemed to be the steering mechanisms towards such a system. A single national quality dispensation was established, and the HEQC came into being. The HEQC in South Africa is responsible for quality management, encompassing arrangements for quality assurance, quality support and enhancement and quality monitoring. This

covers aspects of input and process, as well as outcomes (Singh & Lange, 2005). In the following overview on Strydom's proposal (Strydom, 1996) it should be noted that in the final HEQC's governance and procedures, as well as its mandate, many of Strydom's proposed ideas appear to be incorporated.

Strydom (Strydom, 1996) proposes goals and objectives for a quality assurance model in South Africa such as improvements in Higher Education and related programmes: to provide assurance to the public regarding the achievement of the required general level of quality; also to provide assurance to the public and other stakeholders that a particular set of professional and academic standards is achieved. Another goal is to demonstrate effectiveness and provide accountability regarding whether or not institutional and programme intentions are fulfilled at a satisfactory level. Demonstration of effective efficiency of all functions at all levels must be shown. A financial goal permits choices to be made in respect of funding from the state or government, and to enable rationalisation decisions to be made in the system at both national and regional levels (Strydom, 1996).

A direct correlation between the objectives and issues such as funding, needs, qualification framework, planning, access articulation and management information systems, can be drawn. These objectives also speak to good and bad practices in South African Higher Education (Strydom, 1996).

The following diagram was adapted from Strydom's proposed model (Strydom, 1996, p. 356) to show the accreditation cycle of his model.

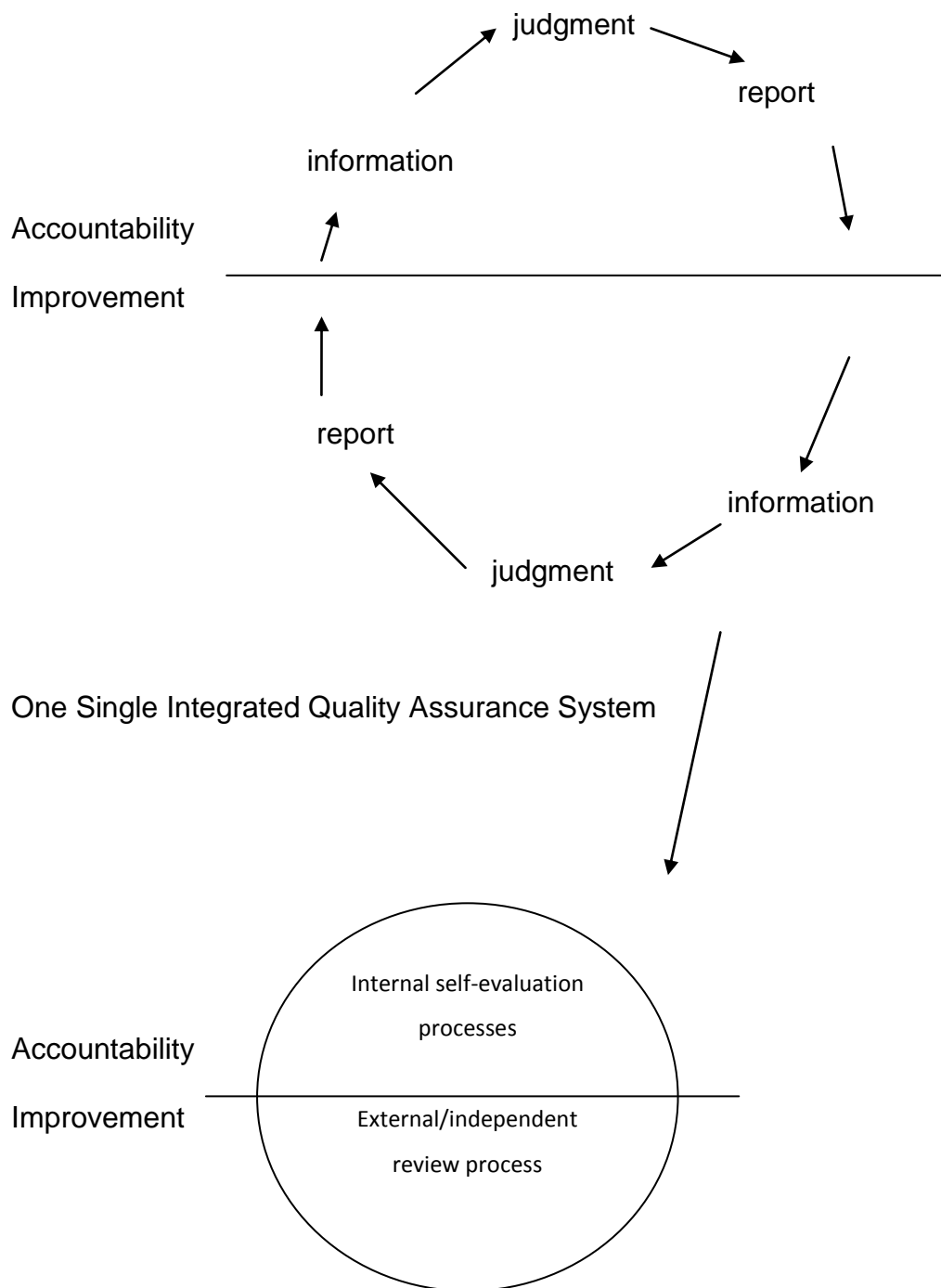


Fig 2.2 Programme Accreditation

The original model by Strydom depicted institutional audits as well as programme accreditation. For the purposes of this study, I have adapted this model in Figure 2.1

to show the process of programme accreditation, only as used by HEQC. The section on programme accreditation is divided into two sections, namely, the top half, concerning internal self-evaluation, and the bottom half, namely, external independent reviews. Internal self-evaluation involves a process of information gathering that is the self-evaluation, followed by judgment; this is done by peer review, and a report written to inform the institution. The bottom half involves the same elements, but aimed at the external agency, such as HEQC. The diagram shows two objectives for the internal and external processes, namely, accountability or improvement. The two processes are the same, but the context and interpretation of the processes will determine which of the two objectives will be worked towards accountability or improvement. It is important to note that the same process is followed for accountability purposes as is followed for improvement purposes. Thus, Strydom is advocating one integrated assessment system, in which internal and external quality evaluation processes will be the same. This will be the case at programme level in a faculty, thus we have accreditation of programmes.

The top half of Fig 2.2 indicates the same process to lead to accountability and improvement. However, if improvement is the aim of internal or external evaluations, then the cycle will be continuous. It will start with information gathering, judgment, report writing, improvement information gathered, judgment, and carry on in a never ending cycle. On the other hand, for accountability purposes, the cycle will start with information gathering, judgment, report writing, improvement information gathered, and summative judgment.

HEQC has followed a similar process of accreditation, but aimed at accountability towards stakeholders, and not improvement, as the main aim. It has been stressed by HEQC that teacher programme reviews are aimed at fostering a climate of quality improvement in higher education in South Africa, but during the first round of review it was aimed at accountability.

We now turn to the governance of the model for quality assurance as proposed by Strydom.

2.2.5.1 Basic governance, mechanisms and procedures

Governance will be the responsibility of a collaborative inter-higher education council. It will function as a national agency. Divisions will include institutional auditing, programme accreditation and quality promotion. The management of these divisions will be under the auspices of the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA). Input will also be solicited from specialised accreditation agencies of different professional bodies. The state will oversee this self-regulated quality assurance system.

The quality assurance system should have at policy level of the HEQC, a representative board of 'part-time' experts, who will represent the interests of all stakeholders. The HEQC should also have a full-time director for the three divisions. Each division should have a full-time deputy director with two or three full-time staff members with quality assurance and administrative expertise and skills. Institutional auditing for quality improvement and enhancement should make use of self-evaluation and independent review processes. The second division will be

accreditation processes, being conducted by academics from other institutions. A review will be conducted by these academics, acting independently and with integrity.

The third division should do quality promotion through research and development work. Quality assurance research will be conducted by a team of three experts, with representations of institutions taking part in the collection, interpretation and dissemination of information on quality assurance matters.

Self-evaluation should form the most important component of the model, especially at institutional and programme levels. To add to the attainment of self-regulation, experts should be involved in the act of judgment, rather than just procedures providing numbers or indicators. Although an element of subjectivity might be introduced, it is advantageous in that it provides a firm basis for sustained change.

Self-evaluation and independent reviews should be guided by an agreed-upon framework. This framework will first be interpreted by the act of self-evaluation, and then by the external independent review. The critical factor is agreement on the framework, since this will form the basis for useful, valid and consistent regulatory practice. Institutions not attaining the standards agreed upon in the framework, should be given an opportunity for improvement before the results are published.

Strydom mentions that quality assurance should be a cyclical process. This will allow it to gain effectiveness over time. Thus, quality assurance becomes a formative

process, regulating and improving itself over time to ensure quality in the institution (Strydom, 1996).

The quality assurance model proposed by Strydom has been specifically developed to suit the demands and identity of South African Higher Education. Most elements have been incorporated into the current model which the HEQC is using. Institutional auditing, programme accreditation and quality promotion are within the ambit of the HEQC's mission. With the emphasis on self-evaluation, and thus self-learning, the model positions itself as a tool towards self-reflection, providing institutions with the opportunity to gain insight and knowledge regarding their own practices. This will enable them to engage in continuous improvement of quality.

2.3 CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Barnett (Barnett, 1994) alludes to the fact that all quality assurance processes gain justification when the actors, or stakeholders, involved in the processes learn about themselves, and as a result change and improve their own professional activities and services to society. The study's main question speaks to external quality assurance processes promoting continuous improvement and self-regulation, pointing to Barnett's ((Barnett, 1994, p. 178) view- *'the evaluation of quality is worthwhile but its justification is not that it is worthwhile in itself. It gains its point from the benefits that flow from it.'*

Conceptual models to indicate the relationship between quality management and institutional change have been put forward by several authors. Brennan and Shah

(Brennan & Shah, 2000) structured a framework for institutional case studies around the following elements: contexts, internal quality assurance methods, impact on management and decision-making, other kinds of impact, interpretations of outcomes of quality assessment and the relationship between this and the future strategies. This conceptual model focuses on the change aspect, following quality assessment. As an extension to Brennan and Shah’s framework, Rasmussen (Rasmussen, 1997) suggests his relational framework for analysis of the types of change that can occur to distinguish between three different levels within an institution, and between three different channels through which quality assessment can have an impact on the institution. In diagramme form Rasmussen’s analytical framework for change is as follows:

Table 2.3 Rasmussen’s Analytical Framework for Change:

Channel	Area		
	Decision-making	Structure and Curriculum	Study Culture
Participation and Consensus			
Policy Intervention			
Status Allocation			

(Rasmussen, 1997, p. 260)

Given the above as background, the conceptual framework decided on for this study is Barnett's (Barnett, 1994) forms of quality assurance being oriented separately towards judgments on quality (a summative function) and quality improvement (a formative function). This framework alludes to the concept of judgment as in an external evaluation, and the value of the judgment, as in continuous improvement processes derived from it. Barnett distinguishes between surveillance and enlightenment, with surveillance being external control as wielded by the state, and enlightenment being internal self-evaluation of quality aimed at emancipating academics.

Barnett poses the concept of quality evaluation opposite the concept quality improvement. According to him, quality evaluation is judgmental, retrospective and formal. A decision regarding quality is taken, based on quality evaluation. In contrast, quality improvement is non-judgmental, future-oriented and informal. It fulfils a formative function. Based on the judgmental decision of the quality evaluation done in an institution, changes can be effected to programmes striving for improvement (Barnett, 1994).

A question posed by Barnett, who is in control of quality evaluations, needs to be explored. In institutions of higher education, academics are mostly in control of processes and practices. This is referred to as professional autonomy. According to Barnett, pressure from the state and the market causes stress in the academic environment. Tension arises between academics in control of their own self-evaluation, or self-learning, and national systems, as applied by the HEQC, thus we have an outside agency evaluating programmes at institutions. This tension speaks

to the questions, who is in control of the evaluation, and what form does it take? Is the power internal or external to the academic community? (Barnett, 1994). The following framework pertains:

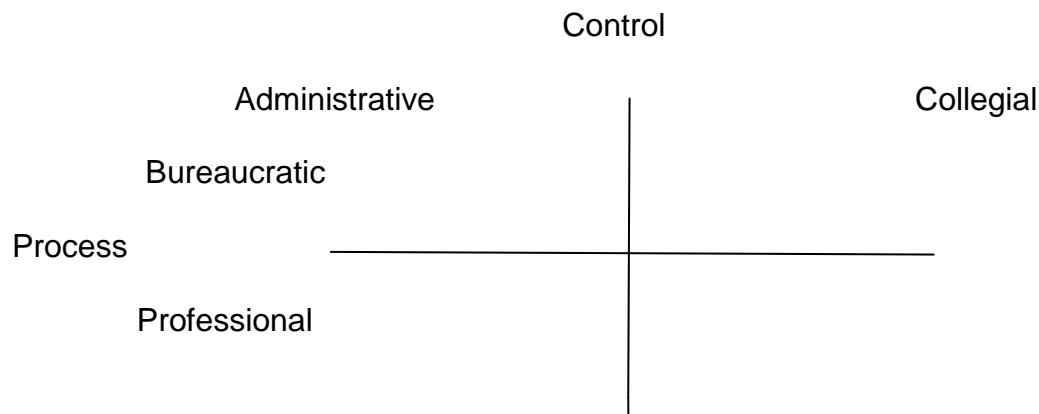


Fig 2.4

(Barnett, 1994, p. 170)

The framework explains that external evaluations, e.g. HEQC's first evaluation cycle of Teacher Education, can have a professional character; it also explains that self-evaluation processes under the control of academics, can have a bureaucratic form. This means that the ownership of the evaluation process is distinctly different from who is conducting the evaluation. It also points to control of the evaluation being different to the process of evaluation. In summary, academics and administrators (outside agencies) are both likely to engage in either professional and collegial or bureaucratic evaluations (Barnett, 1994, p. 165):

....'is it essentially a means for the faculty to understand itself better and so be enabled to transform its own activities by and for itself? Or, is it a means by which the state can know better and thereby control more effectively what is going on in the institutions increasingly drawn together into a higher education system?'

Quality as such is seen by Barnett as an empty concept supported by a tacit idea of what the purpose of higher education should be. He therefore believes that the concept of quality and the way it is measured is based on the perceived concept and purpose of an institution, as seen by its stakeholders. One of the aims of higher education is to prepare students to be high-quality graduates. In order to achieve this, he mentions three approaches to quality assurance. These approaches are an objectivist approach, a relativist approach and a developmental approach. The objectivist approach is based on performance indicators. The relativist approach is based on a retrospective view of performance, while the developmental approach is based on improvement of quality. Since the objectivist view is based on performance indicators, Yorke (Yorke, 2000) questions the out of context application of performance indicators. Performance indicators or standards should be contextualised before applied, thus if used out of context, their value is diminished. Critique is also levelled at the subjective nature of the performance indicators. Since it is not contextualised and has a subjective nature, Yorke mentions that it cannot be used as a comparative standard. The relativist approach to quality assurance is based on evidence obtained from self-evaluations or external evaluations. Thus, evidence from summative judgments is used as an approach to quality assurance,

positioning evaluations as a summative once-off happening, not conducive to quality improvement.

The third approach mentioned by Barnett, is the developmental approach. This is the approach that, according to Barnett leads to real improvement in quality. This approach is formative, however, and does not fulfil the mandate of external stakeholders, that is for accountability or control purposes, but enhances teaching and learning in the institution. The goal set for this approach is improvement, based on the institution's adoption of a culture of quality improvement. Performance indicators are used in such a way in the self-evaluation process that they enhance improvement, and academic practice, as oppose to summative judgments (Barnett, 2003).

Several purposes for evaluations have been identified by Barnett (Barnett, 1994). These include fitness for purpose, summative or formative evaluations, accountability or self-learning purposes, and quality control or quality assurance. These might be criterion or norm-referenced, or measured against customer satisfaction standards. Of import here is a summative evaluation that, according to Barnett, produces a decision about quality, driven by a third party. It is summative in nature but nevertheless has formative undertones. He states that these evaluations have an impact on the nature of the programmes offered, since institutions will respond to the evaluation in ways which will secure them a favourable outcome to the process.

Underlying all forms of evaluations is what we believe to be the ideal nature of higher education (Barnett, 1994). Evaluations will be shaped according to our beliefs. Barnett mentions that if we believe higher education to be about the redistribution of life's chances, then that is what our evaluation will be about. If we believe that higher education is about learning specific truths that is what our evaluations will focus on. Taking Barnett's views into account, in the current global climate of financial difficulty and stakeholder interests, it is easy to understand the 'accountability to stakeholders'-driven evaluations of teacher education, as performed by HEQC in South Africa.

Having presented the conceptual framework for this study, the chapter now concludes with a summary of the main points.

2.4 SUMMARY

As evidenced in this chapter, the notion of quality is an elusive concept. Some authors posit it as a subjective and value-laden concept, while others call it an empty concept. Others refer to 'quality' as what is good, excellent and worthwhile. In higher education the notion of quality is seen as value-laden, and context-bound. Quality assurance on the other hand, is a process embedded in the systems and practices of an institution. However, there are different approaches to quality assurance, based on the objective of the institution. Quality can be assured with accountability purposes in mind, or improvement can be the aim of the process. Standards used by institutions to determine the quality output, internally and externally are context bound and open to interpretation.

Evaluations of standards in higher education can be done internally or externally. Internal processes include self-evaluation, whilst external evaluation is done by an external agency. What is important in the process of evaluation is who is in control of the evaluation. Whose interests are being looked after, the state or academe? If it is the state, surveillance or control is enhanced, or, in other words, accountability towards stakeholders. If it is academe, the evaluation based on Strydom's model for quality assurance for South Africa, can be used for accountability or improvement purposes (Strydom, 1996).

The chapter ends with a presentation of the conceptual framework for the study as posited by Barnett (Barnett, 1994). This framework will be explored in detail in Chapter Five, when an in-depth discussion of the findings of the study will be presented. The following chapter, Chapter Three, presents the methodology used in the study.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

3 INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter reviewed literature covering key concepts and the theoretical framework for this study. This chapter presents the methodology of this study. The chapter is divided into different sections. The first part deals with the ontological and epistemological basis of the study. This is followed by an outline of the research design followed by the methods of data collection. The next section focuses on issues of research quality. The chapter ends by discussing the ethical considerations that underpinned the study.

3.1 THE RESEARCH ORIENTATION

All research is guided by some theoretical orientation. Van Rensburg (Van Rensburg, 2001) addresses three philosophical assumptions about knowledge, namely; ontology, epistemology, and methodology. Ontology refers to one's view of reality, while epistemology deals with the question of what counts as knowledge, and how it is produced. Over the years many ontological and epistemological positions have developed, and are reflected in various research paradigms that characterize these different research paradigms. A paradigm is a cluster of beliefs and practices associated with a particular worldview about how scientific practice should take place (Becker & Bryman, 2004). It also refers to philosophical frameworks that guide the researchers in carrying out their research (Gibbons & Sanderson, 2002). One of the

paradigms in which research driven by questions which seek qualitative data, is anchored, is called the interpretive paradigm.

The study was carried out within an interpretive paradigm. Interpretive ontology holds that social reality is a result of interactions between actors in real social contexts and that the reality of the social world resides in the minds of the social actors. Thus a researcher can get information from participants through questioning them. Anderson (Anderson, 1989) observes that people's realities are multiple, complex and socially-bound. Hence the interpretive paradigm posits that the world, including educational organizations like universities, is socially constructed. Interpretation in itself is seen as an important and meaningful way of assessing and reasoning about the meanings of people's actions and viewpoints.

Garrick (Garrick, 1999) defines interpretivism as a set of practices that are organized and constituted through discourses. These discourses and practices have personal everyday experiences as a starting point. In this study I interpreted interview data from selected academics who had participated in the first cycle of the HEQC national review of Teacher Education in South Africa.

According to Denzin and Lincoln (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), interpretation of the *Verstehen* tradition in sociology, as represented in interpretivism, draws on two kinds of hermeneutics, namely, the objective, validation hermeneutics, and the philosophical hermeneutics. The first, objective validation hermeneutics is a methodology for understanding the foci of the human mind. It assumes that meaning is an entity to be discovered in, for example, text, or the mind of a social actor. It

means hermeneutics are used to identify and explain objective meanings. Hermeneutics thus becomes a methodological device that can be used to explain human sciences. In the case of the second, philosophical hermeneutics, it points to involvement with the being, that is, ontology. Ontological hermeneutics strive to capture the actor's point of view, and verify it through interpretation of data that makes use of the categories of the people acting as respondents.

Although ontological hermeneutics is not a method per se, and was not used in this study, it was used as a support to enable me to practice good judgment. Good judgment refers to interpretation - something that is not always verifiable or testable. By applying criteria, such as comprehensiveness and coherence, the researcher can verify the interpretation and decide if the interpretation is useful. The researcher who understands that the activity of interpretation is an ontological condition rather than a methodological device, gains insight into the thinking of those he involves in the act of research. Understanding the act of interpretation means that the researcher accepts a certain model of being, or a certain way of life (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). For this study I accepted the academic persona of participants in this research, and their world of work or academe as their way of life, regarding the study.

Denzin and Lincoln's (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) understanding of interpretive practices supports the research study undertaken. They posit that knowledge is always local, embedded in organization sites, such as the faculties of education selected for this study. The purpose of the research was to understand the daily practices and systems in two higher education institutions pertaining to constructing a culture of continuous improvement of quality. Also included in the study was the

value which academics placed on the external reviews, and its resultant positives and negatives. The ontological aspect of the study included the different view points and experiences, through interaction between academics and other role players. The kind of phenomena I was interested in represented understandings and practices regarding ways of continuous quality improvement. Participants connected their responses to the social and academic context of their world of practice. The nature of their responses, i.e. epistemologically, was shaped by their day to day experiences. I was looking for the kind of knowledge or evidence constituted by ontological phenomena.

The interpretive approach focuses on action and the meaning behind the action. A set of meanings is derived from people's behavior, to provide insight into their behavior. As Bassey (Bassey, 1999) mentions, reality is not something out there, but what people perceive. Their perceptions lead to constructs that are very personal and individual; often similar to those of other people, although not necessarily the same. He suggests that interpretivism can lead to different understandings of reality, the understanding of which can differ from person to person. People observe the world of which they are a part, and in doing so, might change the world they are observing, based on their understanding of that reality.

Laverty (Laverty, 2003) mentions that the interpretive framework of inquiry supports the belief in not just one reality, but more than one reality, that cannot only be constructed but can also be altered by the knower. The reality mentioned is local and specifically constructed. The researcher becomes the knower in a relationship with the known, with the knower playing a central role. The link between the researcher

and the investigation is personified by the findings. A process evolves, of interpretation and interaction between the researcher and the participants. The primary aim of the interpretive process is the understanding and the reconstruction of experience and knowledge encountered by the researcher during the investigation (Laverty, 2003).

The interpretivist paradigm has its detractors in the form of challenges as mentioned by Denzin and Lincoln. The first challenge they mention, from within the paradigm, is the problem of criteria. Contemporary interpretivists are not of the persuasion that there are unquestioned foundations for any act of interpretation. In saying this, they are rejecting objectivism as a basis for criteria. They tend to lean towards procedural criteria as criteria for judging the acceptability of interpretations. Another possibility may be seated in the subtle realism, deriving criteria from what is beyond the claim, theory or interpretation. The last possibility offered for the problem of criteria means the researcher must focus on the intentional, meaningful behaviour that is historically, culturally and socially relative. The judgment of interpretive accounts must rest on the premise of usefulness, fitting for, and possibly generative of, further investigations (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I used specifically the third solution offered in my study which was the interpretive accounts of participants judged for usefulness, fitting the research parameters, and with the possibility of using the accounts as a basis for further investigations, thus negating the problem of criteria.

The second challenge from within is the lack of critical purchase, meaning that the interpretive report lacks critical interest or the ability to critique the reports it produced. This challenge points to the fact that actors live their lives within the

context of the status quo. This means living in a regulated framework, not a challenging framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). I took cognizance of this challenge, since the participants in the study were all academics employed by universities. This meant to me that we are all working in a regulated world of work, being governed by the policies of Higher Education.

The third challenge, that is the problem of authority, challenges the authority of the interpretivist as inscriber. The inscriber assumes the role of controller of inscriptions and suppresses the dialogic dimension of constructing the interpretations as observed by the researcher of human actions (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

The fourth and last challenge, the making of epistemological claims, is focused on the production of theory from facts, the fact that knowledge is somehow available to individuals, and that knowledge is shared and transmitted. The notion of social construction of knowledge can be claimed as a basis for epistemological claims, but the tension between knowledge as the property of individual minds, and the sharing of knowledge in a public social way, must be kept in mind (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000). Whilst analyzing the data, I became aware of the expressed views of individuals being aired in an open forum, thus becoming public social knowledge.

Denzin and Lincoln posit the thesis that interpretivism, as a unique form of human inquiry, is a set of theoretical commitments and philosophical assumptions about the way the world is supposed to be (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000).

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN: CASE STUDY

This was a case study of two faculties of education which participated in the first cycle of HEQC National Reviews of Teacher Education.

The case study definition used for this study, that of Yin (Yin, 2003, p. 13) states:

Case study is a strategy for doing research, which involves an empirical investigation of a particular contemporary phenomenon within its real life context, using multiple sources of evidence

The central defining characteristic of case studies can be seen as the concentration by the researcher on a particular case or cases to be studied. Also of importance is the setting or context of the case. It is seen as a fundamentally different research strategy with its own designs (Robson, 2002).

A wide range of social phenomena can be used as the unit of analysis for a case study, such as an organization, an industry, an educational programme, etc. The unit of analysis must have distinct boundaries, such as a faculty in a university. Faculties at institutions of higher learning are fairly self-contained, with distinct boundaries. In defining the case for this study I took cognizance of the boundaries of the faculties identified and treated them as units of analysis (Denscombe, 2010).

3.3 SELECTION OF CASES

In the selection of the two cases, I kept in mind Denscombe's (Denscombe, 2010) view that all case studies must be selected on the basis of their relevance to the research problem being investigated. The case selection process was lead by an external criterion, this being imposed on the faculty from outside the institution and internally, this was linked to the involvement of faculty-employed staff. This was considered to be the most important criterion. First, externally, faculties of education which had undergone external reviews as part of the HEQC's first cycle of national reviews, and second, internally, academics involved in the first cycle of reviews. I selected one example of the group of universities previously advantaged by the political climate in South Africa, and thus known as one of the 'advantaged' universities, I also selected one example of the group of universities previously economically disadvantaged by the political dispensation of the time, and thus known as a 'disadvantaged' university. The selection was thus made on the basis of known attributes.

The Faculty of Education, Institution A, has been selected on the basis of being a previously disadvantaged university, suffering under the previous government's racial laws. This Faculty represents the universities previously known as the 'homeland' universities, meaning they had been marginalized by government regarding resources. The Faculty of Education, Institution B, has been selected on the basis of being a previously advantaged university, favored by the previous government of South Africa with all manner of support. This Faculty represents the universities traditionally supported by government, since they were geographically part of South Africa. By selecting these two Faculties, I hoped to cover the two

diverse groups of institutions of higher education in South Africa. Since the higher education field in South Africa can be divided into the above-mentioned two categories, it allowed grounds for generalization of the results of the study.

The criteria used for selecting these two universities involved factors, such as both Faculties of Education underwent external reviews by the HEQC. Similar programmes were reviewed by the HEQC. Both Faculties received review reports with recommendations for improvement of quality to implement. Both Faculties have quality assurance processes and practices in place. One Faculty has a fairly large student number, whilst the other Faculty has a smaller number of students, making them representative of South African universities. The two universities represent the two distinct economic poles present in South African higher education, i.e. former disadvantaged universities and former advantaged universities, thus creating opportunity for generalization.

Yin (Yin, 2003) mentions that all case studies must include a clear and detailed case description.

3.4 CASE DESCRIPTION

I selected two faculties of education as cases to be studied.

3.4.1 Education Faculty Institution A

The Faculty of Education in Institution A is an established faculty with a balance between its students coming from educationally-disadvantaged backgrounds and fairly wealthy backgrounds. The faculty spans two campuses, offering two different bands of Teacher Education programmes, all of which have participated in the national reviews. One of the campuses was a result of incorporation of a campus from a previously advantaged institution.

3.4.2 Education Faculty Institution B

Institution B has been selected on the basis of being previously advantaged by the former government of the day. The faculty is a large established faculty drawing students from urban and rural backgrounds. It has undergone national reviews of its programmes during the first cycle of teacher education reviews by HEQC. It represents the previously advantaged spectrum of South African higher education.

3.5 SELECTION OF PARTICIPANTS WITHIN THE CASE

Participants in this study were selected purposely based on two factors. One was that the person had to be an academic who had participated in the national reviews in that particular faculty. The other was based on availability and willingness to participate in the study.

With the first group of interviewees, five interviews were conducted. I travelled to two of the three campuses of Institution A to conduct these interviews. Two interviews

were conducted at the main campus and three at the second campus. All these interviews took place in the offices of the academics.

The two academics interviewed at the main campus are both experienced academics at lecturer level. The female interviewee has been in tertiary education for more than 16 years, whilst the male interviewee has been teaching in Faculties of Education for more than 14 years. The female interviewee held the position of programme-co-ordinator in the past, whilst the male interviewee held a management position. Both academics were involved in the HEQC review process of the Faculty of Education, one as narrative writer and the other as team member preparing for the HEQC Review Panel visit. At the second campus three experienced academics were identified and interviewed. This group comprised two females, one with 14 years experience, the other with 12 years experience and the male interviewee with 14 years experience. Currently one female interviewee is holding the position of senior lecturer, whilst the other two are holding positions of lecturers. All three were involved in the HEQC review process, one in writing part of the narrative and assisting with the editing of the self-evaluation report, one as the team leader preparing for the HEQC Review Panel visit, and the third in a supporting role to the team preparing the self-evaluation report.

The second group of interviewees was based at Institution B. I travelled and interviewed the five participants on the main campus and second campus. Three academics were interviewed on the main campus, two being senior management members of departments within the Faculty of Education, and one a senior academic. These academics have accumulated experience between them of more

than 50 years, with the one senior academic having 24 years of experience, the other senior academic with 22 years of experience and the third academic with 8 years of experience at institutions of higher education in faculties of education or related entities. Two male participants and one female participant were interviewed. The interviews took place in their offices.

Two of the above mentioned academics were directly involved in the HEQC Review of the faculty. One was the narrative writer, and the other a team member preparing for the HEQC Review Panel visit. The third academic was attached to an institution-based quality assurance unit, preparing and assisting faculties for the review visits.

Two male academics were interviewed on the second campus. Both were very experienced with one academic specifically experienced in quality assurance matters. One participant indicated that he had had 15 years experience in the Faculty of Education, whilst the other indicated he had played various roles in the past in faculties of education spanning 20 years. One academic was directly involved in the HEQC Review of the faculty in the capacities of co-writer of the narrative and team member of the faculty team preparing for the review. The other academic was on the periphery of the review, being in the capacity of overseer of quality assurance processes at the time of the review. Interviews took place in their offices.

The term 'sampling' seems to be problematic, according to Light, Singer and Willet (Light, Singer, & Willet, 1990), since 'sampling' implies representativeness, and in qualitative studies, other than quantitative studies, participants are not representative of the population of the study. Maxwell (Maxwell, 2005) prefers to call it purposeful

selection of participants, stating certain goals if a researcher make use of this strategy. The first goal is to achieve, through the participants, identification of the case setting. This was achieved by selecting academics embedded through their world of work in the quality assurance practices and systems, at the identified Faculties of Education, as well as selecting, as cases, two universities typical of the higher education world in South Africa. The second goal mentioned by Maxwell refers to the representation of the entire range of variation. In the case of this study, this was met by selecting a previously advantaged Faculty of Education, and a previously disadvantaged Faculty of Education. The third goal he mentions pertains to the theory building. The selection of the cases in this study took that into account.

Babbie (Babbie, 1989) mentions that participants must be selected on the basis of being knowledgeable about the research topic, as well as deemed to be having valuable information. I thus selected the participants for the one-on-one semi-structured interviews on the basis of their involvement in the first round of HEQC's external quality assurance reviews, and their continued work as academics in the faculties. The interviewees selected comprised five academics at each university. I depended on administrative staff attached to the two Faculties of Education to identify academics who meet the necessary criteria. Strydom and Delpport (Strydom & Delpport, 2002) mention that sampling in qualitative studies has its limitations, since the size is not statistically determined. The sample size of 10 participants for the interviews is in line with the recommendation by Fouché (Fouché, 2002), which states that no more than 10 people should be interviewed.

3.6 ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES OF THE CASE STUDY APPROACH

Case studies as an approach to research, have advantages and disadvantages. A short discussion on both follows.

3.6.1 Advantages

Several advantages of the case study approach are mentioned by Denscombe (Denscombe, 2010). One advantage of case studies is that it is particularly suitable when the researcher has no control over events. The researcher investigates the phenomena in its natural environment, and no controls are imposed by the researcher or by change in circumstances. In this case study, I studied quality assurance practices and the improvement thereof as they naturally occur. No controls were imposed or circumstances altered to suit the investigation. Denscombe also mentions that case studies can be concentrated on one or a few research sites. The case study under discussion was based in two sites, making it a concentrated effort. The last advantage mentioned concerns to theory-building and theory-testing that can both use the case study approach to good effect. I aimed to develop new theory by investigating if external quality assurance leads to continuous improvement of quality.

3.6.2 Disadvantages

Denscombe (Denscombe, 2010) mentions that the most vulnerable point of case study research is in relation to the credibility of generalizations made from its findings. I took great care in the selection of the cases investigated. Representativeness was considered, measured against the broader spectrum of higher education in South Africa. Another disadvantage stems from an often perceived idea of case studies being more descriptive than suitable for analysis or evaluation. This tends to go together with the notion that case studies are often focused on processes, instead of measuring end-products. By working very carefully with collected data and attention to rigor and detail, I tried to produce replicable data. A third disadvantage mentioned by Denscombe is the fuzziness of boundaries in many case studies. This leads to uncertainty of what data to collect and include in the final analysis. The case study conducted by me had clearly demarcated boundaries, in that a tight focus was maintained in the collection of data pertaining only to quality assurance practices and systems. The fourth disadvantage mentioned addresses the issue of access and confidentiality. Access to research sites, and confidentiality regarding documents and information obtained during data collection, can be problematic if not carefully handled by the researcher.

3.7 METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION

The data collection method for this study was semi-structured interviews with individual participants.

3.7.1 Semi-structured Interviews

Data were collected through semi-structured interviews at two selected universities. Two groups of participants of five were involved, that is, one group of participants per university. The groups comprised academics involved in the first cycle of HEQC reviews of Faculties of Education. Having undergone the external review process with their faculties, I deemed them to be knowledgeable and experienced regarding external quality assurance interventions. They had the experience of preparation for the reviews, being part of the actual reviews, as well as experiencing the practical implementation of quality assurance processes and practices in faculties, based on the HEQC reports.

Since the interviews were semi-structured, participants were given the opportunity to offer rich explanations on the topics on which the question focused. I provided the participants with a synopsis of the research study, as well as the focus areas for the interviews, ten days in advance. Appointments were set up with interviewees with the help of faculty administrators. Interviewees were identified by academic management of each faculty, contact numbers and e-mail addresses obtained from faculty administrators, and contact was established first via telephone and by e-mail. One day before the interviews, I confirmed the interviews. One of the interviewees indicated that she did not wish to be interviewed, despite having confirmed the interview. Since the interviews were voluntary, I thanked her for her initial willingness, and substituted her with another academic, fitting the profile of the interviewees. An arrangement was made regarding the time and venue for the substitute interview.

3.7.1.1 Advantages of Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured individual interviews are advantageous in the sense that the opinion and ideas expressed stem from one source, that is, the individual being interviewed. This means that the researcher can identify specific ideas with specific people. The transcription of one voice is also much easier than a group interview (Denscombe, 2010). Since one-on-one semi-structured interviews were conducted for this study, I could stay focused on the opinion of the participant.

The questions put to the interviewees were open-ended questions, allowing the responses to be made freely (See Appendix 1). Yin (Yin, 2003) mentions that the researcher should be pursuing a consistent line of inquiry; the questions asked should not be rigid, but fluid. If an interviewee had a problem with answering a question, prompts were used to assist the interviewee. This was also the case when too brief answers were given. The interviewee was thus encouraged to reflect on the previous answer, or to give more details.

I started the interviews by asking participants in general about themselves (See Appendix 1). In this way valuable background data were collected. This also put participants at ease, since they were asked to give familiar information (Denscombe, 2010).

3.7.1.2 Disadvantages of Semi-structured Interviews

Cognisance was taken of the following disadvantages of interviews (Denscombe, 2010):

- The fact that the interviews were difficult to analyse and also very time-consuming. Constant checking was done to ensure the plausibility of the data, and as well as correlation within sets of data. Finding themes was also time-consuming and difficult.
- The open-format data produced non-standard responses, creating difficulty in the analysis phase.
- Reliability was difficult to achieve with the interviews, since my own impact on the study and the context made it hard to achieve consistency and objectivity.
- The data from the interviews were viewed from the perspective that people may say one thing, but do something else. This is called 'interviewer effect', where the identity of the interviewer affects the opinions expressed by the interviewee. I kept this in mind whilst analyzing the data.

3.8 THE INTERVIEW PROCESS

The interview schedule (see Appendix 1) was divided into three sections. In the first section my intention was to get information on the demographic characteristics of the participants. These characteristics included rank, and years of service as an academic. The variation of rank was important because, I needed to know who was in leadership position and, was therefore, a strategic source of information on the review process and current practices. Years of experience were also important because only those who had participated in the review process could speak meaningfully of the process and they would be in a position to make comparisons

between what happened before the HEQC process, on the process itself, and reflections on current practices and beyond.

Section B of the interview schedule, focused on the issue of how the first cycle of the national reviews had promoted a culture of continuous improvement. This would mean that the participant could interpret the meaning of the process itself, the role they had played and how that has changed their way of thinking about quality assurance processes. Accompanying this was looking for the implications of the process for the faculty as a whole, and the institution.

Section C was about the practices and systems that reflect a culture of continuous improvement. First it looked at the activities of faculties before, during and after the review. It also sought to understand what practices were still retained, in spite of the HEQC intervention. Within this broad band of practices and systems, it became important to look at the challenges encountered by faculties in implementing policies as well as what spin-offs had arisen as a result of the external evaluation. A combination of the ability to reflect on the process as well as the extent to which they could reflect on their practice would mean that there were seeds building a culture of continuous improvement

3.9 DATA ANALYSIS

The data analysis started with the transcription of the semi-structured interviews and I thereafter followed a cyclical process going back and forwards, constantly checking and interpreting data collected. A description of the process is presented below.

3.9.1 Data Handling and Management

I made use of a voice recorder during the interviews, as well as taking notes whilst conducting the interviews. Although notes were taken of immediate relevant issues to follow up during the interviews, I relied more on the recordings in the final data analysis process. Reflections on interviews were also made as soon as practically possible after the interviews, capturing hunches, and what was seen, heard, experienced and impressions gained (Groenewald, 2004).

The handling of data collected from the interviews was done based on the process described by Denscombe (Denscombe, 2010). The first step I took was to protect the data collected. Back-up copies were made of the interview transcriptions (See Appendix 3). These back-up copies were used during the actual processing of data analysis, safe-guarding the originals against possible unintentional corruption by storing them in a safe away from the copies. Secondly, the data collected were catalogued and indexed. Raw data were coded for reference purposes. This ensured that I could return to important data using the coding system as reference.

3.9.2 Analysis of Data and Interpretation

Qualitative research does not follow a linear process; it rather follows a cyclical process with overlapping phases where the researcher moves from one phase to the next and back again (Leedy, 1997). The data analysis aimed at ordering the

information gained during the interviews. In the case of the semi-structured interviews, the participants' own words were used to increase the credibility of the written-up research report. The analysis used the transcripts and memos written up by the researcher.

The data analysis process started with the transcription of interviews, that is, from talk to text. Denscombe (Denscombe, 2010) mentions that data analysis will start with the purpose of the analysis, in the case of this study it was to develop theory, pertaining to the extent that the HEQC external reviews can be viewed as a tool towards continuous improvement of quality assurance processes, ultimately leading to a culture of continuous improvement in faculties. This will be followed by the analysis of the data, looking at the text and talk, to determine what was implied by the words as in the sentences and paragraphs.

The analysis of data in this study followed the five stages, as set out by Denscombe:

Table 3.1 Five Stages of Analysis:

Stages	Qualitative Data
Data preparation	Transcribing the text Cataloguing the data
Initial exploration of the data	Look for obvious recurrent themes Writing memos to capture ideas
Analysis of the data	Coding of data Grouping codes into themes

	Comparisons of themes Looking for concepts encapsulating categories
Presentation and display of the data	Writing-up interpretations of themes Using of quotes for illustration purposes
Validation of the data	Data and method triangulation Member validation Comparison with alternative explanations

(Denscombe, 2010, p. 240)

The analysis of data was supported, not only by the five stages as set out above, but by text analysis which was done, using grounded theory. The ultimate goal of the analysis was to derive the theory and concepts that captured the meaning contained in the transcripts of the interviews. The inductive process followed led to the use of findings from specific instances, for the purpose of developing general statements.

I immersed myself in the data to become thoroughly familiar with it. Cross-referencing took place with field notes taken, to enhance my understanding of the data in context. Themes were also identified. Memos were made by me whilst analyzing the data. This provided a tangible and permanent record of my decision-making.

During the process of developing the categories, I engaged in two processes; these were the making of comparisons, and asking of questions thus applying the constant comparative method. I followed the technique proposed by Miles and

Hubermann (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to collect data, analyse how the data function and to determine its position in the context of the study, and then decide on the different categories.

Codes or categories, according to Basit (Basit, 2003) are allocated to units of meaning of inferential information collected by a researcher. By creating these categories, the construction of a conceptual scheme that suits the data was triggered. To me, as the researcher, the interaction with the data was as Ely et al (Ely, Anzul, Friedman, Garner, & Steinmetz, 1991) state, a very close conversation, with on-going implications for interpretation and theory building.

The next step was to code the data. Numbers were used as coding, in a consistent manner. The units for coding were sentences, with words forming sub-units. According to Denscombe (Denscombe, 2010), the kind of thing that needs to be coded, was taken into account, i.e. a type of action, a shade of opinion, the use of a particular word or expression, and/or implied meaning or sentiment (Denscombe, 2010). Thereafter, the various components of data were grouped into categories. These categories were reduced by merging some categories into broader categories. Refining the categories formed part of an inductive process. The use of grounded theory allowed me to identify key concepts.

I read through the transcripts several times, before developing two matrixes with several categories indicated. Interviews were conducted with 5 academics from each university, and a matrix was developed for each group of 5 interviews. The matrixes were done on very large sheets of squared paper, with the interviewees' interview

codes inscribed vertically. At the top of the page, questions asked during the interviews were horizontally inscribed, in a condensed form. The answers given by interviewees were written into the corresponding squares. As Basit states (Basit, 2003), this provided me with an anatomic framework of the data, permitting inter- and intra-interviewee comparisons and contrasts. Once meaning had been derived from the content, indicating the significance of the data, units of analysis, such as sentences and paragraphs, were identified.

A constant comparative method was then used to code the data. The categories identified were extensive. These were reduced once congruence between different categories was established, and some categories were merged. In accordance with Denscombe (Denscombe, 2010), I differentiated between higher and lower level codes, with the higher level codes being the broader and more inclusive codes. Data were revisited on numerous occasions, developing codes, categories and concepts. The higher level codes were used as the basis to identify key concepts. Different colours and letters of the alphabet were used to indicate themes and topics. This finally led to the data analysis based on the interpretation of text moving from codes to categories to concepts, and finally to the theory.

Miles and Huberman (Robson, 2002) view analysis as data reduction, data display and conclusion drawing. I treated data reduction as the process of deciding what to select and how to organise this according to the research questions. The next step, data display, made use of matrixes, displaying the collected data. The final step, drawing conclusions and verification, noted patterns and regularities, indicating possible structures. Validity and reliability were constantly tested by asking questions

such as, what evidence supports this statement and what is the explanation for that statement? All three processes formed an iterative process.

Quotes were also indicated on the matrixes. These quotes were linked to the categories identified. The quotes were used to illustrate points made by me. Cognisance was taken of the fact that the quotes were used somewhat out of context. As far as possible, the context was explained in the research report. From this process grounded theory was developed, and finally it was written up in the research report.

I kept a journal for memoing after each interview. I recorded my experiences, also impressions and insights gained during the interviews, and feelings evoked by the experience of the interview. Thoughts triggered during the interviews, as well as observations, were also jotted down. Reflecting after each interview gave valuable insight into the interview as such. I viewed all of this as part of the data analysis process, albeit informal.

Yin (Yin, 2003) cautions researchers to keep four principles in mind to ensure that the analysis of data is of outstanding quality, such as the analysis of the data should attend to all evidence. I included all collected data in the analysis of the findings. All possible major rival interpretations should be covered by the analysis of data. Care was taken to include as many as possible rival interpretations in the analysis of the data. The analysis should address the most significant aspect of one's study. The analysis was focused on how the external quality assurance reviews at higher education institutions led to continuous improvement of quality. The researcher

needs to demonstrate in-depth knowledge of the current thinking and discourse, regarding the research topic. Pertaining to the case study conducted, I've had in-depth knowledge regarding the research topic, since I was a panel member for various external quality assurance reviews done by HEQC, as well as team leader for an external review done in my department, by HEQC. Added to that, I am currently the quality assurance co-ordinator for the Faculty of Education, Fort Hare University.

3.10 RESEARCH QUALITY

I aligned myself with Miles and Huberman (Miles & Huberman, 1994) to be aware of several pitfalls, like respondents not being representative. In the case of this study, I ensured representativeness by only collecting data from academics involved in the initial external reviews, and currently still working in the Faculty of Education. These participants were taken to represent the broader population of academics at South African universities. Miles and Huberman also mention the need for checking researcher effects such as bias. According to Drake, Shanks and Broadbent (Drake, Shanks, & Broadbent, 1998) two types of bias may occur; firstly, the effects of the researcher on events and the behaviour of participants during the interviews, and secondly, the researcher's own value systems and beliefs which might prevent in-depth investigation and consideration of the data collected. The first bias, the effects of the researcher on events, is deemed by Walsham to be unavoidable (Walsham, 1995). As an interpretative interviewer I acknowledged that, by sharing the concepts contained in the research questions, participants were influenced. I also

acknowledged the subjectivity of my analysis, in that my predispositions, beliefs, and values intervened in the shaping of the investigation (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991).

The quality of research needs to be demonstrated, and not taken for granted. The basis for judging the quality of research is validity, reliability, generalisability or transferability, and objectivity or confirmability. Denscombe (Denscombe, 2010) warns that it is quite difficult to determine the quality of qualitative research, firstly, since replication of a social setting is quite difficult, and secondly, the intimate involvement of the researcher with the collection of data makes it virtually impossible for another researcher to produce identical data and come to identical conclusions.

3.10.1 Validity

In this study I looked at internal and external validity of the study, with reference to methodology research instruments and fieldwork processes.

Internal validity refers to the causal relationships between variables identified and results of the study. The researcher must provide logical reasoning in defence of the conclusion reached at the end of the study. The main question of the study pertained to internal validity, since it aimed to establish the relationship between external quality assurance processes and the promotion of continuous improvement of quality. The sub-questions also pertained to internal validity, in asking in what ways the first cycle of HEQC national reviews constructed a culture of continuous improvement in teacher education; as well as what quality assurance model promoted continuous improvement in the following way:

- Firstly, the study endeavoured to establish whether event 'a', that is HEQC national reviews, did lead to event 'b', that is, continuous quality improvement at higher education institutions (teacher education), and
- Secondly, what quality assurance model would ensure continuous improvement?

Internal validity, according to Yin, is also concerned with inferences being made by the researcher. If events cannot be directly observed, researchers are using data gathered during interviews and questionnaires to make inferences. Different questions need to be answered by the researcher, e.g. Is the inference correct? Is the evidence convergent? Have all the rival explanations been considered, and similar propositions? If all possible questions have been covered by the research design, then the researcher is addressing the question of internal validity (Yin, 2003). Since I did not observe the actual improvement of quality assurance processes, inferences were made based on data collected from interviews.

Respondent validation was done to check on the validity of the findings. It was a check for factual accuracy as advised by Denscombe (Denscombe, 2010). I was keen to determine whether the presentation of the semi-structured interviews, questionnaires, and especially my own understanding of participants' meanings and opinions was correct.

Care was taken to ground the findings of the study in empirical data and fieldwork. Time was spent conducting the fieldwork, collecting data, and verifying them. They

provided a foundation for the conclusions drawn, and added to the quality of the research.

The study undertaken was a multiple case study, comprising the use of quality assurance in Higher Education as a tool towards continuous improvement of quality, at two selected Faculties of Education. The two universities lie at different ends of an economic and educational continuum. Institution A is a former disadvantaged university, being established in one of the former 'homelands' of South Africa. Very little funding or resources were made available by the previous government, and academically the university suffered. It has endeavored, since the advent of democracy in South Africa to establish itself as a reputable institution. Institution B is a former advantaged university, having benefited from the previous government's generous financial aid. This means the university was in a privileged position to secure funding and resources, and ploughed this into academic excellence. In general, the university is well-known for its excellent programme delivery, and has an established reputation in the academic world.

Based on the selection of the two cases, a cross-case analysis was done, using case studies of different organizations. The rationale for the case study was embedded in the external validity, namely, to investigate if the external reviews of quality assurance processes in higher education, by the HEQC, fulfilled the role of impetus for continuous improvement that would eventually lead to self-regulation. The two cases chosen were representative of quality assurance processes and practices in higher education in South Africa, having undergone external reviews by HEQC, as well as representing the broader spectrum of higher education in South

Africa. Both Faculties of Education had to put improvement plans in place, as recommended by HEQC, ultimately aiming for self-regulation. In doing so, they developed their own quality assurance model, relevant to their circumstances and educational environment, as defined by their stakeholders.

3.10.2 Reliability

Reliability refers to the absence of random error. It enables subsequent researchers to arrive at the insights, should they replicate the study. Reliability was ensured in the study through careful documentation. A case study protocol was written up, documenting how the case study was conducted. This ensured transparency through-out the investigation. Replication was taken care of by putting together a case study data base, including all notes, documents and narratives collected during the study as advocated by Gibbert, *et al* (Gibbert, Ruigrok, & Wicki, 2008).

It is mentioned by Babbie and Mouton (Babbie & Mouton, 2001) that the credibility, or worth, of qualitative findings must be ensured. Lincoln and Guba (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) agree with Babbie and Mouton, stating that investigators must convince an audience of the authenticity of the findings, in other words, the dependability of the findings.

Dependability, as seen by Lincoln and Guba, means the demonstration by a researcher that the procedures applied can be used by other researchers in replication of the study. It means that reputable procedures and reasonable decisions were taken by the researcher (Denscombe, 2010). I endeavoured to

provide an explicit account of procedures followed, analysis done and decision-making taken during the collection of data. In this way, I tried to make clear the lines of enquiry leading to certain conclusions.

I concentrated on the richness of data collected, and the experiences people had regarding quality assurance. The data, findings, interpretations and recommendations made were checked for internal coherence. In particular, meanings assigned to responses were carefully checked to guard against misinterpretation. In the data trail established, care was taken to enable anyone to establish if the interpretations, conclusions and finally the recommendations could be linked to their sources.

3.10.3 Transferability

The probability of transferability relies on some aspect of the data recurring elsewhere. Since I collected data from only two research sites, the question regarding transferability in this study should be, according to Denscombe (Denscombe, 2010): To what extent *could* the findings of this study be transferred to other studies? In this study, although the fact that the faculties of education in the participating institutions were in slightly different contexts, the review of programmes was guided by standardized criteria. This means that the findings of this work could be applied to other faculties of education across the country.

3.10.4 Comfirmability

Claims made by the research were supported by the data trail developed for the study, as well as supporting the interpretations of the findings.

I kept in mind Denscombe's position that no research can ever be free from the influence of those who conducted it (Denscombe, 2010). In line with this, I reflected on my role as investigator, and how my position as investigator might have an influence on the data gathered and the analysis (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). An open mind was kept and through reflective thinking, alternative and competing explanations of the data were considered.

Russell *et al* (Russell, Gregory, Ploeg, DiCenso, & Guyatt, 2005) mention that a foundation must be kept in mind by the researcher to ensure quality comprising the research questions being clearly written; I took great care in writing the research questions as clearly as possible. Next, the case study design must be appropriate for the research questions. This was checked and confirmed. I made sure that the purposeful sampling strategy applied was appropriate for the case study design; and lastly data were collected and managed systematically through coding and categorizing.

The handling of ethical issues pertaining to the study was deemed to be of utmost importance to me. Ethical considerations applied to the study are now discussed below.

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Wassenaar (2011) argues that one of the most important aims or objectives of the research process is to protect the research participants. In doing so I observed Wassenaar's philosophical principles guiding ethical research. These are outlined below:

3.11.1 Autonomy and respect for the dignity of persons

This principle embodies the voluntary consent given by participants to take part in the study. It speaks directly to the protection of the institution and the individual. I dealt with this by getting ethical clearance for my study (See Appendix 2), as well as informed consent from the two institutions I selected. The informed consent was based on sharing with participants and institutions the aims and scope of the study. The identities of institutions have been protected by referring to institution A and B, and coding participants' contributions accordingly.

3.11.2 Non-maleficence

Non-maleficence refers to measures being put in place to ensure no participant will come to any harm or be wronged as a result of the study. I safeguarded and protected the contribution made by participants in such a way that no-one but myself was involved, or had access to the initial transcribed versions of the interviews. I assigned codes before I shared the transcriptions with my supervisors. In this way, what participants said during the interviews was protected, and cannot be used by

anyone to harm or wrong them. I also took great care in not giving information to participants that could be misconstrued. This could be seen as deception, not in the interest of the participants or institutions. Deception will harm or wrong participants, thus is to be avoided at all costs.

The language used in my schedule was simple and direct. This was done in order to ensure that language did not become a barrier.

3.11.3 Beneficence

This principle forces the researcher to share as many as possible of the research benefits with the participants. It hangs in the balance with non-maleficence, with the possible harm of a study on the one hand, and the benefits of a study on the other hand. I see the benefits of my study pertaining to the participants as two fold. First, participants engaged in reflection, questioning their own quality assurance practices and started to create a culture of continuous improvement in quality. The reflection forced them to 'disengage' from superficial practices for the here and now. Instead, they had to dig deep into themselves to question their own practices in an open and transparent way. The second benefit can also be linked to reflection. For the first time since the reviews, academics talked about the review in a free and open way. They reflected, for the first time, on the process, gaining self-knowledge in the process.

A possible risk to participants and the study might be in the answers to the research questions, with some participants being very critical of their arena of work. This could

harm them if it became public knowledge. I treated this as very sensitive and ensured that I was the only person working with the data, with no indication of the participants' identity in any way, on the transcripts.

3.11.4 Justice

Justice refers to people getting what is their due. It refers to the equitable and fair way in which a researcher needs to treat all participants. It starts with the selection of participants. I selected participants on the basis of a selection profile. I only selected participants who were part of the HEQC first round of Teacher Education reviews. I also took cognisance of the possible knowledge-base of participants regarding quality assurance matters. It was very important that participants fitted into the research framework. The participants are all currently practising academics in their respective faculties, and stand to gain from the findings of the study. These will also benefit the faculty and institution, since HEQC is about to embark on a second round of national Teacher Education reviews. Participants were treated fairly and in an equitable way, by being respected for their knowledge and experience in quality assurance matters.

As a researcher I was conscious of the role my identification with the participants was to play in the research. I shared many of my attributes with the participants, such as academic background and experience. I had to be careful not to lead participants in their responses with the prompts I used during the interviews. This awareness of my own identity in the research process, that is reflexivity, cautioned me to be professional in all my dealings with participants. I also guarded against

being too close to my participants, by acknowledging my own role in the research process as interviewer and researcher.

As such, ethical considerations in research gave a guarantee to participants that their shared knowledge will be treated with respect and dignity. It also safeguarded the researcher against inappropriate handling of the research.

3.12 SUMMARY

A qualitative, multiple case study design was employed to carry out the investigation into the continuous improvement of quality as a result of external reviews conducted by HEQC. The methodology was highlighted in this chapter. The research approach was described in detail, giving me the opportunity to outline the exact plan of action I had designed to carry out the investigation. It also provided me with the opportunity to give a theoretical overview in setting out a clear framework.

The research problem drove the inquiry. Higher education institutions are striving for an improvement in quality output and a suitable model of self-regulation is needed to guide them in their quest for continuous quality assurance improvement, culminating in self-regulation. I used data from the interviews as a basis for understanding what elements of continuous improvement have been attained by the two Faculties of Education. This knowledge could be used in quality assurance practices at higher education institutions. The elements attained were checked against the literature reviewed and discussed and analysed in Chapter Two of the study.

In Chapter Four, data analysis and presentation are handled.

CHAPTER FOUR

DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

4. INTRODUCTION

In this chapter ways in which the first cycle of HEQC national reviews constructed a culture of continuous improvement in quality are discussed, followed by practices and systems in place that drive the process of continuous improvement. Lastly, threats to continuous improvement of quality in faculties are highlighted.

Two foci for the interviews were in place, namely, the establishment of the presence of continuous improvement in quality assurance processes in faculties, as a follow-up of the HEQC external reviews, and faculties' management of quality assurance processes. The data analysis was guided by an interpretive approach, using inductive thinking.

Interviews were conducted as scheduled with interviewees. Most venues booked were conducive to the exercise; however, two venues turned out to be very noisy. This impacted on the quality of the recordings. After enhancing the sound with technical support, I was able to transcribe these interviews verbatim.

I took care throughout the process of data analysis not to let personal bias, assumptions and presuppositions become an influence competing with the participants' meanings and opinions. As Denscombe states, (Denscombe, 2010) the researcher's identity, values and beliefs cannot be entirely eliminated. They do play

a role in the data analysis, albeit a distant role. The suspension of the normal attitudes and beliefs for the duration of the research is indicated.

4.1 DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF PARTICIPANTS

4.1.1 Distribution of participants by institution and years as academics in the institution

Institution	Years in Institution			Total
	Less than 5	6 – 10	More than 10	
A	0	1	4	5
B	1	2	2	5
Totals	1	3	6	10

As shown in table 4.1.1 all participants interviewed were experienced academics, having spent many years at the chosen institutions of higher education. They all met the main criterion, namely, being part of the first cycle of HEQC national reviews of Teacher Education in South Africa.

4.1.2 Distribution of participants by institution and gender

Institution	Gender		Total
	Male	Female	
A	2	3	5
B	4	1	5
Totals	6	4	10

Most of the participants were males, with females in the minority. It was especially so valid at Institution B, where only one female participant was interviewed. Selection based on the criterion of involvement in the first cycle of reviews necessitated the selection of mostly male participants at this institution.

4.1.3 Distribution of participants by institution, and academic and management position

Institution	Position				Total
	Professor + Director	Associate professor	Senior lecturer	Lecturer	
A			1	4	5
B	2	1	2		5
Totals	2	1	3	4	10

The spread of participants in relation to their positions, covered ranks from lecturer to management, with the academic appointment structure ensuring a balanced view from all levels of the academic spectrum. With two of the participants holding management appointments, the views expressed by them were focused on the management of faculties, whilst the rest of the participants expressed views based on their experience, linked to their appointment responsibilities.

4.1.4 Distribution of participants' coding by institution

The researcher read through the transcripts several times, before developing two matrixes, with several categories indicated. Interviews were conducted with 5 academics from each university, and a matrix was developed for each group of 5 interviews. The matrixes were done on very large sheets of squared paper, with the

participants' interview codes inscribed vertically. The codes assigned to participants were based on the institution at which they were based. The first institution was coded 'Institution A', and a numerical number assigned for each participant in the order in which they were interviewed. Data set A represented Institution A. The same applied to Institution B. At the top of the page, questions asked during the interviews were horizontally inscribed in a condensed form. The answers given by interviewees were written into the corresponding squares.

Quotes were also indicated on the matrixes. These quotes were linked to the categories identified. Coding of the quotes was linked to the coding of the participants, e.g. F2:A. The letter 'A' indicated the data set from which the quotes were lifted.

The following section presents data under two main themes, which are divided into sub-categories.

4.2 WAYS IN WHICH THE FIRST CYCLE OF HEQC NATIONAL REVIEWS CONSTRUCT A CULTURE OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN QUALITY

Barnett (Barnett, 1994) has argued that one of the aims of external quality assurance is to promote continuous improvement in quality in a higher education institution. It emerged from the field that the HEQC, as an external quality assurance intervention, was seen as an intervention which affected a culture of quality management, as seen under the following categories: ways of thinking; way of doing things;

standards driven practices; and ways of improving staff relations. If a culture can be defined as 'a way of doing things' then the categories of participants' responses can be seen as examples of how people construct a culture of quality consciousness and practice within an institution. Wong alluded to a culture of quality when stating that it will encompass refinement of performance measures, alignment of new practices and standards, and facilitation of the process to enhance efficiency and effectiveness, thus describing the way to do things (Wong, 2012). Responses from each category and their interpretation follow.

4.2.1 Ways of thinking

A way of thinking is part of a culture which can be manifested in peoples' actions.

Participants attested to this view. F1:A said:

I am much more aware of quality assurance issues. I can remember our prospectus of the time when we had the review, there was a mistake in there and the panel picked it up. Now every time we amend the prospectus, I think back and apply the same rigor the panel applied to the scrutiny of the prospectus.

It can be seen from the above quotation that, as a result of the HEQC national review process, the participants were making claims that the rigour of HEQC continues to occupy their minds as they do their work. The use of the term "...think back and apply the same rigour..." suggested that the external quality assurance provided the participants with the skill to internalise, therefore, creating capacity for continuous improvement. This is in line with Barnett's (Barnett, 1994) expressed view that all quality assurance processes, gain justification when the actors, or

stakeholders involved in the processes learn about themselves, and as a result change and improve their own professional activities and services to society.

F3:A, said:

It made me much more reflective....., yes, to reflect on what we are doing, on what we want to do, and also the responsibility of management. For instance, when we design our own learning guides, I am aware of how it should fit together, what I should put in there, what are the different elements. I am also aware of constantly improving what I am doing, in other words continuous improvement in everything I do.

Both F1:A and F3:A testified to the fact that the HEQC national review process had made a difference in the way they think about their work. For example, F1:A use of the terms ‘...think back and apply the same rigour...’ suggested that the external quality assurance provided the participants with the skill to internalise, therefore, creating capacity for continuous improvement. F3:A goes further to highlight the insight gained by academics whilst going through the review process. Specifically referred to here, is the internal evaluation process preceding the external panel visit. Barnett refers to the learning curve academics go through during the internal evaluation, as a reflexive process during which the stakeholders of the institution critique themselves, and learn from their own practice (Barnett, 1994).

The HEQC external quality intervention instilled a way of thinking that goes beyond the process itself, and translated into ways of doing things. As B5:B said:

...it really let me start focusing on certain things. Especially regarding through flow, student support, those aspects I think I was not strong enough on and I think it actually helped myself reflecting on my own practice regarding that.

The words of the participant show that the experience was seen, not as an event but an on-going process of reflecting on practice which F4:A agreed with, in saying:

It was not an event; it was a process that still lives even today.

From all of the above, it can be seen that participants made reference to a change in the way they view quality in their work. These ideas speak to Brennan and Shah's view of the change aspect that follows quality assessment at higher education institutions (Brennan & Shah, 2000). The lasting impression of the first cycle of external reviews of Teacher Education changed the way this participant looks at the process of quality assurance. It is not a summative process, but became an all enduring formative process, changing the way of thinking in the faculty, to be constantly aware of quality issues.

It is clear from the above that participants gained in ways of thinking, regarding the improvement of quality in faculties. Not only did they become reflective practitioners, but a constant awareness of quality improvement was also instilled.

4.2.2 Ways of doing things

As indicated above, the thinking process translates into ways of doing things or culture, as B3:B said:

I think quality assurance should be a way of life and not a process. No, I don't think it. I believe it. I currently live it that way.

The thinking process is one and the same as a process of construction. A culture of quality management can also be seen as part of the construction of a culture, as responses from participants show. F2:A states:

...we exchanged views that we never really aired before, as if we now have a reason to talk about it. I think...we also did some very critical thinking around our programmes, interrogating it as such for maybe the first time...

The participants seemed to be making reference to a substantial impact of the HEQC intervention when they made reference to conversations about quality, thereby constructing new meanings and practices. According to F2:A this was happening for the first time. Continuous engagement appeared to have been taking place in different forms, as stated by F3:A that:

It showed me that quality assurance is not easy, there need to be constant communication and consultation, creating a platform for us to talk and reflect on what we are doing.

The constant communication and consultation address a new culture of quality management at institutional level. The participants were making claims of being responsible for the creation of a space for ownership of self-improvement. This agrees with Van Damme when he posits that the review process offers the opportunity for academics and stakeholders to claim ownership of the process, setting the scene for an effective form of self-evaluation (Van Damme, 2000).

Apart from claiming ownership as one way of doing things, participants also mentioned teamwork as one of the most important lessons to be learnt from the review processes. Stated by B1:B:

You are not working on your own, we are a team and we have to co-operate and we have to assist one another and support one another. I would say I think that's the biggest lesson I've learnt from it.

Participant B1:B mentioned teamwork as especially valuable in the re-curriculation processes in which all higher education institutions are currently engaged. The participant acknowledged that the success of working in teams has its roots in the experience gained from working in teams in preparation for the first cycle of national reviews. Goetch and Davis specifically mention teamwork and employee involvement and empowerment, as characteristics of a culture of self-improvement (Goetch & Davis, 1995).

Continuous improvement can be sustained through standards. The HEQC process worked with a system of minimum standards and criteria. A sense of fitness of purpose, as well as fitness for purpose permeated the way of doing things. The term 'fitness for purpose' signifies, according to Westerheijden, quality, that is quality geared towards stakeholders, always relative to its purpose (Westerheijden, 1999). Faculties thus looked at quality in a way which was different from before the reviews. As F2:A said:

People really started to talk and communicate. I mean talk with purpose, not just talk, ...

By using the words '...talk with a purpose...' participant F2:A indicated the focused way in which faculty members had engaged in talk since the review. A real purpose drives the discussions in the faculty.

The change in the way of doing things is indicative of the footprint left by the review process. It cannot be seen as superficial if people are prepared to make meaningful changes to the ways they do things.

4.2.3 Ways of improving student support

Participants claimed to have improved support systems for students in place in the faculties. Especially 'at risk' students seemed to have benefited from a new awareness by academics, of how vulnerable students in a learning situation can be.

As B1:B mentioned:

And of course we identify at risk students now, we have People Soft System...we can draw at any time and see but how do our learners perform so we can see red lights in time.

The care expressed for students by this participant has been part of a change in faculty culture, since he is referring to '...And of course we identify 'at risk' students now,...'. The fact that faculties are taking cognisance of 'at risk' students speaks to the change in approach of faculties and institutions towards their mission and vision. It also speaks to accountability towards their stakeholders, in this case their students.

4.2.4 Improvement through dialogue

Credit has been given to students for helping academics to gain knowledge and experience. Academics expressed themselves as learning through their interaction

with students, thus describing an interactive dialogue between staff and students, and not as traditionally experienced, a one-sided learning curve experienced by the student alone. This speaks to a reviewed position of students in the faculty structure. It also alludes to the fact that the voice of students is taking on a new meaning. It has become a valued part of the academic conversation in faculties. Participant F1:A put it in an eloquent way:

My thinking has been shaped by gaining experience by working with students and getting feedback from them.

Barnett (Barnett, 1994) points out that self-learning leads to self-knowledge, as is the case with participant F1:A. The participant understands the interdependent relationship between academic and student.

A wider perspective is expressed by Senge (Senge, 1995) when he mentions that if continual learning by all involved becomes a way of life, then the performance of the organisation as a total system will be enhanced. Based on Senge's view, faculties stand to benefit enormously from learning from students. In turn, the entire institution will reap positive benefits.

4.2.5 Ways of improving staff relations

The impact of the HEQC reviews appears to have been experienced beyond programme delivery. It facilitated improvement in staff relations and collegiality within the faculty and institution wide. In the words of B3:B:

Decision-making, design, development is not a one-man show. We rely on teams, we rely on feedback from outside resources as a let's say an external view prior to design and development. Once the design and development of either a qualification or a short learning programme has been done, then we have it moderated as well. So we consult on a continuous basis and we make sure that the systems that are put in place are agreed upon and are understood by all parties and are workable. And it's reviewed on a constant basis. It's developmental, it changes when it needs to change and be improved.

From the above quote, two things emerge. One is that staff started recognising that in unity is strength. The second is that the system strengthens self-improvement through internal reviews, verification and authentication of information. This process acts as a bonding mechanism among faculty and institutional staff.

Another important spin-off of the HEQC review is that quality cannot be left to a few individuals. It is the business of every member of the institution. B1:B stated that:

I think what is brand new is that, staff realise it is a faculty wide effort. Just about everyone was involved so the ownership is really shared of quality. It's not a case where a few people just drive the process, just about everyone, just about everyone in the faculty was involved.

The quote speaks to the issue of building an organisational culture which bridges the gap between institutional administrators and academic staff. As F3:A said:

First we learn to share information amongst academics, also amongst academics and admin. This was a direct result of the information-gathering exercise we had to engage in.

This addresses the organisational culture of engagement in information-sharing, leading to a common purpose about quality. Such a culture promotes continuous

improvement. Working together, thus improving working relationships, were seen as tool for continuous improvement. Goetch and Davis's characteristics of a culture of continuous self-improvement can be linked to these participants' beliefs, since they state characteristics, such as an obsession with quality, long-term commitment with change, continual process improvement, and unity of purpose (Goetch & Davis, 1995).

In similar vein, Wong (Wong, 2012) speaks to the ecology of a quality assurance system, emphasising the importance of the relations between various members of the system, the fact that an understanding regarding the processes must be reached, and the importance of certain unalienable conditions to ensure the survival of particular traits of the system.

Furthermore, Wong (Wong, 2012) argues that quality assurance requires constant refinement and redefinition of performance measurements, alignment of new practices and standards, and facilitation of the process to enhance efficiency and effectiveness. Participant F4:A saw quality as a quest for excellence, in the sense that it challenges faculties to excel in what they do:

...the review I can say it stretched us, it challenged us. It began to force us to move beyond our kind of comfort zones. I'm confident. I'm confident that we can continue, we will continue.

The use of the term 'force' is an indication that it is not by choice but is an interpolation of constant improvement in quality.

4.2.6 Provided framework for reviewing job descriptions

An area in which institutions lacked before the review, was staff development. Staff was appointed in positions with scanty job descriptions or task frames. Participant F4:A said:

...there was no policy document that actually guided what I was supposed to do, but instead I was helped by the review process. Because in the review document, the roles and the responsibility of a programme co-ordinator are spelled out. It capacitated us in that sense.

The participant makes claims that before the review process there were no guidelines that highlighted the roles and responsibilities of a programme co-ordinator. If there were no standards roles and responsibilities associated with academic co-ordination, then it was difficult to sustain continuous improvement and self-regulation. This is evident in the participant's use of '...capacitated...'. Once staff feel they possess the necessary capacity, it enables self-improvement, which would allow, according to Barnett's (1994) theory, continuous improvement without external intervention.

4.2.7 Standards-driven practices

It emerged that, before the HEQC process, there were policies which were not translated into standards and procedures. This is evident in participant B1:B's testimony that talks to operation of policies through procedures as he says:

The challenge is to look at the policies and to write up procedures to get it to be implemented. I think that was the biggest challenge I would say. Because you get the policy but what do you do with the policy? So what we've done is to sit down and write procedures for each policy, so how will our faculty address each policy and how will we make sure that this policy is adhered to...

The issues of policies, from the above quotation, raised the question of how to standardise the procedures that guide the practice. This means that, even before the HEQC review, policies were there, but were not operationalised into quality management. The implications of this are that policies were technicist, not designed to facilitate self-improvement. As Venter and Bezuidenhout stated, quality assurance does have a bearing on the policies, systems and processes directed at ensuring the quality of education provision in the faculty (Venter & Bezuidenhout, 2008). While the importance of standardising policies is acknowledged, there is an added advantage of opportunity to interrogate policy during the process of operationalising it, as opposed to the acceptance of policy. The latter is antithetical to continuous improvement. B2:B elaborates on this idea by saying that:

But the formal reviews and the formal audits have brought forward I think a more formalised structure in which to do it. I mean just if you think of the criteria you know that needs to be looked at that has helped to broaden the scope of what should all be in place. I think the biggest change is keeping criteria in mind always. I think to me that is the biggest spin-off of the audit or of the review to always think quality. It permeates all your doings in terms of programme development and so on. I think the criteria, the programme accreditation criteria they are always somewhere I can say consciously, subconsciously even unconsciously they are always around. I mean do we have the right staff to offer a programme, are we pegging it at the right level, you know. So it's always part of our speak, of our talk.

The above quote speaks to a standards-driven process that appears to bridge the gap between policy and practice as it permeates the entire culture of the

practitioners. This is in line with Barnett's (Barnett, 1994) concept of the evaluation of quality assurance that is guided by accountability or self-learning, leading to self-knowledge.

Mention was made by respondents of the lack of policies, and in some instances standards, before the review. The second point from B2:B is that the review process instilled, in his words:

....consciously, subconsciously even unconsciously they (criteria) are always around...

This suggests that the continuous presence of the review guidelines in people's minds becomes part of their consciousness that drives self-improvement. The use of 'subconscious' and 'unconscious' suggests that the practice is so internalised and intrinsic that one is not even aware of it, and that one does not need external regulation.

4.3 PRACTICES AND SYSTEMS IN PLACE THAT DRIVE THE PROCESS OF CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN QUALITY

Evidence of construction of a culture of continuous improvement, as reported above, was also identified in practices and systems of self-regulation. It can be argued that these systems and practices were part of the outcomes of the HEQC review process. Two sets of practices were identified; record keeping and reflection.

4.3.1 Record Keeping and Reflection

Record keeping makes reference to writing up procedures and processes, so that they are available for reference in the present and future, as participant B1:B stated:

And sometimes you know also in a faculty is that a lot of operations are just common knowledge of how things are done so people don't necessarily put it down on paper. And I think that actually gave us an opportunity to really see, do we have all the operations and all the systems on paper. Although there might have been a broader policy but also the implications of the policy and how it is operationalised and implemented when it was on paper and I think that gave us an opportunity to do that.

Because what you do becomes an action research process. Once you designed the thing, you implement it, review it, change it, you implement it. So it becomes a cycle, But you have got to believe in the system, to implement the system in that way.

Record keeping is vital for keeping institutional memory of in good practice. This participant said that '...you implement it, review it...it becomes a cycle...' This is evidence of continuous improvement that happens through record keeping and reflection. On the whole the presence of such documentation, and the implementation thereof, adds to the self-improvement of faculties.

4.3.2 Systems of Continuous Improvement

There is evidence that as people were going through the HEQC reviews, there were traces of systems that were being established. The systems of self-improvement have been seen to be divided into three categories; namely, monitoring and student

evaluation, alignment of policies and procedure; and a framework for managing quality.

4.3.2.1 Monitoring and student evaluation

If institutions are to achieve self-regulation, it is important that they are able to monitor and make use of student evaluation. As B5:B recognised:

I think a lot more of control and monitoring systems have come into place. We have always previously had focus groups and things but not really taking it so seriously, now we have got constant monitoring processes. With our Honours and our structured Masters, every six (6) months we have got questionnaires going out to our students, what would you have liked to do better, what are the things that you think can be improved, how do you feel about this? We have also constituted a number of Committees in the faculty. They have always been there but it wasn't...it was more once a semester maybe, now we have got structures particularly in those committees like the Postgrad Committee, very structured and rigid and how they operate, student representation on them which was not previously the case.

Both the monitoring and student evaluations are vital mechanisms for self-improvement in quality.

4.3.2.2 Alignment of policies and procedures

The HEQC process facilitated the alignment of institutional policies and procedures with those of the faculties. This suggests that before the reviews, the policies stood alone and were not used to guide quality management. As B1:B stated:

Once the University policies came into being, we could draw on that to make it very faculty specific policies. Whereas in the past often there was a vacuum that we couldn't relate to some University policies or refer to the link between our doings and the University's.

The alignment of policies ensures institution-wide quality management that lay the foundations for continuous improvement. This also speaks to the problem of silos and silo mentality which prevailed prior to the HEQC process. When institutions operate in silo units, it becomes difficult to realise the common vision driving continuous improvement.

4.3.2.3 Framework for Managing Quality

The HEQC process is seen to have provided two things. One is that it gave perspective to quality and a framework for managing quality, as recognised by B5:B:

I think the HEQC helped us to give us a framework also. Even if you conceptualise, but you have a framework to see those are things that I need to look at. But the formal reviews and the formal audits have brought forward I think a more formalised structure in which to do it. I mean just if you think of the criteria you know that needs to be looked at that has helped to broaden the scope of what should all be in place. So I think that issue, perhaps we should say that one of the spin-offs, good spin-offs is that people are much more aware to keep a consistent trail of quality and assessments, whatever you know, proof of what we are doing.

It is clear from B5:B that the process provided the tools for understanding and measuring quality in a way that can sustain continuous improvement.

4.3.2.4 Practices promoting institution-wide quality assurance

Faculties are an integral part of institutions. In the pursuit to live up to its mission and vision, an institution needs the support of all its faculties. In attaining these common goals, both faculties and institutional identity or reputation are enhanced. Faculties responded with appropriate quality assurance mechanisms being put in place in support of the institution. B5:B offered the following:

Now we do it quite differently. We have got a separate office that is in my directorate now, the titles are registered with title registration, the examiner are appointed externally on a Committee base it is to an independent person you know and all that. Although our full masters and full Ph D's are dealt with by the University's office. But we have set out for the mini dissertations we have set up an office (I would rather say) similar to the University office and conducting it.

From the above quote the inter-connectedness between university and faculty is emphasised. The institution implements certain practices in the enhancement of quality, and at faculty level it will be mirrored. Participant B5:B carried on:

Also got it from an institutional level to say, you must get your act right at faculty level as well...

At institutional, as well as faculty level, the concern for quality is emphasised. Young, Chambers and Kells (Young, Chambers & Kells, 1983) define education quality as being interpreted within the institution's or programme's mission statement in comparison with similar institutions and programmes. It also refers to institutional integrity being what the institution says it is, and does what it says it does.

Reference was also made by participant F5:A to the university demonstrating its professional competence, nationally, institutionally and at faculty level:

...I think the whole view was that what the university wanted to do was to demonstrate its professional competence and its capacity to work to a high standard and the unifying standard. I think the unifying standard being first of all at national level and then secondly within the university itself and that is where this type of thing has possibly been quite beneficial.

It has become imperative for institutions to compete at national and international levels since higher education has moved into a global playing field. This can only be done by standardisation. Referring to the adherence of institutions to internal standards linked to national standards, the participant alludes to the generic standards set up by the HEQC that has become in his words '...the unifying standard...'. Sursock (2001) affirms the notion of a national standard, in saying that quality can be seen as a threshold. This means quality can be linked to norms and standards. 'Quality as threshold' speaks to an entire system of higher education institutions. The norms and standards are generic, not specific to single universities, but used in all the universities in the system.

4.3.2.5 International Benchmarking

Institutions have to adhere to global expectations and standards of stakeholders. In order to achieve this, institutions have to set up internationally comparable practices and systems that will position them as 'best practice' universities. Participant B5:B described the faculty's practices and systems to comply with international standards as follows:

Also about internationalisation, we have a very strict and very rigid criteria for admission on our Masters and Ph D's, even to our Honours you have to have a sixty five percent in the preceding qualification for Honours. And then they go through a rigid process, we have a language proficiency test, we have a disciplinary test kind of formulating test that they have to write through so also becoming aware that we have to attract good students that they will be able to deal with the challenges, we have to report on their progress you know...

The above quote highlights the adherence to agreed global standards, e.g. the Bologna Declaration. In 2003, the Bologna Process members specifically asked the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) to develop a set of standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance for the entire region. This indicated the members' commitment to quality assurance in the European region and was the first concerted effort by countries to unify their efforts regarding quality assurance. Their immediate aim was to encourage quality compliance among member states, with the intermediate aim, value for money, and the long term aim, development of the economy to benefit all (International Institute for Education Planning, 2006).

The importance of world standards is that it allows for mobility across borders. This is an important quality assurance phenomenon, that the quality of provision of one country is comparable to that of another country.

The practices and systems discussed in this section serve as enablers for continuous improvement in quality in faculties. However, participants also mentioned threats to the creation of a culture of continuous improvement.

4.4 THREATS TO CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT IN QUALITY

It is evident from the data that there were two sets of impact results in the HEQC external quality assurance review. One was that it laid the foundations for continuous improvement, as presented in the above two sections.

In this section what comes into play is that, inherent in the review process, were threats to continued improvement. These are presented below.

4.4.1 Staff Appointments

The differences and/or lack of shared understanding on the meaning of quality, undermines continuous improvement as noted by B4:B:

...the best solution is to appoint the correct person from the start, ... you can clearly see that some people have the ability and some people don't. Some have a culture of quality and detail, some have none...

What B4:B referred to was that the manner in which institutions of higher education appoint people, has got implications for how they sustain, gain or lose the trajectory for continuous improvement. The point also applies to how institutions through appointment of new staff members are at risk of losing momentum.

4.4.2 Emphasis on Compliance

There is a view that the HEQC process encouraged compliance at the expense of self-improvement, therefore defeating the purpose of continuous improvement. In the words of F2:A and F5:A:

yes straight after the review there was an urgency to clean up our act, but then it fizzled out. Now...I have to say the practice remains the same,...there are certain things you do, and that is quality assurance, as in the case of setting exam papers, but...there is no sense of let's improve our practices constantly. No, it is really just taking care of quality assurance as needed.

There was a positive influence, but it was short-lived. It passed. After the review, it was often referred to and people were reminded about certain issues mentioned in the review report, but now...there really is no mention. It is as if it was a happening, and now it is out of our minds.

The use of '...short-lived. It passed...' shows that the pressure which was exercised as a result of the reviews, emanated from compliance imperatives. The perspective is clearly a threat to continuous improvement, as respondents seem to portray the fact that quality improvement was not their concern.

4.4.3 Power Dynamics

At the interface of internal and external quality assurance reviews are power dynamics. On the one hand, HEQC empowers by providing a set of criteria and standards which are seen as empowering. On the other hand, the fact that HEQC visits the site for external evaluation using their instruments, is seen as disempowering by the academics as they have to adhere to the given set of criteria.

Participants raised concerns regarding practices and processes over-regulating the day to day practices and processes in faculties, to the point of compromising quality assurance in faculties. The adjustments and changes effected are based on the HEQC review report. In their quest to improve quality, faculties and institutions are 'over-complicating' the implementation of policies. The main aim of the HEQC first cycle of national reviews of Teacher Education was accountability. However, from the responses of participants, it is clear that a power struggle exists in institutions between ways of retaining improvement and ways of strengthening it within an accountability agenda. Participant F5:A stated:

I would suggest that the bureaucracy which is driving exam policy is becoming quite unwieldy. And it seems every time a new set of exams come out, there are a new set of rules, amended rules. ...now each of this is a small thing, but certainly you have to keep on top of this.

I would imagine on the exams side there has been some tightening up, and maybe some of it was warranted but some of it seems more like a bureaucratic paper trail rather than anything else.

At the root of what this participant is saying are power relations that are shifting distributions of power between academics and institutional managers, and external and internal stakeholders. Singh and Lange (Singh & Lange, 2007) refer to these power relations in their statement that academics have been marginalised to a position where their primary responsibility is to account for internal and external stakeholders' expectations of quality. The role of academics needs to be designed within quality assurance politics, in such a way that they feel able to re-infuse their own conceptions of quality, based on their professional and vocational competences. In doing this, institutions, according to Singh and Lange (2007), will afford academics

ownership of quality assurance, as well as give credence to the idea of self-improvement.

4.4.4 The Actual Process

Doubts were offered by participants regarding the review process as such. Participants called it 'artificial', and 'imposed'.

4.4.4.1 Perceptions of Artificiality in the HEQC Process

The fact that the HEQC process was externally initiated, may have led to the perception that it was artificial in two ways. First, that it put emphasis on a paper trail, and, second, that it was imposed on people. One participant referred to the review process as being 'artificial'; the participant was categorising the process as being of no substance or consequence. The implication was that following the review process there was thus no need to work actively at establishing a culture of continuous improvement of quality in faculties. As F2:A said:

I remember the detail, much attention to detail, the urgency of the sudden exercise being foisted upon us. It was as if we have to produce a report in, ...now. It all made it a bit superficial...yes, the superficiality of the exercise, not that I want to call it...hmmm...artificial, in the sense of being artificial, but to a certain extent there were artificial overtones.

The perspective of the participant seems to be that the review process, as such, was a contained process, an exercise to finish and sign off. In this sense, it was portrayed

as a paper exercise. Harvey and Green warn that quality is not an absolute concept, but it compromises the processes and contexts as presented in attaining outcomes. Therefore the perspective of the stakeholders will determine what they deemed 'quality' to be (Harvey & Green, 1993).

Mention was made, by participants, that they experienced the review process as being 'imposed' on them. F5:A said:

I think the biggest single thing that I remember was it was imposed upon us on top of so much other work we had to do.

The implication of this statement is that academics did not develop ownership of the review process, not being able to see the benefits for themselves as well as for the faculty. They saw it as an add-on, an exercise to finish as quickly as possible with the least possible interruption of their professional life. In the words of Harvey and Newton (Harvey & Newton, 2004), the real purpose of reviews is accountability, control and compliance. It thus becomes a summative exercise to be completed to provide results to the stakeholders. The formative purpose, improvement, is not taken into account.

4.4.4.2 Potential to Stifle Innovation

The review process was experienced by some as contradictory. One view was that it promotes self-improvement and the other was that it has the potential to stifle innovation and creativity. F2:A and B1:B said:

...we need...need this heel against the head. We lack the capacity to work without it...

...the HEQC reviews...it is a case of carrot and stick...

Reference to 'carrot' and 'stick' captures the dualism in the thinking. The stifling of creativity lies in the fact that once there are standards which are to be adhered to creativity is no longer spontaneous. There is also a sense of ambivalence because on the one hand there is a feeling of need for continuous support from the external body, while; on the other hand it whips people into compliance. As Singh and Lange (2007) posit, the setting of targets and indicators for higher education coupled with more stringent reporting and information provision requirements are used to demand and validate higher education accountability. They went further to say that accountability demands on higher education have grown increasingly visible and explicit and in doing so, creativity and academic freedom have fallen by the wayside.

4.5 SUMMARY

In constructing a culture of continuous improvement of quality in Teacher Education, faculties engaged in an on-going process of quality assurance. Academics employed reflective thinking, shifting their focus from summative evaluation of quality to formative evaluation practice. The formative nature of the evaluation led to self-evaluation; this in turn led to self-knowledge. With self-knowledge gained, academics claimed ownership of the process, ensuring sustainable improvement.

At institutional level, a new awareness of the role of the institution was fostered. In recording quality assurance records, faculties emphasised their supporting role and link with the institution. As an extension of the institution, a faculty identity was created amongst staff, realising what value lies in collegiality and the exchange of information.

The reviews allowed a fresh look at the identity and position of students in the faculty and wider institution. Academics assumed the persona of 'being a student' by learning from students, building a relationship of mutual respect between academics and students. The evaluations done by students were used as a guide to improve practices that will lead the faculty to continuous improvement.

There were also detractors in the form of a sense of over-regulation possibly stifling the innovation and academic freedom of academics. This was based on the prescriptive nature of the HEQC set of criteria. In the same vein, academics mentioned that having a set of criteria to adhere to might not be conducive to continuous improvement, since some staff appointments were not deemed to be of suitable calibre and experience to cope in the academic world.

The review process was also described as 'imposed' and 'artificial'. Both terms signal a negative experience as a lasting impression with the participants. These participants looked at the review as a burden, not opening themselves up to renewal and sustainable improvement.

The main findings of the study are that the HEQC national review process promoted the construction of a culture of continuous improvement; the process instilled constant awareness of quality improvement that is reflective thinking; quality became a way of life for academics in faculties; policies, procedures and practices became standards-driven; and systems that drive the process of self-improvement were either developed or revived. On the other hand, the national review process encouraged compliance at the expense of quality improvement, and gains made on quality consciousness and practices were seen as not sustainable.

The findings lead us into Chapter Five, which follows with an in-depth discussion of the findings as presented in this chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

5. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the data of how a culture of continuous quality improvement can be created. In this chapter I highlighted issues pertaining to quality assurance with a view to showing key findings and debating points. The discussion was divided into the importance of the HEQC quality assurance process, the systems and structures in quality assurance, and lastly, a possible framework towards the self-generation of standards linked to a possible model for quality assurance.

5.1 THE HEQC QUALITY ASSURANCE APPROACH

5.1.1 Importance of the Process

The process of quality assurance, according to Barnett (Barnett, 1994), is driven by different interest groups. The academic community, the state, and the stakeholders are driving the process. Based on the aims of these interest groups, it must be established whether or not the evaluation of quality is aimed at the faculty understanding itself better, and by doing so transforming its activities and, therefore it become enlightened, or is it aimed at giving the state more control over institutions, meaning that state surveillance of higher education is enhanced, thus strengthening

accountability to the state? These two role players, the state and the academic community, are the strongest players in the field of quality assurance with stakeholders holding a weak position behind the state and academe. The national reviews of Teacher Education by the HEQC, started out with the main focus of the review on accountability. Based on the external nature, with the state as the major party of interest, the review was perceived by higher education institutions as a bureaucratic process. Since universities are funded with public money, stakeholder interests must be protected by the state. The HEQC became the agency performing an accountability exercise on behalf of the state. According to Barnett, this gave the state, or in this case, the HEQC, a very powerful position.

Since the review was deemed to be a bureaucratic process, it entered into an uneven power relationship with institutions. Attached to the external role of the HEQC was the high stakes accreditation process, which in a way elevated the status of the HEQC to be more powerful than the internal processes taking place. However, it has to be acknowledged that with or without accreditation, it can be argued that the process in itself is valuable as it raises awareness of quality practices. This creates a tension between the developmental aspects of external evaluation and the accountability aspects.

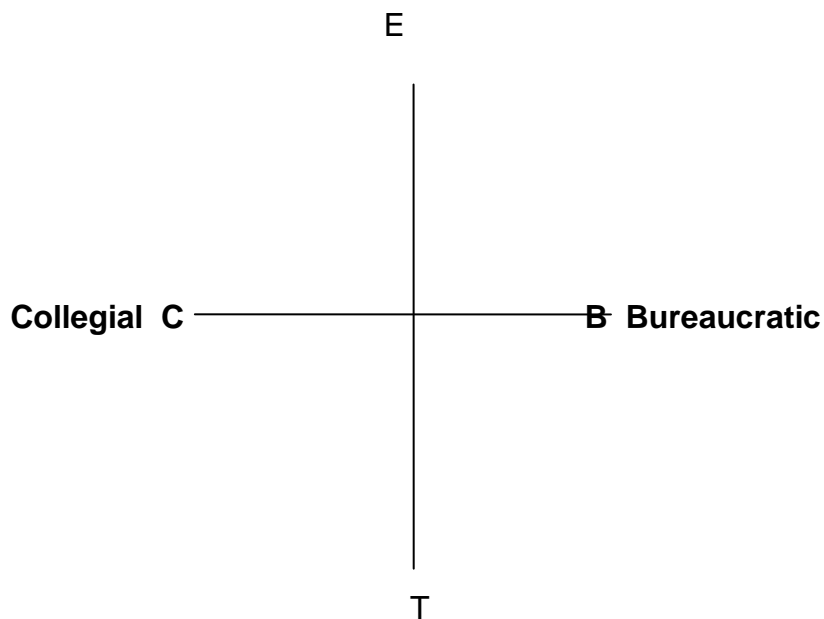
Accountability and/or gaining self-knowledge should be framed against its intentions. Is it intended for academics to account for themselves, or to learn more about themselves? Findings showed that, in the case of the HEQC review, initially through the self-evaluation report, academics had to account for themselves. Thus, the third party, that is the HEQC, learnt about the programme being reviewed. However, in

the case of gaining self-knowledge, an internal relationship is formed between the learning and the review. The learning becomes part of the review. As stated, initially academics accounted for themselves, but as shown by the findings of the study, learning started to occur through the review process. In this sense, it became emancipatory. Academics learned through reflective practices; they learned about themselves and in this process they opened themselves up to new insights. The process was not distorted by power relations, but it took the form of an open dialogue between academics and the review process.

This was an important shift in the power yielded through the review process. By engaging in self-learning, academics claimed the power, and the process changed from a bureaucratic process to a collegial process. Bureaucracy was no longer in control, but collegiality gained control.

The 'controller' of the process will determine the character of the process, or review. According to Barnett (Barnett, 1994) it must be carefully considered. If the state or external agency is in control, it does not always mean it is a bureaucratic process, and if academe is in control, it does not always mean it is a collegial process. The ownership or control of a review is important in the sense that it is different from the group of people conducting the review. Barnett positions bureaucracy and collegiality at different ends of the power axis of evaluations as shown in Fig 5.1:

Enlightenment:Emancipatory (Self-Enlightenment)



Technician: Enlightenment of External Agency

Fig 5.1

(Barnett, 1994, p 177)

The axis BC represents the power in an evaluation. The HEQC review started out as bureaucratic (B), and based on the findings of the study, the power gradually shifted to the left-hand side, that is collegiality (C). From being on the receiving end of the review, academics took control of the process by declaring ownership of quality assurance processes in the faculty. Participants mentioned that it 'became a way of life', it 'permeated' their daily practices, and they could 'apply the same rigour (as the review)'.

Self-evaluation is seen by Barnett as one of the collegial activities academics engage in, in their quest to gain self-knowledge. The HEQC requested faculties to complete self-evaluation reports. These reports formed part of the accountability chain HEQC had established. The findings of the study showed that from accounting to the HEQC, academics moved to accounting to themselves. They became accountable for their own actions. The self-evaluation reports they completed started the process of reflective thinking in faculties, fostering self-learning. This in turn has changed their view of their practices, students, and the institution they are attached to. One participant commented: ...'I live it everyday'.

Through self-learning, participants were enlightened regarding their status as academics. They mentioned that they tended to have worked in isolation, but internal and external relationships have been strengthened by the review process, as well as empowered by partnerships in the faculties, as well as with other institutions. Their status as independent academics working within the notion of 'academic freedom' changed to collegial partnerships, opening up their world of practice. This pointed to another aspect of collegiality as the power driving the process, since working in teams strengthens the academic output of the faculty. Participants mentioned that working together to improve the through-flow of their faculty had positive results for the entire faculty and institution.

Barnett (Barnett, 1994) posits that the intended outcomes of a review will drive it. The review can be intended to ascertain the 'fitness for purpose' status of the faculty, to account to a third party, to assist the institution in gaining self-knowledge, or to evaluate the faculty in a summative or formative way. In the case of the HEQC

reviews, the intention was to determine fitness for purpose, and fitness of purpose, linked to accounting to a third party, namely the state. As a result of the intended outcomes of the process, programmes were changed to comply with the results of the evaluation, thus a form of 'improvement' was implemented. In conjunction with this, findings showed academics not only engaging in improvement based on the review report, but constructing a culture of continuous quality improvement in faculties. Participants attested to this by describing their daily practices as ...'developmental, it changes when it needs to change and be improved...' Tools from the review were incorporated into the planning and implementation of new and improved programmes in faculties. These tools, such as a set of criteria used as a framework for quality assurance in faculties, became important in benchmarking programmes and faculty output, nationally and internationally.

We turn now to the ET axis in Fig 6.1. This axis represents enlightenment (E), that being emancipated through self-learning, or technician (T), is the enlightenment of the external agency. The findings showed to what extent the self-understanding of those reviewed, was enhanced by the review process. Academics became enlightened through changing their way of doing things. By adopting the set of criteria as provided by HEQC, they empowered themselves, opening themselves up to new possibilities and new knowledge. Through self-knowledge, they assumed power over quality assurance practices in their daily practice, moving to a true informed position of academic freedom. The findings showed that academics were emancipated by the review process.

Barnett (Barnett, 1994) views academe to be at the mercy of bureaucracy and technicism. Evaluations are being driven by purposive knowledge interests. However, in the study conducted, a shift in power relations was detected. Findings showed that the review process as conducted by the HEQC, has through its ontological identity become a dialogical process. Fig 5.2 depicts Barnett's process, and Fig 5.3 depicts the process as found in the study:

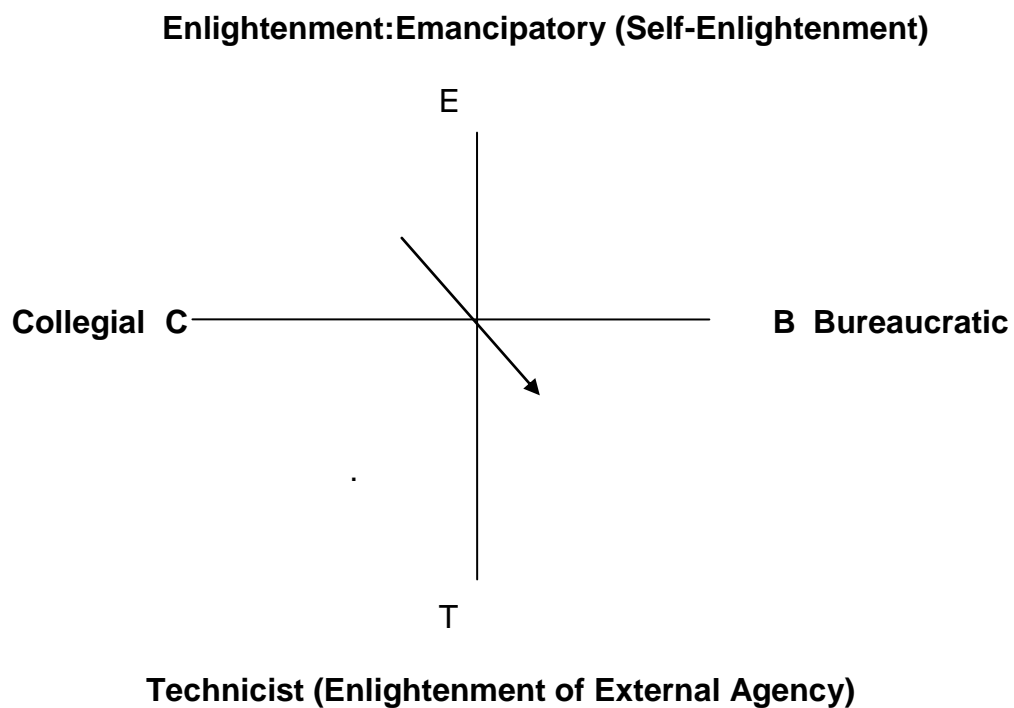
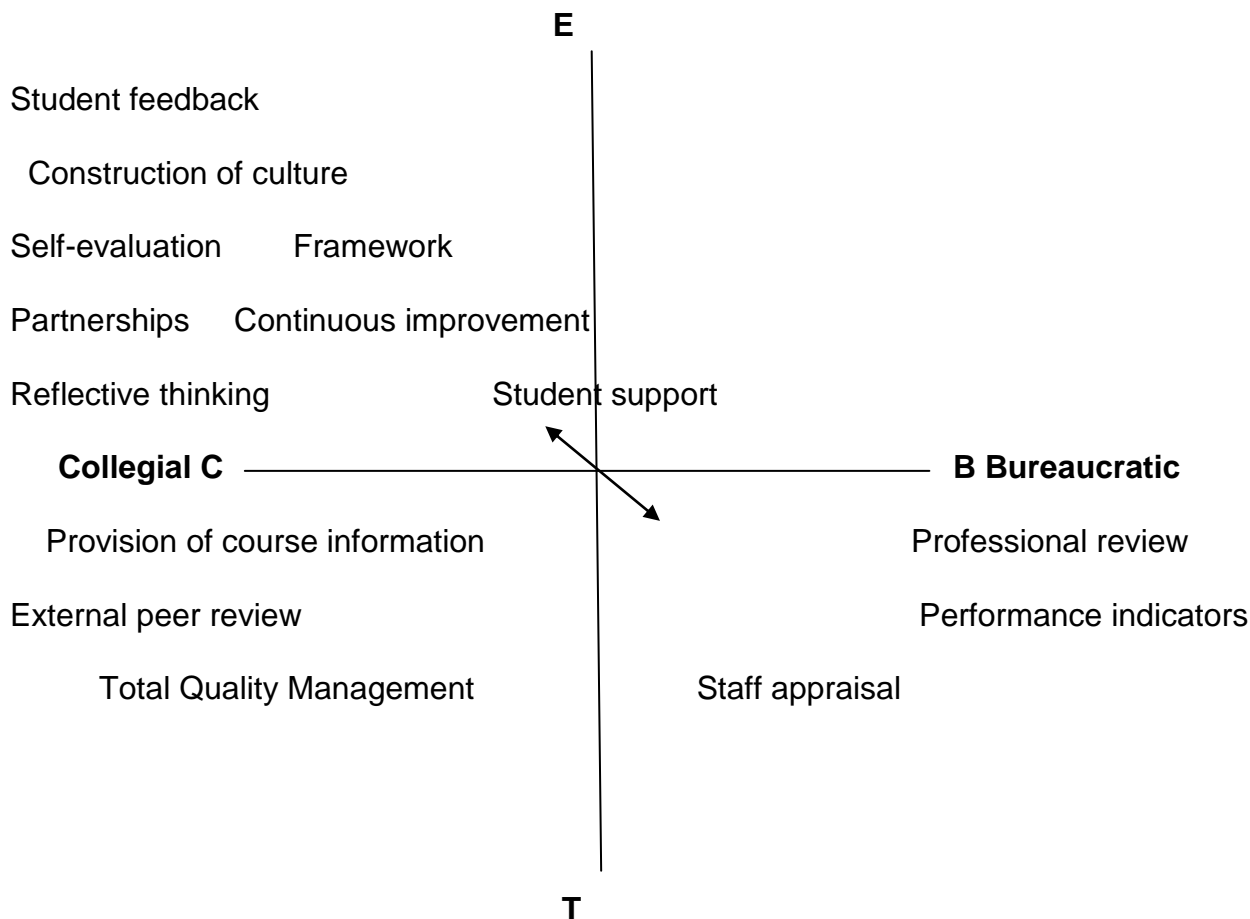


Fig 5.2

(Barnett, 1994, p 176)

Enlightenment: Emancipatory (Self-Enlightenment)



Technicist: Enlightenment of External Agency

Fig 5.3

Barnett (Barnett, 1994) positioned in the lower right-hand quadrant staff appraisals, inspections, professional accreditation, quality audit, performance indicators, total quality management and quality audits. This is according to Barnett being driven by the power bureaucracy and the method technicism. Based on the findings of the study professional reviews, performance indicators and staff appraisal is still driven

by bureaucracy. However, total quality management has moved to being driven by collegiality coupled with technicism. This is evidenced in the control academics assumed over the quality assurance processes in faculties.

Student feedback has moved from self-enlightenment, driven by bureaucracy as depicted by Barnett, (that is the top right-hand quadrant), to self-enlightenment and collegiality. The position of students has been strengthened by the review process, in that participants attested to learning from students, and improving their practice based on student feedback. An addition to the top right-hand quadrant is student support, which is shared between collegiality and bureaucracy. Findings show that student support moved, due to the review process from being the responsibility of bureaucracy to being shared between collegiality and bureaucracy. Academics have, with the support systems made available by institutions, become much more aware of what is needed by students and how to keep track of at-risk students.

The top left-hand quadrant changed the most from Barnett's original proposed diagram. The findings of the study showed a shift to this quadrant based on the shift in power, from bureaucracy to collegiality, as evidenced by the findings. Academics took control of constructing a culture of continuous improvement of quality which included a framework for programme development, building of partnerships, reflective thinking, and development of policies and systems.

The changes depicted in Fig 5.3 are based on the dialogical nature of the review process as data collected showed. In Barnett's original diagram a one-way conversation was indicated, moving from bureaucracy informing the review process

and driving institutions to meet compliance targets. Change and improvement in faculties are based on compliance targets as developed by bureaucracy. However, the findings of the study showed that the one-way conversation has changed to a dialogical conversation. From HEQC occupying the driver's seat and thus being the power behind the review process, to academics became a power in themselves and driving the process of improvement. Bureaucracy driven by technicism is informing collegiality driven by enlightenment, and vice versa.

The three drivers of quality assurance evaluations are the state, the academic community and other stakeholders. As shown in this study, the national reviews of Teacher Education in South Africa were driven by the state. However, the actual review activity as implemented by HEQC became instrumental in changing the state as driver, to the academic community in Faculties of Education. This in turn changed the character of the review process from a once-off happening to a tool driving faculties towards self-improvement.

The results of the first cycle of national reviews are twofold: It ensured accountability towards stakeholders as evidenced in the accreditation of programmes, and academics learnt about themselves, and changed and improved the quality of their professional activities and services. As one participant put it:

'It was not an event; it was a process that still lives even today.'

The change in the power driving the process of continuous improvement was supported by the systems and structure established in the faculties after the review. We now turn our attention to that.

5.2 SYSTEMS AND STRUCTURES IN QUALITY ASSURANCE

One of the main questions of this study focuses on how the HEQC external evaluation intervention fosters a culture of continuous improvement. It can be argued that the key to self-improvement is the development of a culture of continuous improvement in quality. That culture is embedded in systems and structures.

Built into the organisation of higher education institutions are systems that, over time, according to Senge *et al* (Senge et al, 1997) should produce growth, or decline or create a state of balance and equilibrium in faculties. Systems are aimed at making people think differently, and see things differently, leading finally to changed actions. The findings showed that there were signs that academics engaged in systems thinking benefited through common understanding. This created a dynamic system, achieving change in the faculties. The alignment of policies and procedures, first between faculty and institution and then benchmarking the institution against the rest of higher education institution in South Africa, has put faculties and institutions on the national and international higher education map. It showed the applications of systems thinking in institutions, with the interdependence of institutions and faculties being highlighted, and the need for collaboration within a system of higher education, emphasised. The importance of systemic thinking is that it allows people to see the interconnectedness of things, and by definition, their actions into the bigger picture.

This gives a framework for building a culture of continuous improvement and self-improvement.

Participants pointed out that '...that you have a framework to see those are the things that I need to look at...' The structure to which academics could relate, led them to realise that their old ways of thinking produced many of the problems they had to face in the self-evaluation report. It made them come to a new awareness, according to Senge *et al* (Senge, et al, 1997) that reinforced their sense of hope about leading in effective change. This is an important change in the way of thinking in faculties.

Senge et al (Senge, et al, 1997) pose four levels of systems thinking that operate simultaneously in organisations. The study showed the first level of thinking in the analysis of problems within faculties, in the self-evaluation report written by academics. The second level of thinking manifested itself in the writing and/or development of policies and structures, such as committees, to counteract problems as identified. The third level of thinking happened simultaneously with the first two, and was created at a managerial level in the institution. It was the standardisation of systems and practices in the institutions, with other institutions. The last level of systems thinking occurred at individual and team levels. This was the internalisation of the notion of quality as a way of life, by individual academics, as well as teamwork in faculties and interaction in the institution.

In an organisation, people define policies, generate structures and are engaged in activities in order to fulfil the mission and vision of the institution. Structures are components of a system influencing the system over time, to produce growth,

decline, or a state of balance and equilibrium. Structures generated by faculties such as committees, are in support of the culture constructed by people, or as in the case of this study, academics constructed cultures of continuous improvement in faculties of education. Bush and West-Burnham (Bush & West-Burnham (eds), 1994, p 102) depict the interdependency between structures, cultures and activities as follows:

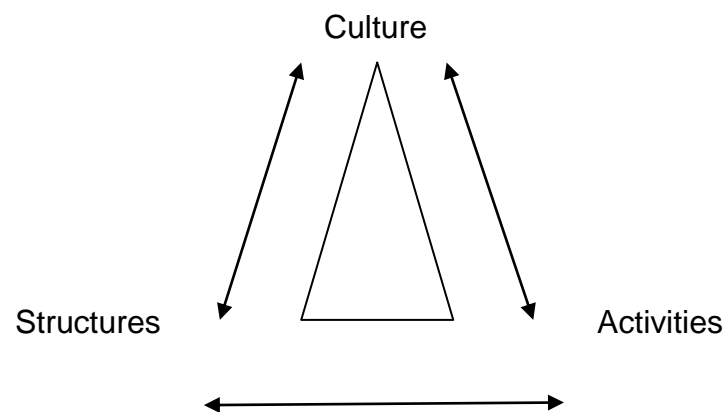


Fig 5.4

(Bush & West-Burnham (eds), 1994, p 102)

The findings showed that while people claimed to have developed a culture of maintaining quality, there was little evidence of systems and structures, which carry this culture. If culture is not institutionalised in systems and structures it is difficult to sustain. Diagrammatically there should be a one-way line moving from culture to structure. However, culture can also be seen as a structure in its own right, in the sense of enduring properties that exist independent of human beings. These may or may not be reflected in artefacts such as institutional structures (the artefacts sustain culture in the sense that the meanings attached to them are symbolic in certain cultural activities). Nevertheless, it can be argued that culture and structure govern quality assurance activities that people undertake. In this study, it was shown that

quality assurance systems and structures were difficult to identify and yet people claimed that they have the required reflexivity. The question is, if the institutional basis of a culture of improvement is missing, what were they reflective about? This raises the question of the meanings that people attach to the activities which participants claimed to be self-improvement. Activities alone do not necessarily mean that a sustainable culture of continuous improvement has been developed. However, what activities do is to cause new consciousness to be developed during their enactment. The problem with the HEQC system is that it was accreditation-driven. Once faculties received accreditation, it was seen as an end in itself, instead of being the trigger for continuous improvement.

Findings of the study showed that it seems as if a culture of continuous quality improvement was created in faculties. Culture, as shown by Fig 5.4, is one of the three dimensions of an organisation. In the case of this study, culture development was evident in the change in the way academics think and do things in the faculties. This 'change' permeated the faculty and its practices and processes.

Record keeping as such can be cited as an example of one of the under-pinning activities to support the culture of the faculty. Participants stated that record-keeping was seen, before the review, as unnecessary paper work and administrative duties, not part of the academic domain. They have come to the realisation that, not only is recordkeeping an integral part of quality assurance, but it also sustains the continuous improvement of quality in the faculty, since it built the history of the faculty. By keeping track of recorded standards in the faculty, academics have a benchmark to improve upon. Record-keeping has become an important tool in the

hands of the academic, to keep track of the relevancy of teaching and learning practices.

The findings also showed the presence of structures of self-regulation, in place in faculties. These structures were in some instances in place, whilst in other instances they were re-developed or entirely new to the faculty. The monitoring of students, coupled with the use of student-evaluations by academics, has undergone change and development in the light of the review. The study showed that the monitoring of students as a structure has been enhanced by the adoption of systemic improvements in faculties. There were strong sentiments regarding the systems and structures, through which students' voices could be heard. This in turn changed the awareness, thus the culture, in the faculties, of the importance of the student as stakeholder. It also had a positive impact on the activities of the faculties, namely, teaching and learning.

Two dimensions in educational organisations, culture and systems, have been discussed above. We now turn to activities, such as teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. Culture is dependent on structures and activities, structures are dependent on activities and culture, and, in turn, activities are dependent on culture and structures. Activities are the practical fulfilment of the prevailing culture and structures in faculties and institutions. In this study, a participant alluded to the HEQC as providing a ...'unifying standard...' at a national level for institutions of higher education in South Africa. The common purpose of the review was accountability towards stakeholders, thus compliance with the 'unifying standard' as provided by HEQC to institutions. This positioned institutions and

faculties as part of a system whose elements are fused together to continuously have an effect on one another over a period of time, since the system as a whole operates towards a common goal.

Having posed the interrelatedness between culture, structure and activities in the academic practices in the faculties, we now move to the generation of a framework for self-generated standards.

5.3 TOWARDS A FRAMEWORK OF SELF-GENERATED STANDARDS

There are two issues of concern here. First, is the idea of standards, and how they are generated and sustained. Second, a possible framework of self-generated standards is discussed.

Standards form the backbone of quality assurance evaluations. Harvey (Harvey, 2007) refers to generic standards such as academic standards, standards of competence, service standards and organisational standards. Academic standards are demonstrated by an institution, in reaching a specific academic attainment. This applies to pedagogy, course work and research. Standards of competence refer to the attainment of a specified level of ability in a range of competences. Service standards measure the service delivered against specific benchmarks. Organisational standards focus on effective management and clear dissemination of organisational practices (Harvey, 2007). These standards all embrace compliance by institutions, as was the case of the HEQC set of standards aimed at accountability through accreditation.

The generation of standards and its sustainability needs a closer look. First, the issue of the generation of standards can be looked at from two levels. Both levels are problematic. The first level pertains to standards being generated, aimed at particular consequences and impacts. Standards will be used to attain certain outcomes, as in the case of the HEQC reviews, accreditation. The problem with the generation of these standards is that HEQC failed to stipulate the grading of sufficient and insufficient attainment of minimum standards, meaning that some faculties will regard these standards as over-specified, while others will regard them as under-specified. This in turn raises the issue of transformation in higher education in South Africa as one of the aims of the HEQC. If the standards are not levelling the playing field, can we claim real transformation?

The second level pertaining to the generation of standards is the fact that standards, as such, represent certain values and perspectives. These need to be interrogated by faculties in order to be taken into account in quality assurance practices. Once the underlying meaning of the standards has been raised to the surface, only then can real change be effected in quality assurance in the faculty. The values and perspectives feeding into the generation of standards are diverse, such as academic interests, management targets for teaching, learning and research, accountability, transformation, and value for money. The findings in this study showed that external standards have not been interrogated and linked to certain values and perspectives, but are accepted as such by faculties. The superficial value of standards has become the norm of faculties to drive their quality assurance practices.

The second issue with the generation of standards links up with the aim of the review. Standards are generated with a specific aim in mind. The first round of external HEQC reviews standards were generated to fit the accountability-driven mandate of the HEQC. Standards generated thus all fed into the context of accountability, giving faculties the opportunity to show fitness of purpose and fitness for purpose practices in Teacher Education. However, the HEQC also claimed that the review must serve as the impetus for improvement of quality in faculties. The findings in this study showed that faculties claimed to be using the HEQC standards as a framework for improvement of quality. They based their quality assurance improvement plans on accountability standards, creating ambiguity in their outcomes. Thus I ask the question, are faculties in fact working towards accountability based on the external HEQC standards or working towards improvement? If it is the latter, without changing the review standards, how is it possible to work towards improvement of quality?

If the activity is fairly simple, then external generic standards can be used for measurement purposes. The logic used in the judgment will be low level inferential logic. In the case of more complex activities, such as the quality assurance practices in faculties and institutions, the generation of standards becomes much more complicated, involving not only inferential logic, but also interpretation. A compliance or accountability set of standards becomes problematic, since it is aimed at a summative judgment, such as accreditation. Since it will be used in a summative way, the sustainability of the standards, such as the HEQC's standards becomes questionable. The study showed that the external set of standards used was not

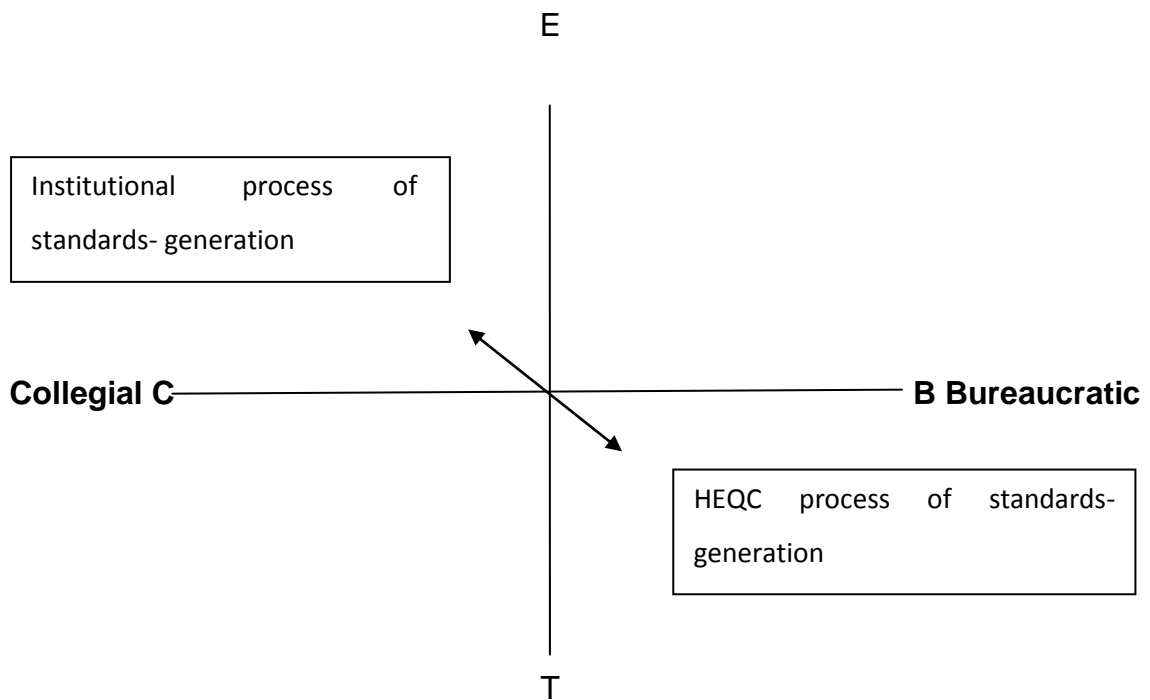
sustainable. It was seen as backwards-looking, thus compliance-driven, and not forward-looking, thus improvement-driven.

We now turn to the generation of a framework for self-generated standards. Barnett (Barnett, 1994) proposed a framework for quality evaluations, based on the world of the academe being ruled by technicism, which is in the service of surveillance, control and external direction. With this he emphasises the enlightenment and control gained by the external agency, through evaluation at the expense of the evaluated. It can be argued that through a process of internal self evaluation, enlightenment also takes place. The question of how far the enlightenment goes beyond the self evaluation process becomes relevant here. The fact that standards, initially introduced through external evaluation, presents a dilemma with regard to the possibility and ability of internal people generating their own standards, is key. The fact that there was no exercise beyond the HEQC process complicates the enlightenment claim, as practitioners have not demonstrated that they can generate their own standards. This study was not able to establish whether or not the enlightenment went to the extent of enabling practitioners to generate their own standards. Barnett (Barnett, 1994) states that faculties engaging in evaluations with the purpose of understanding themselves and transforming their own activities by and for themselves, enact a form of enlightenment. The findings showed that the faculties' engagement in the review was to inform the external agency, thus for surveillance purposes, and not enlightenment. However, the fact that practitioners claimed to be standards-driven in their practice, may be indicative of the fact that they were using self-generated or HEQC standards. If the former is the case, then the prospects for self-improvement are enhanced.

From the position of collegiality/emancipatory student feedback, construction of culture, self-evaluation, partnerships, reflective thinking and student support, the generation of standards were informed. The study showed that the self-generation of standards is possible through the shift in power relations, as indicated above. However, there are still areas being governed by bureaucracy and technicism. To attain self-regulation, the external review, called 'professional reviews' by Barnett, will have to move to the background, and self reviews governed by the process of institutional standards generation needs to be fore-grounded and governed by collegiality. The findings showed that professional reviews still have a very strong bureaucratic nature, based on external standards. This negates the idea of self-reviews based on self-generated standards. Participants claimed that a culture of continuous improvement has been established in faculties. However, in the light of non-sustainability of external standards, it seems as if this 'culture' is not sustainable.

A possible framework for a model of quality assurance can be depicted as in Fig 5.5:

Self-Enlightenment (Emancipatory)



Technicist (Enlightenment of External Agency)

Fig 5.5

A two-way conversation is indicated in Fig 5.5. The institutional (internal) generation of standards will be informed by the aims of student feedback, construction of a culture of continuous improvement of quality, self-evaluations, partnerships, reflective thinking and student support. The process will be driven by collegiality aiming for enlightenment, thus quality assurance practice changing by itself for itself. In contrast, the HEQC generation, thus external standards, will be informed by the aims of professional reviews, performance indicators and staff appraisal. This generation is driven by bureaucratic aims, aimed at informing an external (in this case HEQC) agency. It is linked to the surveillance of institutions by external agencies.

However, since this is a two-way conversation, moving from bureaucratic/technicist to collegial/enlightenment and vice versa, it means that the two processes of generation of standards are interdependent. The one cannot function without the other. In order for institutions to generate their own internal standards, they need the HEQC, and for HEQC to generate external standards, they need the input of the institutions.

5.4 SUMMARY

The findings of this study showed that there are changes in ownership and responsibilities, regarding quality assurance in Faculties of Education in South Africa. First, in line with Barnett (Barnett, 1994) there is a tendency for reviews of Teacher Education to be driven by external interests, being operated by bureaucracy through technicist forms of evaluation. This will enable control to be exerted, by external agencies, over higher education. However, the study showed that a shift from Barnett's bureaucratic/technicist position was made towards the collegial/emancipator position as the driver of reviews in South Africa.

The question was posed whether a culture of continuous improvement was established in faculties by the review process. It was clear that the concept of culture has not been addressed by the study; however, changes in ways of thinking and doing things have been indicated by findings.

Since the power base of the review has shifted, it is deemed to be possible for faculties to generate their own standards. However, as shown in Fig 5.5,

interdependency is indicated between HEQC and institutions, in the generation of standards.

The research report concludes with a summary of the chapters, the final conclusion drawn and recommendation for further study, as presented in Chapter 6.

CHAPTER SIX

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6. INTRODUCTION

The key ideas of the study are drawn together in this chapter. Recommendations flowing from the study are also raised. The first section of the chapter covers an overview of all the chapters, the second the conclusions, ending with recommendations based on the findings of the research study and for further research.

6.1 MAIN IDEAS OF THE STUDY

In the first chapter, the focus, context and motivation for the study were set out. The research questions were also raised. These questions focused on determining if the HEQC external reviews of Teacher Education did indeed serve as a tool towards continuous quality improvement, leading to self-improving faculties. The first chapter set the tone for the study, leading into the literature review done in two parts; first an overview of quality assurance, and second, models of quality assurance and management.

Chapter Two posits Barnett's (1994) conceptual framework regarding evaluation of quality. This has been the theoretical under-pinning of the study, stated by Barnett as evaluations not being meaningful in themselves, but the real value being found in the

resultant actions generated by the evaluation. The concept of quality was also addressed in this chapter based on Harvey's (2007) view of quality that quality is many things to many people. The real meaning of quality is relative to its outcomes and processes. The next section is devoted to the notion of quality assurance, as Wong (2012) stated, the 'who', 'what' and 'how' of quality assurance. Since the HEQC was using accreditation as an instrument to determine quality, accreditation as such was discussed, as well as quality audits. This was followed by a look at external quality assurance practices, international and national, and how they are used to bring about accountability, control, compliance and improvement. This chapter continued with the notion of quality assurance moving to different models of quality assurance, leading to continuous improvement of quality. It gave brief overviews of the applicability of the different models in education. A model of quality assurance for South Africa, as proposed by Strydom (Strydom, 1996), was discussed in detail. The models presented in this chapter underscore the fact that most models are being borrowed by education, from industry. It is then tried and tested in education; in effect 'made to fit' the educational environment. The effectiveness of such models must be questioned. Very few models have been developed with education in mind as the audience. The South African model is such a model, with many of its elements represented in the HEQC evaluation model. It is clear from the interrogation of the different models that different models, suit different environments.

From setting the context and background to the study in Chapters One and Two, the researcher moved on to design the study in order to carry out the research. Chapter Three presents the methodology of the study, starting with an in-depth look into

interpretivism as research orientation. This forms the philosophical basis of the research paradigm, extending to the ontological, epistemological and methodological areas of the study. The research questions lead the researcher to design a case study. The case study design allowed the researcher to investigate two main areas concerning the HEQC external reviews, namely, the creation of a culture of continuous quality improvement in faculties, as well as the systems and practices which made this happen. The method, that is, semi-structured interviews, used for data collection, was discussed and its appropriateness justified. In this chapter attention was also given to the quality of the research conducted. Lastly, my ethical stance in relation to the study is discussed, with special reference to my position in the study.

Data presentation was taken care of in Chapter Four. Since this was a qualitative study, a certain amount of discussion accompanied the data presentation. The chapter started with the demographic details of participants of the study. This was followed by the presentation of data divided into two sections. The first presented ways in which a culture of continuous quality improvement was created in faculties, with the second section presenting systems and practices in place and being developed in faculties to support such a culture. However, cognisance must also be taken of possible threats to this process. The threats, as perceived by participants, round off the chapter.

In order to clarify the data presented in Chapter Four, an in-depth discussion was presented in Chapter Five. Based on the findings of the study, a power shift from bureaucracy and technicism driving change in faculties, to a dialogue between

bureaucracy/technicist and collegiality/enlightenment, was indicated. Ownership of the review process was assumed by academics through self-learning, moving them to a position of sharing power with the external agency, that is HEQC. The question is also posed whether improvement of quality was sustainable in faculties. It was my considered opinion that support systems and structures must be strengthened to provide a platform for sustained improvement. The notion of self-generated standards is then presented. A clear interdependency between different role players was indicated, again emphasising the dialogic nature of the conversation between external and internal role players. Based on the findings of the study, a framework for the generation of standards was presented, indicating the shift in elements, representing evaluations as opposed to the framework indicated by Barnett (Barnett, 1994). A proposed model of quality assurance rounded off this chapter.

Chapter Six concludes the research report with a summary of the findings in relation to the research questions. Possible contributions from the study are offered, and recommendations for further study conclude this chapter.

6.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

6.2.1 The HEQC national review process promoted the construction of a culture of continuous improvement and self-regulation.

6.2.2 The process instilled constant awareness of quality improvement – reflective thinking and quality became a way of life.

6.2.3 There was evidence that faculty policies, procedures and practices became standards-driven.

6.2.4 Systems that drive the process of self-improvement were either developed or revived.

6.2.5 On the other hand, the national review process encouraged compliance at the expense of quality improvement.

6.2.6 Gains made on quality consciousness and practices were seen as not sustainable.

6.3 CONCLUSIONS

It can be concluded that as long as the HEQC process is driven by accreditation, the tendency is to comply with set standards and criteria. This undermines emancipation and collegiality and promotes bureaucracy and technicism. However, according to this study, there is evidence that the bureaucracy/technicist and the emancipatory/collegiality quadrants feed into one another. This shows that the two quadrants are not mutually exclusive. There is a possibility that external quality assurance processes can lead to continuous improvements in quality.

6.4 POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

The HEQC, as an external quality assurance authority, comes with the power that is vested in it by the state. However, in this study it became evident that that power is mediated by internal evaluation processes. The study has generated some evidence which can be used to understand the interaction between external and internal quality assurance processes. It has further shown that external quality assurance processes can be used as a tool for continuous improvement of quality.

6.5 RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations stemming from this study are as follows:

6.5.1 For Practice

- Systems, structures and activities need strengthening at institutional and faculty level in order to sustain a culture of continuous improvement and a move towards self-regulation.
- External quality standards, as provided by HEQC, must be used as a basis for generating institutional and faculty quality standards, not adopted as they are.

6.5.2 For Further Study

- A study of what mechanisms lead to the development of enlightenment and self-regulation in an institution of higher education.
- A study focussing on whether self-regulation is possible within the context of a bureaucratic society.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview Schedule

Appendix 2: Ethical Clearance

Appendix 3: Data Set A & Data Set B

**External quality assurance in Higher Education as a tool towards
continuous improvement: A case study of two faculties of
education in South Africa.**

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

(Academic Staff)

September 2012

INTRODUCTION

(Introduce yourself)

Purpose of the interview

Guaranteed Anonymity and Confidentiality

Permission to Tape

Any questions

SECTION A: Demographic Characteristics of respondents

1. Academic rank_____
2. For How many years have you been a lecturer in this faculty?_____
3. For how many years, altogether, have you been a lecturer?_____

SECTION B: First cycle of HEQC national reviews and construction of culture of continuous improvement

1. Tell me about the first cycle of HEQC national reviews.**(Probe as necessary)**

2. What role did you play in the review process? **(Probe as necessary)**

3. How did your participation in the process change the way you do things?
(Probe as necessary)

4. What changes have you noticed in the way your colleagues do things as a result of the process? **(Probe as necessary)**

SECTION C: Practices and systems that drive the process of continuous improvement

1. For the purpose of quality assurance in your faculty what activities were place before the reviews?
2. In your view how has the review process assisted the way you think and do quality assurance in your faculty? (**Probe:** what changes did you make? What did you retain and why?)
3. What quality assurance structures were in place before the reviews?
4. What quality assurance policies were in place before the review process? (**Probe:** How did the process help you improve the policies)
5. What challenges did you encounter in implementing the policies you have mentioned above? (**Prove:** How did the review help you overcome the challenges?)
6. With the academic review process what did you learn about the wider university? (**Probe:** what were the positive spin offs? What were the negative aspects, please explain)
7. How did that change the way the institution supports the faculty?
8. What influence did the review process have on the way in you as a faculty assure quality?

9. How, in your view, has participating in the process impacted on faculty internal quality assurance processes? (**Probe:** what about on the university as a whole?)
10. Did this experience illuminate within the faculty a new way of quality assurance? (**Probe:** What about within the wider university?)
11. What lessons did you draw from the review process?
12. To what extent have these lessons guided your thinking about and practices of quality assurance?
13. How have the reviews sharpened your awareness of continuous improvement? (**Probe:**
14. How confident are you that continuous improvement can be sustained without an external intervention? (**Probe:** Please elaborate)
15. Is there anything else you would like to share with me?

ETHICAL CLEARANCE CERTIFICATE

Certificate Reference Number: MTO01 1SvdW01

Project title: **External** quality assurance in Higher Education as a tool towards continuous improvement: A case study of two faculties of education in South Africa

Nature of Project: PhD

Principal Researcher: Marian van der Walt

Supervisor: Professor X Mtose

Co-Supervisor: Professor G Moyo

On behalf of the University of Fort Hare's Research Ethics Committee (UREC) I hereby give ethical approval in respect of the undertakings contained in the above-mentioned project and research instrument(s). Should any other instruments be used, these require separate authorization. The Researcher may therefore commence with the research as from the date of this certificate, using the reference number indicated above.

Please note that the UREC must be informed immediately of

- Any material change in the conditions or undertakings mentioned in the document
- Any material breaches of ethical undertakings or events that impact upon the ethical conduct of the research

The Principal Researcher must report to the UREC in the prescribe format, where applicable, annually, and at the end of the project, in respect of ethical compliance.

The UREC retains the right to

- Withdraw or amend this Ethical Clearance Certificate if
 - Any unethical principles or practices are revealed or suspected
 - Relevant information has been withheld or misrepresented

- Regulatory changes of whatsoever nature so require
 - The conditions contained in this Certificate have not been adhered to
-
- Request access to any information or data at any time during the course or after completion of the project

The Ethics Committee wishes you well in your research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Gideon de Wet'. The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G' and a distinct 'de'.

Prof Gideon de Wet

Acting Deputy Vice-Chancellor: Academic Affairs and Chair

1 October 2012

F1: It was a very concentrated effort. Information was to be gathered and it included administrative documentation as well, that was difficult. It was time consuming and very demanding. It also led to reflection of what the real task of an academic is.

It led to a better understanding of processes, for instance the setting up of programmes, how it all fits together, a better understanding of how the institution functions. Overall, I think for the first time I understood the quality assurance role the university has to play in the bigger education picture.

Especially as far as record keeping is concerned, I think a lot has changed. We understand now how important something like a 'papertrail' is, and why our records should be up to date. I also think teaching and learning practices have been sharpened.

In your view how has the review process assisted the way you think and do quality assurance in your faculty?

I must say, not from the review as such. My thinking has been shaped by gaining experience by working with students and getting feedback from them.

The way we mark exams, the entire exam process and policy was in place, moderation and submission of marks, meetings to discuss marks, ways in which staff were appointed, also the way we accommodated the voice of the students, and liaise with students. We had student reps in place who were our link between students and academics and the school.

The review process indicated lessons we should keep in mind in developing new programmes, such as the ACE School Leadership that we developed since. The experience from the review stood us in good stead and really helped us to work more coherently in our planning and final implementation of the ACE SL. The development of the new programme allowed us to follow-up the recommendations of the review panel and put that in practice.

First we learn to share information amongst academics, also amongst academics and admin. This was a direct result of the information gathering exercise we had to engage in. Then, we also learn to communicate better. Suddenly we all had a common purpose and we were talking about it. It also provided us with an incentive to make the world aware of the university and the good things we are achieving. However, there was also a negative, we discovered to our dismay the unacceptable way in which the student admin section of the university is treating students, by for instance putting obstacles in the way of students as a way out of serving students. No change in the way the faculty is supported by the wider university. It is still the same, despite several highlighted problem areas in the review report.

There was a positive influence, but it was short-lived. It passed. After the review, it was often referred to and people were reminded about certain issues mentioned in the review report, but now...there really is no mention. It is as if it was a

happening, and now it is out of our minds. We are currently re-curriculating, and I think now we are applying the standards set by the review in the planning of our new programmes. Yes, we are.

We did improve our processes. We have updated our policies. As academics, I think we have changed our mindsets as well. There is a better all-round understanding of quality assurance processes.

For me, the fact that quality assurance is not a summative happening, but it is a continuous process became very clear.

I am much more aware of quality assurance issues. I can remember our prospectus of the time when we had the review, there was a mistake in there and the panel picked it up. Now every time we amend the prospectus, I think back and apply the same rigor the panel applied in their scrutiny of the prospectus.

How confident are you that continuous improvement can be sustained without an external intervention?

It depends on the work ethic of staff. I am dedicated to my work and have a very high work ethic, therefore I have no problem in continuously improving my practice and constantly upping my standards. But, other staff might not have the same work ethic; it really depends on the person. And because we are a mixed bag of people, I can't really say regarding the faculty.

F2: I remember the detail, much attention to detail, the urgency of the sudden exercise foisted upon us. It was as if we have to produce a report in, ...now. It all made it a bit superficial... yes, the superficiality of the exercise, not that I want to call it ...hmm...artificial, in the sense of being artificial, but to a certain extent there were artificial overtones

I think it created a feeling for...hmm...in general an improvement of systems. As academics we became more aware of throughput and retention. We were not really making the links between before. It made us understand the bigger picture...meaning... Certainly no ...hmm...long term changes in the way we do things. The review was such a immediate exercise, to be completed, delivered, etc, etc, ...The immediacy of the project...if I can call it a project...yes, it was like a project to be completed,... there was short term results, although not specific results, ...I mean the changes can be contributed ...maybe things were started, e.g. we started the Education Research Forum (ERF), as an afterthought, but not as a direct result

There were the normal hierarchic and lower hierarchic activities were...in place, like ...activities such as screening of students, hmm... we use to interview students and they had to write a simple literacy test...for placement purposes...hmm...we did a lot of talk around workload...workload planning as such, also, discussing practices and procedures at staff meetings and

informal get-togethers...we really talked a lot...to colleagues at other universities as well...finding our way through discussions and sharing of ideas

We made some changes...maybe not big changes...also at the time not seen as changes... but ...ethics got a lot more attention, before the review we did not even discuss ethics...it was mentioned that issues such as plagiarism is not considered to be a problem by supervisors... meetings became more focused...we specifically focused on problematic areas highlighted by the review... 'In our discussions we were much more focused and sharpened by the experience, ...if was as if we now know what to look out for...to produce master students of 'quality'

There were quite a number. We has the faculty quality assurance meetings, also teaching and learning meetings,...and we had ERF. The structure that we were most proud of was our post-graduate guide that we have produced as post-graduate school. The institution had no such a guide, ...in fact...they ...once they decided to put together a post-graduate guide, they actually referred to our guide in it. The faculty was leading the institution in this instance

It was a challenge...the review report clearly indicated the numbers we should plan for in the next few years...hmm...but then massification took over, turning the masters degree in something of a commodity, ever increasing numbers, quality of

students ... This also lead to the skewed workloads academics are faced with, ...there is just no time for independent research and writing...when you finish marking at 11:00 at night, there is no energy left to start working on your own writings and research.

On the negative side, it was clear that there are ...were... very few linkages between the faculty and the university. The faculty did exceptionally well in the review, we were the only institution offering a M Ed by dissertation getting accreditation, but it was not acknowledged by the university. People really started to talk and communicate,...I mean talk with a purpose, not just talk, ...hmm...we exchanged views that we never really aired before, as if we now had a reason to talk about it. I think...we also id some very critical thinking around our programme, interrogating it as such for ... maybe the first time.

Stringent measures were put in place based on the review focus and criteria, as well as the review report, buttttt...it...fell by the wayside. We really treated it as a once off event, you know, like we have to adhere to these measures, and then...as time went by, we just left it there.

It is as if we do accept quality as a given, but a given what? It becomes a spur of the moment concept, run after it as in the review, and then...we forget about it in our daily toil. We engage in a lot of talk regarding quality assurance, but there is no real understanding regarding the essence of quality assurance. No

real discussions taking place to analyse the practices of quality assurance in the faculty. It is same old, same old.

Not really, hmm...yes straight after the review there was an urgency to clean up our act, but then it fizzled out. Now...I have to say the practice remains the same,...there are certain things you do, and that is quality assurance, as in the case of setting exam papers, but...there is no sense of let's improve our practices constantly. No, it is really just taking care of quality assurance as needed.

How confident are you that continuous improvement can be sustained without an external intervention?

Not really confident, we need this heel against the head.

F3: It was beneficial to me. It showed me what good programmes we have, ...I think we were thinking at UFH we do not have such good programmes it showed what criteria we need to set for our programmes, sharpened our programmes...hmm...especially our curriculums.

There is a deepened awareness of putting together programmes in a coherent way, ...the delivery must be of a high standard, and at all times the outcomes must be reached. We had internal moderation, I'm talking about the exams and systems at programme level, like supporting students who are at risk, with setting of exams we had moderation in place, and we use to report back on all our needs and problems. The process made me very cautious, aware of how to do things and what to do. I think the term accountability comes to mind, being aware of what we need to do, the little and big things, being aware of what is needed to offer quality to our students, to be accountable for our teaching and learning, but also for all the systems supporting the teaching and learning processes. I am even now aware of how much care we must take with our students, thinking back on the review criteria. Previously I did not realize how it all made sense, all fit together, but now...I know.

We had teaching and learning, we discussed curriculum issues, we had the faculty quality assurance committee, we ...had all these.

At institutional level there was a lack of policies, I can say most policies today is as a direct result of the review. Yes, there were very few policies; we use to make it up as we went along.

the retention policy, hmm... it opened the dialogue, you know, in the school, and faculty regarding students retention, ...up to now we did not talk about it. The exam policy was changed; we had to work differently with our papers and memos, security was definitely sharpened Yes, I want to add, the dialogue regarding retention was also opened institution wide.

The support we get from the institution is still the same support, from school to faculty to institution. I do not recall any influence from the review. After the review we were all relaxed, we forgot about the review. Then as an institution we moved into restructuring, we all focused on the restructuring of the faculty, we did not even talk about the review, or what we need to do to make it better. No influence, yes, no influence on our daily activities. We just carried on in the same way as before.

It changed the way we looked at exams; we are doing things differently and also student access. We have opened up our access route to students.

No, hmmm...with the management change we had in the faculty...we did not take the process forward...we just ignore it as if it never happened. The wider institution...I don't know...maybe...but the restructuring took all the energy of management, I don't think it made a change at all.

It showed me that quality assurance is not just easy, there need to be constant communication and consultation, creating a platform for us to talk and reflect on what we are doing.

I am much more aware of how processes work, how programmes must be developed, what the quality is we are striving for.

It made me much more reflective, yes, to reflect on what we are doing, on what we want to do, and also the responsibility of management. For instance, when we design our own learning guides, I am very aware of how it should fit together, what I should put in there, what are the different elements. I am also aware of constantly improving what I am doing, in other words continuous improvement in everything I do.

Yes, I am confident we can sustain it provided we have academic freedom to plan coherent programmes, all internal systems must be in place and working, we must engage in dialogue, in other words where do we go, what do we want to do, without all this there will be no improvement.

Yes, we need to continuously improve, yearly we need to have strategic planning, in the faculty, in the school, we need to reflect on this so we can make changes if needed. It is important that we establish what worked and what did not work. We need to look at the authenticity of what we are offering students, is it what students need, or is it what we think they need. Our practices need to be reflected on, especially what is influencing

our practices. The influences from for instance the external examiners need to be taken into account, talking to them, getting their input. We need to engage in a wider forum, getting out of our boxes, and listening to what other people are saying, we do not exist in isolation, we are part of the higher education world of South Africa.

F4: The fear, the anxiety, the excitement, hope, okay, and there was a sense of excitement and hope because I think as we embarked on developing the portfolio there was a sense of hope and a sense of excitement because we were beginning to say, hey, this is where we want to go! But I think at the initial stages of the process there were anxiety you know that were going to be closed down and I think especially we started reflecting on ourselves, on what is it that as a faculty we did and what is it that we didn't do. and I think as we went along to understand what the process of review needed that's when we actually started being excited about the possibilities of the future.

there was no policy document that actually guided what I was supposed to do, but instead I was helped by the review process. Because in the review document, the roles and the responsibility of the Programme Co-ordinator are spelled out. It capacitated us in that sense.

You know, with regards to the M.Ed programme, I want to believe that even today we are still carrying the philosophy of the regime with us. For instance the issue of accountability, of accounting, of evidence, of reporting as well as the issue of how can we grow and how can we develop from here and what is it that we are not doing well. But I think in terms of our reporting, we still trying to do things as what we did after the review. Though not quite, not in the kind of rigour that we used to.

But there is still some legacy of the review?

Interviewee: Yes, but I think it's safe to say, it was not an event. It's a process that still lives even today.

For the purpose of quality assurance in your faculty, what activities were in place before the review, for feedback?

Interviewee: Marian, with the University of Fort Hare former Faculty of Education, there was nothing.

In your view, has the review process assisted the way you think and do quality assurance in your faculty now?

Interviewee: I think we are pretty much still guided by those processes. And I am not sure how far it would have been should we have had the policies and those guidelines in place before the review. Because I think what we did was we used the review as the basis for developing policies and guidelines for post graduate supervision and development.

. I think what happened was that whilst we were working on our full accreditation we also had to make it a point that some of the plans come to fruition. And part of that for instance was the issue of the staff members that were in the process of obtaining their PhDs and stuff because amongst the issues that was raised was the issue of the qualifications of the supervisors.

And the other thing was the issue of the mentoring of the inexperienced supervisors. You know, the review made me to interact with people that I never thought I would ever interact with. The review helped me identify some units and departments within the University that were helpful to our programmes, which before we never...we knew they were there but not really interacting, so those were some of the things.

But in a way one began to understand how the university works as well as...the bureaucracy. Bureaucracy is not always positive. And the kind of bureaucratic structure that the university is operating. So basically I think for me it was a way of understanding how the university works. I began to understand it better during this. .

I think after the review, the university began to notice the Faculty of Education and its supervision activities and all of that. The review also pushed the University as well

because besides what we are saying were our plans, the University was also challenged to say, as a University how do you support. And I think the University is doing well in terms of supporting the faculties

the issue of the allocation of supervisors, for instances amongst the negatives that we identified before the review was the fact that there was no principled policy of allocating supervisors. So now the faculty has a committee that actually allocates supervisors which was not there before that. The issue of reporting progress, which I don't think was there before the review. We report progress of students and I think beyond the progress we also think as a faculty of ways of supporting both the supervisors and the students. Generally we adhere as a faculty to the general university policies and guidelines that guide postgraduate studies. And I think also more importantly, as I indicated that the university began to notice the faculty also in terms of throughput because of those policies that are in place, the support for the students and supervisors, I think the throughput as well, The importance of evidence. You know, evidence and data collection, you know. The relationship between the supervisor and the student which is key in supervision. As well as belonging in a community of researchers. Those were some of the things and also that as an academic you cannot work in isolation. That in education you cannot work in isolation from library, from computers, from I.T....

You know, sometimes there are things that I do not do. I do not do because of excess workload and even though I do not do those things I still feel guilty because I know that I'm supposed to do those things. But sometimes you know you cannot stretch beyond a particular limit. But as much as I am not doing those things, I feel guilty inside because I know they are absolutely necessary.

the review I can say it stretched us, it challenged us. It began to force us to move beyond our kind of comfort zones. But it was all for the good of the faculty and the University.

I'm confident. I'm confident that we can continue, we will continue. The foundation that was laid in 2005, it was a solid foundation. It was a solid foundation because it was not the foundation that was built by one person. It was a foundation that was built in collaboration. From the faculty side it was not one person that built the foundation, and that foundation was not only built from the faculty's side. It was also built from the other units and structures of the University. I also believe that we will continue because of the policies and procedures that are there. And the fact that the faculty has quality assurance structures and reporting on progress and all, so I believe we will continue for a very long time.

F5: I think the biggest single thing that I remember was it was imposed upon us on top of so much other work we had to do. And I remember the massive paper trail that it generated. So I didn't see that much change in attitude in terms of the way we prepare and check our work. I'm sure again it would have had a positive influence and certainly at the time we would have had these heightened awarenesses.

Maybe the whole University? Do you think there was any impact on the entire University?

Interviewee: Ja, I do, I do and I think the whole view was that what the University wanted to do was to demonstrate its professional competence and its capacity to work to a high standard and the unifying standard. I think the unifying standard being first of all the national level and then secondly within the University itself and that's where this type of thing has possibly been quite beneficial.

, to what extent have these lessons guide your thinking about and practices of quality assurance?

Interviewee: There certain has been an influence and they've been subtle. It's being constantly aware that you are being monitored and should be monitored. It's being constantly aware that the little niggly things have to be sorted out. The niggly things might be as for example the idea that an exam paper must be a hundred marks, must be three (3) hours or whatever it might be.

You know what, again, I think intrinsic motivation is the way to go, but, all of us work very well with carrot and stick, reward and the opposite. So I would imagine the external intervention is an important aspect of this.

B1: I think it was a worthwhile exercise and it really actually challenged us to reflect on our own practice and then of course also to really focus also not only on doing things correctly but also provide evidence. I think it was an evidence driven process. How did your participation in the process change the way you do things?

Interviewee: I must say I was actually working along those lines. I think it's just my way of working and doing things. Although if you look at the minimum requirements and the criteria and the minimum standards that the HEQC actually provided, it really let me start focusing on certain things. Especially regarding through flow, student support, those aspects I think I was not strong enough on and I think it actually helped myself to reflect on my own practice regarding that. I think like I've mentioned we did bring a lot of check and balances to quality assure our processes that we are involved in. For example, we did previously moderate papers but didn't write reports on that. Now we've prepared documents in a certain format that actually become part of your file. So we didn't do it like that previously but now we are doing it.

Quality assurance is important, but quality assurance must not hamper critical quality teaching at the end of the day. So in other words the focus should not be on paper, it should be on developing skills, reasoning and those type of things.

To be quite honest if you think we did not externally moderate any of our undergraduate papers. We start doing that with the reviews; we started realising that this is important. Although we did talk about those things a lot of policy documents were not in place at the University We think differently about those things but I think like I've said the biggest challenge is not to make it just a paper trace. We must really assure quality for what it's worth, to improve the programme, to improve delivery, to improve the through flow. It's more sort of a gentleman's agreement type of quality assurance I would say. Listen we did moderate one another's papers. We

did do moderation internally but not externally. We did language edit our papers etcetera. So those type of things but it's more on a gentle man's agreement type of quality assured processes. And of course quality assurance in the sense that certification are well guarded, all those types of things were in place, there's nothing wrong with that. We did have a safe where we put all our exam papers in as well. We did have things like for example that when you type you are not allowed to type your exam paper on the hard disk. So those type of things to make sure there's no leak etcetera. So that was important. We did have those type of things but I think the extra things that was highlighted by the minimum standards was part of those criteria, actually led us to move a little bit up higher. I would say.

The challenge is to look at the policies and to write up procedures to get it to be implemented. I think that was the biggest challenge I would say. Because you get the policy but what do you do with the policy? So what we've done is sit down and write procedures for each policy, so how will our faculty address each policy and how will we make sure that this policy are adhered to. To enable us to do that, we did start writing procedures.

How did that change the way the institution support the faculty, that's the review?

Interviewee: I think that due to the fact that there was some collective input into all these various Portfolio Committees, they start actually realising and understanding all the faculties and what each faculty is doing. I think the HEQC helped us to give us a framework also. Even if you conceptualise, but you have a framework to see those are things that I need to look at. But we did not let that dictate to us. So, I'm not so very positive to be quite honest as that some people in Pretoria or wherever are dictating and telling us what to do. I'm not very positive about it because that model is not really okay to assure success. Like people would say accountability is

something minus responsibility, you know (laughs). If we are not responsible, so we have to make people responsible for what they are doing. I think if we can do that, then we will be successful.

To be quite honest I think that the big lesson is to actually get everyone on board. I would say that that's the most important thing. Not to work in isolation, I think that's also a lesson that we can learn from Finland. It's all about cooperation. I think that is the strongest lesson I have learnt. You are not working on your own, we are a team and we have to cooperate and we have to assist one another and support one another. I would say I think that's the biggest lesson I've learnt from it.

How has the review sharpened your awareness of continuous improvement?

Interviewee: It's a way of life. We were looking at things, I mean just yesterday with the Faculty Management meeting I showed some graphs of how the first years are performing, showed some graphs of how many students are enrolled for different subjects, identical courses and where are needs and how we must address the imperatives of the country, you know. So we are busy, and of course the structure we are in actually allows us to because I as the Programme Director know what's going in the sector, that's my job. So I look at it then I have and interactions with the Heads of Schools and with colleagues in different schools and go talk to them and say listen, look at this, what is happening, why is there a difference of twenty percent in your semester mark and your exam mark. Interesting how easily you pick it up now because you are aware of it, which was not the case before. And of course we identify at risk students now, we have People Soft System, not working very well yet but all marks are on this new People Soft. We can draw at any time and see but how do our learners perform so we can see red lights in time. One thing that we've also learnt I must say is that we did a lot of small modules, eight (8) credit modules,

I'm not talking about thousands but I mean in Education over a five hundred (500) modules, which is ridiculous. We are moving away towards sixteen (16), twenty (20) to twenty four (24) type of credit modules now which makes us much stronger I would say, and easier to help and support because in an eight (8) credit module it's such a ...so it's a test it's gone you don't get a second chance

I think it all depends on how well or how good or empowered your lecturers are at universities. Really if we keep on and that's one thing that's bothering me, that's the whole issue of equity and transformation. I think it's very important that we must look at situations where people were discriminated against, we must really address that, I've got no problem with that. I just think being part of the academic world, you need to be an academic, and we must identify people who have the potential who do not have the support. But if they have the potential, then we have to develop them. So, according to my opinion, if you stand over me the whole time and tell me what to do, eventually I will do just things that will please you.

So my view is that we have to empower people to be responsible. You must be responsible and you must take agency for what you are doing. If we can get an empowered group of people at University who understand what the academic world is all about, then we don't need that.

Interviewer: Carrot and stick can fall away.

Interviewee: Ja.

B2: I think a very good effort from the government in terms of quality assuring Higher Education. So I don't have a fear for that. I think it was a very positive move. I mean one of the earliest memories from my side is that I could always tell people, look for example we have got in terms of SAQA, we've got credits now for modules. In the past we didn't have an indication of the depth or the scope of a module so I see a lot of positives in the HEQC developments.

I think the biggest change is keeping criteria in mind always. I think to me that is the biggest spin-off of the audit or of the review to always think quality. It permeates all your doings in terms of programme development and so on. I think the criteria, the programme accreditation criteria they are always somewhere I can say consciously, subconsciously even unconsciously they are always around. I mean do we have the right staff to offer a programme, are we pegging it at the right level, you know. So it's always part of our speak, of our talk.

That's one of the big critiques of the reviews is the massive paper work that we had to do and so on...

But the formal reviews and the formal audits have brought forward I think a more formalised structure in which to do it. I mean just if you think of the criteria you know that needs to be looked at that has helped to broaden the scope of what should all be in place. Yes, I think the danger is always stated that we are too busy with paper process that we are neglecting let's say teaching for example or...

That's also a danger I think if we are too much into the written and the compliant kind of mode. But yes, I think there were things in place in terms of...I think...but perhaps one should say it much more dependent on individuals and you know the kind of quality that they thought, they attached to the concept of quality.

Ja, I think the biggest complaint is you know the paperwork and especially to prepare for a review you know. The time that it takes to prepare your portfolios and all your paper trail material you know. That was massive, and the stress it places on academics. And people not keeping audit trails throughout on a consistent basis. So I think that issue, perhaps we should say that one of the spin-offs, good spin-offs is that people are much more aware to keep a consistent trail of quality and assessments, whatever you know, proof of what we are doing. So...

And I think with the first reviews everything had to be done you know from scratch, nearly from scratch. Now I mean it's pretty easy because people are aware that they should keep let's say copies of test results you know, of tests...

I think one of our biggest shocks was the small number of policies in place in terms of the broader criteria of the audit. So that was a massive, massive endeavour, to get policies in place you know, which was a good thing, I think, but it really took a lot of effort to get that going.

Once the University policies came into being, we could draw on that to make it very faculty specific policies. Whereas in the past often there was a vacuum that we couldn't relate to some University policies or refer to the link between our doings and the University's. I think we had a few procedures in place but I mean most of the procedures I think really came into written place only after the policies you know were instituted. I think it had many spin-offs. For example, we started after the audit review in every faculty a Teaching and Learning Manager was for example appointed, really looking at a lot of learning and teaching issues you know. So, in some of the faculties we even have a Community Service Officials being appointed. Not as such a specific person for quality assurance but the idea was really that the

Teaching and Learning Manager would very much focus on quality assurance of teaching and learning and assessment at least.

I think what is brand new is that, staff realise it's a faculty wide effort I think what is brand new is that, staff realise it's a faculty wide effort. For example you know Gawie may have spoken about the new B.Ed that we are re-curriculating. Just about everyone was involved so the ownership is really shared of quality. It's not a case where a few people just drive the process, just about everyone (I don't have that document with me of all the modules) just about everyone in the Faculty was involved now developing their modules for new programmes.

Ja, that was what we decided you know. Quality must be everyone's business. So in that sense everyone is on board, quite well on board. A very, a very (what is the word now....) a very cumbersome process but at least it's a very democratic and tiring process. But at least everyone is involved.

You personally, lessons that you have learnt from the review and the audit process? For you as an academic.

Interviewee: Ja, one of our programmes (as I said I wasn't in the Faculty at that stage) but the Coursework Masters in Education was de-accredited so I think it just brought me under the impression again that our job is very much peer related. You know, so one cannot ignore your peers, the consensual kind of value that a number of people from different institutions bring to the table is very, very valuable. I mean that's powerful, that's really powerful, the consensus that's reached.

I think just to reiterate what we said; it's something that permeates our everyday talk, especially in terms of modules, assessment, teaching...

I think we have so many mechanisms in place at the moment you know. If I think of our undergraduate I mean all exit level modules are externally assessed. It's actually

a pain now how serious that is. Last year we had (not last year? This...was it last year...ja) we started with for example our Honours, we had a group of external people coming here to assess our programmes. So I think our structures have been set so much withy checks and balances and so on you know, that I don't even think it's an issue of sustainability, it's just part of your...

Interviewer: Daily

Interviewee: Daily duties at the moment, ja.

B:3 Well, I think, files, files and files to read. I haven't studied it. My impression was that people were totally bogged down with work, and it created pessimism with me, ...People talk about modules as if it is some paper work to be delivered to students. I have tried my best to let people understand that it is not a guide, but the entire concept of curriculum, philosophical conceptualizing, delivery mode, etc. I have been told the current qualifications have been done based on current policies, ...working with the programmes...I'm not convinced. I think intent was not implemented sufficiently in all branches, There is a lot of talk, where we talk at the institutional research forum, where we talk at the Centre for Teaching and Learning, we also talk at the Ethics centre, the little I've spoken to them they say yes this is how it should be done, the little I've seen I can see that it is in line with SAQA, Policies have been created at the strategic level, but the translation from the strategic to the operational does not take place.

Let me interrupt myself here with the previous question, my perception is that the reason why things are not implemented, and maybe this is a professional hatch I have to cut with everybody in curriculum or maybe people who want to make money from curriculum, nobody appreciates the amount of work and planning and piloting, which is a swear word. Nobody appreciates the amount of time and effort it takes, and now I taking all the universities and I've also seen this when I worked

at the ETDP SETA, nobody appreciates the time it takes to get a quality instructional design study guide together. It takes time, it's not nice, you have to re-do, you get stuff rejected, ...it is not nice! don't think academics gear themselves for that step up through the door to actually make use of the resources available. They simply don't understand that you must also write your material in a motivational spirit.

I mean one of the things we need to check is the content overlap between test and examination, from the previous years, very often we have to write not checked. So we have a legend, a myth, that there were proper planning in the far past, I haven't seen it since I have been here, and I know that the writing of the materials were not done properly even if there is a good prescription or syntax to do it, I still see...That is why I say I don't believe the myth of planning being put in place and people planning what they are doing. However, this is not a Bloemfontein problem, it is a problem at all universities.

Take nothing for granted, people learn slowly, the best solution is to appoint the correct person from the start, because I am fearing now that we are writing up the results of tests, etc, you can clearly see that some people have the ability and some simply don't. Some have a culture of quality and detail, some have none. It seems that penalties only have meaning if you have a main body of people with collegial thinking.

I don't think you'll be ever isolated, and the some misgivings...I don't think we have enough, I won't say any...but I don't think we have enough integrity and enough care, especially the kind of student we are working for ...and the thing we haven't touched on ...in our distance education how to assure quality teaching, that is a big thing to do. The only way to do it is when you have people who are spiritually committed, care for the students, care about quality and ... revulsion in opportunistic and low-quality work. Only if you appoint such people, you can say you can do without outside intervention. I am not confident about the cultural impetus of the faculty to continuously improve quality without outside intervention.

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B4: As I said previously, it changed my way of operation, after the review when I was still involved with the ACE programme. But currently my approach to quality assurance differs slightly in view of the unique set up or the uniqueness of short learning programmes and of the partnership requirements. But it has placed a... it has made me more sensitive towards quality assurance processes. I have always been much involved with quality assurance processes prior to that but it's just sensitised one again of the importance that quality assurance should actually be a way of life and not something that you do on an ad hoc basis. It should be built into all systems and processes and procedures.

Well, the unit that I have left behind has established a very comprehensive quality assurance unit which previously only was run by myself and one staff member. And they have now established the unit with five (5) members over and above the current Programme Director.

Before the review, we had a system of student feedback, lecturer feedback, external moderator feedback and internal moderator feedback. There was a process of self evaluation prior to my appointment in the unit which I could use as a point of departure to gauge the quality of programme delivery against. That's mostly it. There's also been a system of quality assurance with regard to moderation of tests and exam papers, evaluation of the off-campus centres we offer at a number of off campus centres outside Bloemfontein. We have also built quality admin processes for feedback on how they perceive the administration and the link with the main campus and what they feel should be upgraded.

. In your view, how has the review process assisted the way you do and think quality assurance in your faculty?

Interviewee: Decision making, design, development is not a one-man show. We rely on teams, we rely on feedback from outside resources as a let's say an external view prior to design and development . Once the design and development of either a qualification or a short learning programme has been done, then we have it moderated as well. So we consult on a continuous basis and we make sure that the systems that are put in place are agreed upon and are understood by all parties and are workable. And it's reviewed on a constant basis. It's developmental, it changes when it needs to change and be improved.

Now, challenges, what challenges that you encounter in implementing the policies that were in place? Any kind of challenges.

Interviewee: Definitely capacity. We worked on (I want to say) a skeleton basis of staff Yes, positive in the sense that we received a lot of support. Where I focused on the ACE I got a lot of support from the Faculty of Education. In a more general sense I got a lot of support from the Vice Rector Academic who also was involved in the process in the sense of having to stand to be responsible ultimately for the university and the review. So I experienced a nice cohesion of efforts from (not necessarily outside parties but) Faculty of Education per se, and the Vice Rector also. That was very remarkable, ja.

I would think in terms of negative, I didn't really experience the whole process as negative. I think it's the expectation of having a panel coming to your university or to your unit, having scrutinised materials prior to that, conducting interviews with a lot of people, and having to wait so long for the final report to come out. I think that was the only thing negative.

And that has also contributed towards staff motivation, more focused quality assurance process and procedures within the Faculty of Education.

I think quality assurance should be a way of life and not a process. No I don't think it, I believe it. I currently live it that way. One should not become complacent and think that what has been developed and designed (and I'm thinking of study guides, subject modules) once it's designed don't view it as "been there, done that", it's fine and it can stay that way. It has to be dynamically reviewed on a scheduled basis. And don't shy away from changing for the sake of improvement, don't ignore any comments or feedback that (and we have a process of feedback on a module on an annual basis by students, by the lecturers who offer it, by internal and external moderators) so take that in consideration and ask yourself why are these inputs coming in

Then how have the reviews sharpened your awareness of continuous improvement?

Interviewee: Well I think I have answered that as well. Because what you do becomes an action research process. Once you designed the thing, you implement it, review it, change it, you implement it. So it becomes a cycle, But you have got to believe in the system, to implement the system in that way.

It could based on the (let me put it correctly here). It could work without the watchdog, the HEQC, if the institution or the body lives quality assurance practices. But I think it's essential to still have an external body who comes on a regular basis to say it's now time to review, we've had one five or six years down the line. Let's check and see, has there been progress? What have you changed since then to now? Some people will say we don't because I have got this and this and this system in place, but it does not mean that the systems that you have put in place are really better than what you have had or improves on what you didn't have. I think external is necessary, because it leads to accountability.

B5: Okay, so we have gone through the Masters review process of the HEQC. There is a number of things that pops up in my mind. I think maybe I have got a bit of mixed feelings about it. On the one hand I think it's an excellent project, I think the whole idea was good and it definitely contributed to quality as well. It's also a process that I have learned quite a lot from it and we as a faculty have also learnt quite a lot from it. I don't particularly think that the way that it has been done (especially the first round) was a valid and reliable process, There have been some gaps in the process. Okay, I think in the first place it makes one rich, Richer in terms of experience that you have. It also equipped me with particular ways of thinking when I was involved in the PGCE report and so you know I was looking at that. I was also invited by the CHE at a stage to comment on that. There was a seminar in the Cape. So it gave you some other experiences in that regard. Now I am in a position where I have to manage all the re-circulation processes and I am managing the whole sector of Postgraduate studies in our faculties. I think that background equips you with a lot of not only knowledge but also a richness in data, in insight, in the way that you do things and think about things and also the quality assurance. So I think it was a valuable experience, yes.

). I think the awareness of quality assurance was definitely enhanced about it and people also became aware of the fact that it's not something that you can brush under the table...

That it is something that has to be viewed on continuous basis. So in that regard I think that it was also that. I think at the same time there is a kind of anxiety as well and I would not say it in a negative way but also about...anything about the HEQC and CHE is like a big brother watching you, you know. So it can have a kind of negative effect as well because people may see it as there is a lot of control in it and

not so much that it's self-driven. What I like about it is that when you work on quality, when you work on changes that you could say, okay it's a case of: You can't think that ways anymore, there are different ways of thinking. And at least you have got a framework that you could say this is what it should be and this is what it's like. Because this is what the CHE expects. it gives you a kind of lever as well, which I think is positive.

, let's say, most of the activities were in place. I think about all the activities were in place, these are the things that were there. But how they were set up I think that is what changed particularly. Okay, let's say for instance where we had the mini dissertations at Masters level; it was dealt with within the department. It was submitted to the Head of the Department, they got the external examiners, they sent it out, it came back to the Head of the Department and it was dealt there. Now we do it quite differently. We have got a separate office that is in my directorate now, the titles are registered with title registration, the examiners are appointed externally (we have always had external examiners) on a Committee base it is to an independent person you know and all that. Although our full masters and our full PhDs are dealt with by the University office. But we have set out for the mini dissertations we have set up an office (I would rather say) similar to the University office and conducting it.

In your view, how has the review process the way you think and do quality assurance in your faculty? I think you have touched on that already?

Interviewee: Ja, I would again say it's a kind of lever that you could use but I think there's definitely an awareness and a sensitive towards quality assurance. Also the fact that it actually has extended to the fact that it's also institutional reviews that happened. Also got it from an institutional level to say, you must get your act right at faculty level as well so it's actually cascading so I think at all levels, ja.

And sometimes you know also in a faculty is that a lot of operations are just common knowledge of how things are done so people don't necessarily put it down on paper. And I think that actually gave us an opportunity to really see, do we have all the operations and all the systems on paper. Although there might have been a broader policy but also the implications of the policy and how it is operationalised and implemented when it was on paper and I think that gave us an opportunity to do that. I have learned quite about the wider University at that stage. I don't think the University quality assurance processes were really instituted or let's say implemented as it should be. You must remember the review on the Masters came before any other reviews just after MBA. So it was the first one. We contacted our Quality Assurance Officer and he didn't actually yet know (yes but we have to do this and this and this) so it was still feeling away...

. Luckily I knew the Head of the Business School well so I went to her and I got some information so that how we learn from one another. So I think in this way the University had to get their act in place very quickly, firstly. Secondly what happened is when we had to do our comments on the review and our plans; I think we got a lot of support from the University. I think that I am very thankful for even our Rector at that stage sat with us through the night and you know and I think that was a lot of support that I got. I think also the connections that we had with the Business School was valuable and also how other parts of the University came to us to learn about the reviews and what were the kinds of things that we put in place. I think in that sense, about the wider University was a kind of connectivity in...

First of all I would say we had to make sure that our policies are kept up-to-date, our policies are renewed, revisited and kept up-to-date. A lot more has been put in writing than has been previously. In the meantime I have found other ways, apart

from putting it in writing I like doing a diagrammatical representation so when a PhD comes to us I will say: This is your process, if you apply for title registration (even for staff) this is the process that is going to be followed. I like that because I feel it is something that we can put up and say: Now I know what it is. I think a lot more of control and monitoring systems have come into place. Luckily that I have learned from the review processes, now we have got our Dean, then we have got two Directors, myself and Prof du Toit he's doing undergraduate and I am doing postgraduate, we are like Vice Deans. So what I look at the whole postgraduate sector and he looks at the undergraduate sector, which is valuable because now I can focus on an area. But one of the big benefits is I can now ensure across all departments, across all disciplines that the same criteria have to be applied to everything. So I think in that way of thinking it was valuable. I also think that the nitty gritty of how things are done, you think about things differently: is this the way that it should be done, you look at supervision, we look at through flow of students, we have got a monitoring process in place. . We have always previously had focus groups and things but not really taking it so seriously, now we have got constant monitoring processes. With our Honours and our structured Masters, every six (6) months we have got questionnaires going out to our students, what would you have liked to do better, what are the things that you think can be improved, how do you feel about this We have also constituted a number of Committees in the faculty. They have always been there but it wasn't...it was more once a semester maybe, now we have got structures particularly in those committees like the Postgrad Committee, very structured and rigid and how they operate, student representation on them which was not previously the case. When I say previous years I'm not saying a number of years but I mean before the reviews. Maybe apart from what I

have already mentioned that was enriching that you learn from how you look at stuff, I think what also I keep in mind maybe (on a) in a learning context (but also maybe a bit negative in a sense is that how I look at a review process, not only a quality assurance review, any kind of evaluation or any kind of assessment and see, is it a valid process? I We also know that a lot of politics played a role in the process of the reviews. I think it's a bit better now, but at that stage it was a bit open, different as well. So I look at it in terms of triangulating and also in the review looking at if somebody comes and they have for instance a kind of panel where they ask questions, but then they comment on things, that were not asked during the panels and just because they did not have sufficient information, you know. So those kind of things alerted myself to know, when I have doing a review , not internally or reviewing an article, reviewing a Masters and PhDs that I am aware of certain of those thing that there are different ways of interpretation and whatever you do that it should be justified. It's very difficult to make comments. I will give you an example, one of the comments that we had was, were made we had external examiners, we also had external panel to come and review us before the review, a kind of mock review. For that we had people from Unisa, from University of Pretoria, University of North West and one from Stellenbosch. And the criticism was that we only deal with like-minded Universities. So that way it is actually now you are attacking the integrity of academics in other Universities. So making statements and judgements like that can be dangerous. I believe that the present system is like this because you have to get your programmes accredited and there's only the (what do they call it, this phase) the candidacy phase which means that there's always a follow up. I would say, I think it can. I think if the University has their systems in place, they could do it. I think it must be that there is a possibility that they can at anytime come and review

systems at a University. I don't think it should be something that it should not be there. They should say, okay from time to time, I'm going to look at your University and whether your systems are in place and maybe do a spot check. If that is the case, I think it could be done because of University's integrity and so on. It all depends; I'm looking from my University's perspective. I wouldn't like to talk about another University, but in our University I think if those things are in place it's possible. But I think it could be possible so that the University can be under review whenever it deems necessary.