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Full Length Research Paper

Quality assurance policy frameworks and mechanisms in former technikons

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Opportunities to study and explain the quality assurance policy framework and mechanisms in former technikons in response to the growth in programme re-accreditation have become an isolated territory. Conceptually, this was a legacy study looking at the extent to which quality structures and practices were already entrenched in Universities of Technology as a result of their association with a prior QA regime under which they operated for between ten to twelve years – that is, SERTEC. The thesis of the study was that Universities of Technology would exhibit a sound state of readiness for the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC) by way of establishing quality assurance structures. The study was conducted with 30 academic heads of department from 6 institutions. With the aid of structured interviews, questionnaires and documentary data were used to identify the implementation gap between the intentions underpinning the quality framework and actual outcomes.The study revealed that generally, the Universities of technology had instituted enabling quality assurance infrastructures and environments for them to easily accommodate the incoming Council on Higher Education / Higher Education Quality Committee regime. This suggested that for a few exceptions, the SERTEC regime had helped to institute more than just an awareness of the need for the necessary structures, but also a policy framework, and an overall enabling environment. There was a legacy of quality in the institutions, although a number of quality gaps still existed in terms of the overall organizational quality platform. The thesis of the study was therefore generally found to be tenable.

Key words: Quality improvement, programme re-accreditations and quality enhancement.

INTRODUCTION

Although the South African higher education (HE) system as a whole did not have a systematic and comprehensive system of Quality Assurance (QA), the technikon sector (now referred to as Universities of Technology) had a system of external QA in place from as early as 1986. In the main, this took the form of some professional council engaged in periodic QA in relation to professional programmes and qualifications (CHE, 2004: 143). As the CHE (2004: 144) further points out:

> Approach to quality differs between the university and the technikon sectors. In the university sector, the University Technikons Advisory Council (AUT) was responsible for the offering of new programmes by universities, and it used the criteria laid down in the NATED-02-116 to consider the structure and content of new programmes, as well as the suitability of the applying university to offer them. In practice, it tended to treat each university as a certification or QA body in its own right, as was in line with the growing autonomy which universities achieved in the apartheid years.

At the entry point of the Council on Higher Education (CHE), QA for universities was in the hands of the Quality Promotion Unit (QPA) of the South African Universities Vice-Chancellors Association (SAUVCA). The QPA was established in 1996, and later began conducting

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institutional audits. The functions of the QPA terminated in January, 1999. The situation with regards to the technikon sector (Universities of Technology) was appreciably different, both in structure and intent. The Certification Council for Technikon Education (SERTEC) came into existence by way of an Act of parliament (Act 88 of 1986) to:

> Ensure equal standards and to certify on that basis … Furthermore, the SERTEC council had developed a view of the body's role as a quality monitoring one in addition to certification, focusing on programme accreditation via broad peer group evaluation and employing minimum, rather than equal, standards to satisfy employers and professional bodies (CHE, 2004: 144).

This additional mandate was duly formalised by way of the Certification Council for the Technikon Amendment Act of 1993 (Act 185 of 1993), which extended the functions of SERTEC to that of an accreditation body for both technikons and agricultural colleges. It was at this point in the life of SERTEC that it:

> Extended its focus beyond regulations and conditions for examinations, to include issues such as; requirements for resource centres, staff quailfications, course content, research and institutional aims, goals and objectives … and began to question the need for external QA in their sector, particularly given the absence of any equivalent in the university sector (CHE, 2004: 144).

With regard to the approval of programmes, "technikons remained, even after their declaration as institutions for advanced vocational learning in 1979, subject to central control with respect to syllabi, national examinations and certification by the national department of education" (CHE, 2004: 144). Thus, it is quite clear that the practices between the university and technikon sectors were quite different in the sense that, whilst the former guaranteed its own quality standards at the individual institution level, the latter was being monitored by a body brought into existence by way of an Act of parliament – much in the same way as the CHE. As it was, technikons were required to make descriptive submissions similar in intent to the Higher Education Quality Committee (HEQC's). Self-evaluation reports (portfolios) to SERTEC prior to evaluation visits and focusing on demonstrating compliance with the minimum requirements set by the Council.

It is in view of this background that this study sought to find out the extent to which Universities of Techno-logy were already established, in terms of an enabling infrastructure to enhance QA. Such a state of readiness would enable these institutions to easily accommodate the incoming HEQC modalities which, broadly speaking, signalled requirements similar to those earlier spelled out by SERTEC – such as the adequacy of teaching / learning resources and facilities, staff qualifications, course content, research productivity, and the fitness and purpose of institutional aims, goals and strategic objecttives. Within the aegis of institutional audits and programme reviews, the HEQC was also calling for self-evaluation reports as a critical step in QA.

Research problem

As education and training become more market-orientated, HEIs found themselves in an increasingly competitive environment, with students picking and choosing between them. It is on the strength of the scenario set out above and in recognition of techninkons' experiences under the SERTEC QA framework, that the problem for this study was based on the following thesis statement:

> Following the promulgation of the SERTEC Act (Act 88 of 1986) and a further amendment of this Act in 1993 (Act 185 of 1993), Universities of Technology would have evolved a well-defined QA infrastructure com-prising, inter alia, well articulated internal self-evaluation mechanisms, dedicated officials, committees, policies, processes and procedures.

Aim of the study

Accordingly, this study set out to critically examine whether or not the SERTEC experience had assisted technikons (now Universities of Technology) to develop and establish QA policy frameworks and mechanisms by the time the CHE modalities were being established in the early 2000s. In summary therefore, this was a legacy study, the purpose of which was to ascertain whether or not (at the point when the CHE/HEQC as the new regulatory body overseeing quality across the entire HE system, was being introduced) QA policies, structures, processes, procedures, systems and mechanisms for assuring quality were already established at former technikons, as a result of SERTEC legislative requirements and monitoring. Furthermore, it was also of interest to ascertain whether or not such QA systems, policies, processes and procedures had filtered down to the School / Departmental levels – particularly with regard to the development of Self Evaluation Reports (SERs).

Research objectives

The specific objective of this study was to establish

whether or not internal QA policy frameworks and mechanisms were well established in the selected former technikons, and the extent to which they were deemed to be adequate and effective with regard to:

1) Committees (or any other bodies / structures) through which QA matters were handled;
2) The preparation of Self-Evaluations Reports for both internal purposes and for external evaluations; and
3) QA policies, processes and procedures.

The conceptual framework

Within the context of the aim of this study, the conceptual framework revolves around the following themes:

Internal self-evaluation

According to Kells (1995: 26-31), internationally, the basic quality assurance premise is the institutional internal self-evaluation. It is the general model for HEIs that the process of self-evaluation is the cornerstone and most essential element in quality assurance, particularly if sustainable improvements are to be achieved over a definite period of time. Just as the key foundation to a career is the ethos of lifelong learning, and the ability for self-evaluation, this also holds true for institutions. Institutions need to engage in honest self-evaluation exercises on a sustained basis as a major component of growth and well-earned autonomy, as well as enduring self-regulation and responsibility. It is with this in mind that the Operational Plan of the HEQC Founding Document states that: ''the HEQC should investigate how best to strengthen internal evaluation capacity in providers'' (CHE, 2003: 15-20).

Internal self-evaluation at an institution, with the aim of developing and improving the quality of teaching and learning, involves not only the managers and academics at the institution, but all stakeholders. It is, therefore, important to mention that for internal self-evaluation to have an impact on the quality of teaching / learning, in practice, there ought to be an interactive and reiterative teaching and learning environment / culture at a given institution. Such an environment should be an integral part of the design and implementation of the programmes of the institution, which should include learners' evaluation of facilitators' performance (Jacobs, 2000: 69-74).

However, self-evaluation may also cause some unintended negative effects if not well managed. Such unintended consequences may include tension, alienation, hostilities and divisions. Therefore, if institutions are encouraged to define their problems, to articulate their real needs and to create their well-prepared strategies, and are motivated to improve and cultivate a problem-solving attitude, it may yet be possible to improve the quality of education at local, regional and national levels (Fourie, 2000: 14-26). In this regard, it is important to look at accountability as an aspect of quality assurance since the restoration of the culture of teaching, learning and management involves the creation of a culture of accountability (CHE, 2003).

Quality assurance mechanisms

In all different policy documents as stated previously, except for the Education Training Quality Assurer (ETQAs), where procedures are not specified, prominence is attached to internal quality, counter-balanced by external or independent reviews / assessments as the primary procedures for balanced quality assurance. The policy document distinguishes between internal evaluation and external evaluation, and places the primary responsibility for QA on the individual HE institutions themselves (White Paper 3, 1997). The White Paper further stipulates that self evaluation be made an integral part of a plan of every institution, as a basis for QA. Overall therefore, it may be stated that internal self-evaluation is the foundation of good QA mechanisms and practices, and can form a sound precursor to quality improvement.

RESEARCH METHODS

This was an historical study, using questionnaires and interviews as the main data / information-collection approaches. Legacy and historical studies ensure that our history and past contributions in specific endeavours of life are remembered, and serve as building blocks for our future. As Hérubel (2008: 241) argues:

> Historical research and scholarship are predicated upon continual activity and discovery, be it reformulation of previous historiographical concerns, emerging technical discoveries and innovations, or the discovery of new evidence.

It was also envisaged that within the technikon sector, one would possibly find the experience and expertise required for driving the introduction of the new system (that is, the CHE/HEQC), lying with people who had become accustomed to the ethos and practices of the SERTEC.

The target population were all former technikons in the Republic of South Africa. The research sample comprised six technikons selected on the basis of stratified random sampling based on the Provinces that had technikons at the time of the study. Stratified sampling was used to ensure appropriate representation across the provinces. All academic heads of departments (HoDs) and people responsible for quality assurance (in this study referred to as Quality Assurance Managers (QAMs) in the 6 participating institutions constituted the research sample.

A researcher-designed questionnaire and an interview schedule were used to collect both quantitative and qualitative data. Overall, the methods of study were designed in such a way as to persuade the respondents to supply the information that would assist the author to address the problem outlined above. A covering letter accompanied the questionnaires sent to the respondents, explaining the context of the study and requesting the participation

of the targeted respondents. Data were collected over a period of two months. Interviews were conducted subsequent to the administration of the questionnaires in order to follow up on some of the responses obtained from the questionnaires. Both primary and secondary data were collected. Secondary data included information obtained from academic and scholarly journals, research reports (including unpublished dissertations / theses) and books. This formed the basis for the theoretical study and the analysis of quality models reviewed. Primary data were collected from the HoDs and QAMs by means of questionnaires and structured interviews. Permission for data collection was requested and obtained from the participants.

RESULTS

A summary of the major findings is presented thus, corresponding to the themes of the research objectives.

Quality assurance policy frameworks and mechanisms

In addressing both the first and second research objectives of this study, respondents were asked a number of questions, including an indication of whether or not a quality management system, encompassing self-evaluation was in place in their departments and the institutions as a whole. According to Murdoch (2004: 123-124), self-evaluation is about whether or not educational objectives are being achieved and whether current practices can be improved. For the purpose of this study, the focus was mainly on internal mechanisms. The purpose was also to determine if the HODs used the self-evaluation systems or mechanisms as a means of internal improvements through a determination of departments' strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. Self-evaluation should be used as a means of improvement and the promotion of a quality culture upon identification of the weaknesses. Consequently, self-evaluation should form an integral part of the quality management process that the institution, as well as the academic and support staff, should be trained for. The major findings of the first two research objectives are summarised thus;

Twelve (48%) respondents reported that there were quality management systems in place in their departments and institutions; 9 (36%) stated that this was not the case, while 4 (16%) did not respond to the question. It was commendable that, at least, half of the respondents indicated that they indeed, operated in an environment that enabled them to check on their internal quality mechanisms. Universities of Technology were supposed to be far ahead in the development and implementation of policy procedures regarding internal QA mechanisms, as well as with the process of encouraging a quality culture, given their experiences with SERTEC. With specific reference to the institutionalisation of the self evaluation processes, the majority of the HODs indicated that self evaluation was undertaken in their respective institutions, and that it fulfilled the strategic aims and mission of their universities. A very small minority indicated that self-evaluation was not a regular feature in their institutions, expressing reservations regarding the efficacy of the self-evaluation exercise in their institutions. Moreover, it was pointed out that it was not fully implemented, and that more time was needed to evaluate its outcomes and impact, that is, the extent to which it fulfilled its aims and objectives.

From the point of view of HODs, any review of quality management will have a bearing on the extent to which HODs at programme level are systematically equipped to lead adaptation, as opposed to being equipped only to sustain an existing organisational equilibrium. The opportunity afforded to HODs to enhance their skills' development in dealing with quality management at the departmental level was crucial. In some cases, respondents indicated a lack of certainty regarding guidelines that would assist them in addressing the necessary quality issues, as one HOD remarked:

> As HODs the QAM does not give us enough support regarding what to expect from Quality Assurance bodies. Instead, they give us lots of documentation without clear direction.

As part of the existing internal quality management systems, the academic HODs were also asked to indicate whether or not they believed in programme accreditation at all; 22 (88%) of the respondents believed that programme accreditation was very good; 1 (4%) felt that programme accreditation was not good, and 2 (8%) did not respond to this question. However, i*t was difficult for HODs to unconditionally support the notion of programme accreditation because of its potentially adverse results.* Overall, HODs believed that programme accreditation was terminal, and did not have any developmental impetus to it.

The question regarding whether programme re-accreditation improved quality also received mixed reactions. In this regard, the respondents contended that programme accreditation, per se, did not improve the quality of the university's offerings. It was interesting to note from these perceptions that although the respondents wanted to participate in re-accreditation activities, at the same time, they feared possible negative outcomes. These fears fostered a negative re-accreditation notion among the respondents. Quality agencies used programme re-accreditation as a means of evaluating the quality mechanisms of an academic programme. Programme re-accreditation was seen as being developmental, as it had a very short life span. In the views of the respondents, it did not build/ improve the quality of an academic programme. It was not clear to them how the entire process

would be associated with, or lead to development. During the interviews the respondents touched on the feedback processes of SERTEC. One interviewee remarked:

> During SERTEC there was a quick mechanism to avail feedback to the institution just after the site visit. The site visit chair used to arrange a meeting on the last day of the visit to narrate the outcome of their visit. This arrangement is very good as it gives the whole institution an idea about what needs to be improved or any terminal effect if it is there.

*There was however, an indication from the HODs that programme accreditation by HEQC was a move in the right direction, particularly in the introduct*ory phase of a programme. At *the time of the study the HEQC had not yet started conducting any programme reviews or in-depth institutional audits*. Table 1 shows that most of the respondents believed that the internal quality mechanisms were satisfactory and effective at their respective HEIs.

*Table 1 shows that from a total of 25 respondents, 16 (64%), held the view that internal quality assurance mechanisms were implemented satisfactorily at their re*spective institutions. *It is* somewhat difficult (perhaps even unnecessary), to quantify how 'satisfactorily' quality was implemented by the respondents' institutions. *It was difficult for the respondents to produce evidence of internal improvement plans* as a result of the self-evaluation reports; neither were the departments in a position to produce their self- evaluation models for verification by the researchers. *The other worrying factor was an apparent lack of involvement by other staff members dur*ing the self-evaluation process. *When probed further*, it was not clear how these self evaluations were organised and conducted and who the participants on the committees or teams were that undertook these exercises. *Some respondents indicated that alth*ough self evaluation was implemented effectively in their respective universities, their concern was that the process was not equally applicable to all programmes.

Table 1 shows that of the 25 HOD respondents, 20 (80%) agreed that quality management was an integral part of institutional planning. It is important that HODs perceive this to be the case, given the centrality of their role in promoting quality assurance at their institutions. Indeed, academic HODs should ensure that quality assurance mechanisms are continually adhered to, and that the important role played by departmental staff in upholding quality (as everyone's concern), is always observed. Respondents were also asked about whether there was a policy in place in relation to QA. A total of 9 (36%) respondents reported that they were still working towards developing a QA policy framework, while16 (64%) indicated that their institutions had some sort of policy on QA. If there is no policy it is difficult to have a strategy and implementation procedure in place. Therefore, it is problematic to bring all academics together if there is no clear/ common idea on the implementation of quality mechanisms. Even in institutions where policies were reported to exist, in most of these cases the policies had not been translated into plans and strategies. To this effect, there was not much available documentation, such as manuals or regulations, reflecting QA arrangements. A good example of the gap between the existence of QA policies and their implementation was the lack of guidelines related to external evaluation mechanisms concerning external reviews of programmes, despite 16 (64%) of the respondents reporting that their respective institutions did have mechanisms in place to invite external peers. Policies ensure that HEIs work towards achieving best practices within internal structures. By having clear policies HEIs could easily set the benchmarks for themselves. Having these policies in place is a good thing, but what is even more important is translating such policies into processes and procedures which actively work towards attaining what the policies espouse to achieve. Table 2 shows the proportions of the respondents who indicated having / not having external evaluation mechanisms in their respective institutions.

According to Table 2, there was an almost even split between the positive and negative responses amongst the respondents on whether or not external QA mechanisms existed in their respective institutions. There is a small variation in this response profile compared to the above question where the respondents were asked to indicate whether or not they had policies in place to invite external evaluators. It is possible that there may be interplay in these responses between inviting external evaluators for purposes of examinations and in so doing, for purposes of activities such as programme reviews.

Implementation framework

Further to the previous questions on the notion of an institutional policy framework, it was necessary to examine the extent to which the guidelines provided by the institutional QAMs were being applied in conducting self-evaluations in the participating institutions. As already discussed in the literature review, self-evaluation is the cornerstone of both internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. It was also regarded as such within the SERTEC framework – and it was defined as such by the HEQC at its point of entry into the QA scene in the country. In this regard, the QAMs were asked to respond to the open-ended question: How do you conduct self-evaluation at your institution? This seemed to be a simple and straightforward question, but the respondents were at pains to explain clearly how self-evaluation was conducted and how other follow-up

Table 1. Respondents' views regarding various aspects of quality in their institutions.

Sec. B	Items in questionnaire	1 No (%)	2 Yes (%)
1.1	Internal quality implemented successfully at your institution?	28	72
1.2	Are internal quality assurance mechanisms satisfactory at your institution?	36	44
1.3	Is the quality policy environment satisfactory at your institution?	36	64
1.4	Is quality management in place at your institution?	56	44
1.5	Is quality part of institutional planning at your institution?	20	80
1.6	Generally, would you say that internal quality is measurable?	36	64
1.7	Does your institution follow well-defined quality cycles as part of its quality assurance mechanisms?	12	88
1.8	In your honest view, is it appropriate to link institutional funding with quality?	36	64
	Average:	32.50	65.00

Table 2. Analysis of whether or not external evaluation mechanisms existed.

Response type	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Yes	13	52
No	12	48
Total	25	100

processes resulted there from. Few examples of some of the responses received are given as follows.

Respondent A

> The purpose of prescribing a framework is to bring some guiding elements into the preparation of internal self-evaluations. For many years, my university has been involved in some institutional self-evaluation. However, whether the results of this exercise were implemented or not, I'm afraid I cannot say. As far as I can see, the level of self-evaluation is very uneven and to some extent irregular.

Respondent B

> In my institution, formalised processes for self-evaluation are still at the beginning stage. We're still in the process of coming up with a framework for programme self-evaluation. Frankly, at this stage, the whole exercise of self-evaluation does not really exist in-so-far as implementation is concerned.

Respondent C had the following to say regarding self-evaluation in his institution:

> The use of self-evaluation in quality improvements is the most important approach of this unit.
> My role is to assist academics and HODs on how to do their self-evaluation. Once the self-evaluation is completed, I invite a colleague from another department for peer review purposes. After completing this exercise a report is made by my office to determine the extent to which the peer recommendations are applied. In our university the process is not only done during accreditation but on an annual basis. This really, to my mind, assists us in the improvement of our academic programmes.

Respondent D had the following to say:

> Self-evaluation is done on an annual basis, but the monitoring and evaluation is not very good. The process has not been done as it should be. I would like to see the monitoring being taken seriously by all stakeholders. However, we are addressing the issue and a framework is being discussed on how the process should flow. This will be supported by a clear action plan on what needs to be done and also when it must be done. There must be a mind shift from the perception of taking the QA matters seriously only when there is accreditation.

These responses indicate that to a certain extent, there were some positive things in some of the participating institutions regarding internal self-evaluation. This agrees with the information in Table 1 where 64% of the respondents indicated that their institutions had internal self-evaluation mechanisms in place.

However, respondent E was not entirely happy with the way things were proceeding at his institution regarding quality matters. He had the following to say:

> The University is not doing anything about this exercise. As I have mentioned QA matters have been linked to academic development matters. The quality matter is suffering at this university. Maybe the situation will improve once there is an office established to look at QA matters.

In this institution the office dealing with academic support and development was the one tasked to handle QA matters as well.

Insights gained

A number of insights and lessons have emerged from this study. These are highlighted thus:

1) One valuable comment came from one of the respondents who was critical of the SERTEC approach to QA. In the view of this respondent, SERTEC could have contributed more to the QA environment of institutions had it taken a holistic approach of raising the quality standards of the institution as a whole, rather than "being short sighted by looking only at specific programmes". This is a very important point because almost invariably, one will find that the outcome of a programme review exercise is likely to reflect strengths, weaknesses and other quality attributes and traditions of the institution. In other words, it is unlikely that one would find a quality programme in an institution which is sub-standard on most indicators of quality.
2) The rather diffuse role definition of QAMs is something that needs to be monitored as we move forward. Historically, one may understand that this happened mainly because quality was defined in terms of SERTEC visits. As such, some institutions may have thought that there would not be enough work in between these visits, had they to appoint full-time staff. However, there is now the realisation that quality is an on-going activity that needs to be nurtured and enhanced as part of HEIs' core and support functions.
3) Although there was a common acceptance of the important roles to be played by HoDs, Deans, Heads of School, Programme Heads, etc., there was a lack of clarity regarding what specific roles these officers needed to discharge. The distinctive roles played by these officials in every HEI can no longer be ill-defined, as we move forward.
4) The majority of the respondents identified the staff equity profiles of their institutions as a key institutional quality challenge. The role of race, gender and disability equity in achieving a quality learning experience for diverse student bodies still remains one of the biggest quality challenges in the country. As a result of the findings of this study, the researcher is obliged to join quality bodies and government in urging university authorities, not only of universities of technology, but other HEIs as well to continue addressing this matter.

DISCUSSION

The afore findings suggest that generally, former technikons had enabling QA infrastructures and environments for them to easily accommodate the incoming CHE / HEQC QA regime. However, some of the participating institutions were still grappling with the basics, such as enabling policy frameworks, appointing dedicated staff to promote and monitor QA, and other things. A robust movement of staff across the now integrated HE system, with a fair number of academic staff moving from the university sector to the technikon sector inevitably led to a degree of loss of the ethos and essence of technikon education – including its SERTEC tradition. It is possible therefore, that these movements may have diluted, to a degree, the strength of the SERTEC legacy in at least some of the participating institutions.

This conceptual framework harmonizes external QA drivers with internal (Institutional) policy frameworks as being a key in attaining best practices in QA. To this end, a number of critical variables were extracted from the literature – systematically and scientifically, in a unique contribution to the field of QA practice and research. Clearly, this conceptual framework which is a unique creation of the researcher has clarified many questions in a field which is still relatively unchartered on theories. The researcher is therefore convinced that both QA practitioners and future researchers will gain valuable insights from the variables which are so succinctly laid out in this conceptual model. In particular, the researcher, through this conceptual framework has revealed that best QA practices will be achieved when the following factors are met:

1. Internal / Institutional

i) When institutions' QA Management Structures are in place and fully functional;
ii) Self-evaluation mechanisms are institutionalised and have become part of the institution's QA culture;
iii) When there is adequate funding, not only to drive QA processes, but assist the institution to strive for the highest quality in the attainment of their programmes;
iv) When there is unconditional ownership of the institution's QA systems and mechanisms;
v) When there is a personal sense of responsibility and accountability for QA; and
vi) When well-defined and understood Quality Cycles

(QC) have become part of the QA culture of an institution.

2. External

i) That external QA processes (that is, CHE/HEQC Programme Reviews and Institutional Audits) take cognizance of South Africa's socio-politico-economic contexts;
ii) That the DoE approval of academic programmes and Operating Plans is made with Quality as one of the key elements;
iii) That the DoE's funding framework be an enabling factor in attaining high-quality programmes, that is, more on the developmental trajectory, as opposed to the evaluative and punitive;
iv) That SAQA plays a facilitative role geared towards supporting institutions in setting standards and registration of qualifications;
v) That recognition be made of the uneasy truce between a call for Massification and Consumerism, on the one hand, and Quality on the other.

From the findings of the empirical part of the study, the researcher hoped to identify what may be referred to as the 'blind spots' in our quality assurance culture that need to be brought to light for the considered attention of the country's HE communities. In this regard, the findings have pointed to a significant historical influence of SERTEC on the development of a quality culture among former technikons, which reaches deep into the current practices and beyond. Therefore, this has left behind a sound legacy for what SERTEC attempted to achieve. As a result, one may state that for former technikons, there has not been a QA disjuncture between the SERTEC regime and the HEQC regime – in that many of the SERTEC protocols were also carried forward to the CHE / HEQC regime, such as the centrality of SERs in QA. It would be of particular interest to follow how the academic communities of the former technikons relate to the CHE / HEQC regime against their experiences with SERTEC.

Apart from the scientific merit of investigating the extent to which SERTEC may have contributed to the development of a quality culture for former technikons, this study also had the benefit of other historical studies. One could barely imagine the implicit lack of service to the diverse HE community at large, if scholars were unwilling to undertake basic and fundamental research on the histories and legacies of legislative bodies such as SERTEC. Certainly, in-as-much as it will be of value to review the historical contributions of the CHE / HEQC regime after a period of time, so is it the case with SERTEC. In particular, systematic, systemic and scientific learning from our past efforts have the potential to enrich the present. In the mind of the researcher, no other study has attempted to do what this study has done. In itself, therefore, this study is valuable and unique. For those who have only recently joined the HE sector as novice scholars, studies such as this one could be enlightening.

In conclusion, therefore, it can be said that this study is important in that in going forward, we can find comfort in the notion that if the CHE / HEQC QA regime is implemented properly, particularly with due regard to the variables identified, it can also leave a lasting legacy of, not only quality awareness, but a QA tradition of self-regulation.

Conclusion

This study aimed to (a) examine the internal quality assurance mechanisms pertaining to South Africa's Universities of Technology, (b) identify key structures and best practices within internal quality assurance mechanisms used by South Africa's Universities of Technology, and (c) determine whether internal quality assurance has provided the participating institutions with useful insight pertaining to their strong and weak points and consequently, given them a solid start in the formulation of improvement plans.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations flowing out of the major findings of this study are highlighted thus:

1) That each institution develop a clear policy framework, as well as attendant processes and procedures for promoting quality all the way down to departmental level. The issue of departments and faculties expressing lack of knowledge regarding the translation of Vision and Mission statements into programme activities is a case in point.
2) The substantive appointments of QAMs, on a fulltime basis is no longer 'nice to have', but a necessity. The HEQC is heading towards institutional self-regulation regarding quality. This requires that all institutions have on their permanent, full-time staff complement, people whose responsibility is to continually promote and quality-assure all aspects of university business. Appointing people on a 'time-share' basis (i.e. having the same individual performing many other tasks, concurrently), as was found to be the case in some institutions, will not satisfy the quality requirements of HEIs.
3) Although there is no legislative requirement for the establishment and sustenance of Advisory Committees, it appeared from the findings of this study (in which 40% of the respondents reported that their institutions had no Advisory Committees), that this very important traditional link between Universities of Technology and related industries may be faced with extinction. This study

recommends that even if Advisory Committees were to become extinct, Universities of Technology find ways to sustain their traditional links with industry.

4) In this study, there was a universal acknowledgement of the importance of staff development as one activity that would enhance the quality of programmes. However, the study revealed the absence of properly instituted staff development programmes as a major weakness in all the participating institutions. This study is obliged to call upon all HEIs to treat this matter with the seriousness it deserves, as well as with a sense of urgency.

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